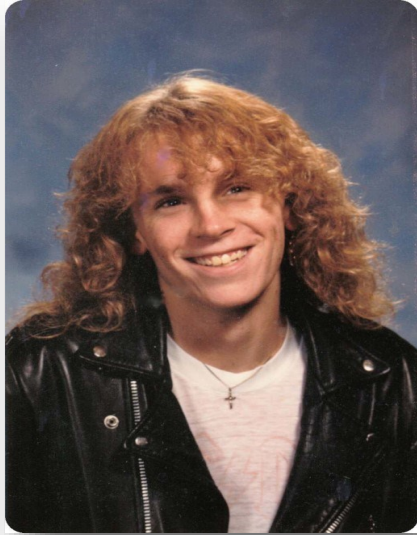




# Chapter Newsletter—BPUSA-St. Louis

## JAN-FEB 2022

**VOLUME 45 - NUMBER 1**



**John Burnham**

***Almost 100 guests attended the Dec. 5, 2021 BPUSASTL Candlelight Memorial. Thank you to Tom Burnham who shared many memories of his brother John.***

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### **My Brother John**

**Speaker: Tom Burnham**

Thank you Mike, Jean, Chris, Carol for allowing me to tell my brother's story, thru my eyes, as his little brother, sprinkled with some help from my sisters & mom. Also, thank you to all of you who have come before me and shared your story of a lost loved one – in essence your stories, your courage has helped me come back year after year, for over 20 years.

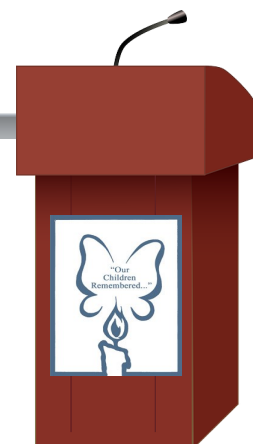
Who, What & Why?

Who – I'm John's little brother Tommy.

What – What am I doing – I am going to speak about John and the fateful, dreadful day he died.

Why – Because I still grieve, my family still grieves & to honor his memory and my promise to our mom to continue coming here after she died.

**The entire speech is continued on page 16 of this newsletter.**





**Robert Andrew  
Angelbeck "Robbie"**



**William Raymond  
Bousman**



**Jeffrey Joseph Lloyd**

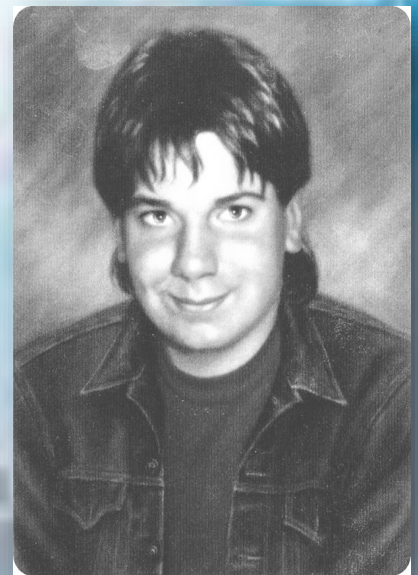
**Thank you for  
your love gifts**



**Rosie Umhoefer**



**Daniel Mark  
Kohler**



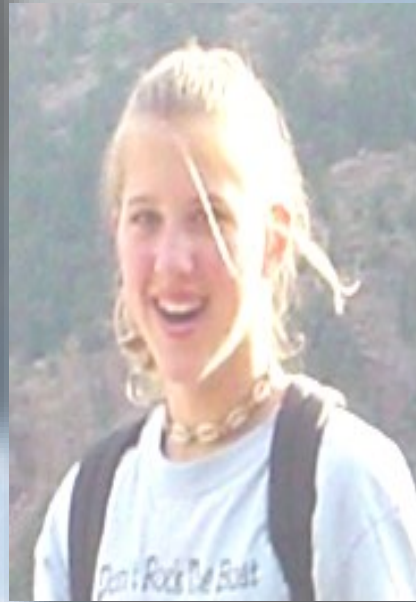
**Timothy Roorda**



Thank you for  
your love gifts



**Sharon Rene'  
Przybyski**



**Kylene Bronder**



**Michael Robert  
Benedict**



**Liam Benedict**



**Richard William  
Wors, III**



**Ryan Matthew  
Corzine**

# Telephone in the woods connects voices in the wind

For more info:

- [Priest Point Park](#), Olympia, Wash.

*Story produced by Aria Shavelson. Editor: Remington Korper.*



In a corner of the Pacific Northwest, muffled by moss and trees that are centuries-old, sits an out-of-place relic - a rotary phone that's connected to nothing, except the wind.

Every few weeks, Andre and Erin Sylvester and the rest of their young family trudge out to Priest Point Park, outside Olympia, Washington, to use that phone to call Joelle, their four-year-old daughter. Without warning, Joelle died last year from an infection.

But out here, Joelle is somehow there on the other end of the line.

"I, literally ... I can hear her," said Andre.

Erin said, "I always feel lighter, ready to go back into the real world of, you know, without my daughter."

The phone mysteriously appeared shortly after Joelle died, put here by photographer and amateur carpenter Corey Dembeck as his way to grieve.

"I just couldn't imagine if something like that happened to my daughter," Dembeck told correspondent Lee Cowan. "It was just something I had to do."

One of his own daughters was friends with Joelle - she's now five.

"I don't think I got, really got, how many people would really ... really needed something like this," he said.

For weeks that phone was there, and few knew, but then word quietly spread. Soon, complete strangers were braving the Northwest rain, making the longest of long-distance calls.

Continued on page 5



Continued from page 4

Lori Provoe was one of them: "When you're grieving, you look for any avenue to try to connect that you can, to make that emotional connection. And that's what the telephone, I thought, would do for me."

Cowan asked, "And did it?" "It did.

She lost her 27-year-old son Tyler last year. "Of course, it's very emotional," Provoe said. "As soon as you pick up the phone, the tears flow. And I've been out here several times, and it's been the same experience every time. I have Kleenex in my pocket. You can't explain why the emotions are flowing as soon as you pick up that phone, but they do."

Whispers in the wind ... you might not hear them, unless you listen.



The desire to connect with lost loved ones is universal, especially when the end comes so quickly. In 2011, in the wake of Japan's devastating tsunami, survivors started flocking to a small phone booth high on a hill, put there months earlier by a man who just wanted to talk to his cousin who had died of cancer. For all the lost souls who the sea never returned, that "Telephone of the Wind" became one of the few places to offer a kind of inexplicable solace.

That idea had blown across the Pacific. Corey Dembeck heard about it, and it stuck for reasons he still doesn't know. "I just thought it would be perfect for now, and as far as I know, at the time, there wasn't one that I knew of in the United States," he said.

Much to his surprise, that old phone helped Dembeck, too: "When my mom passed away, I never really, like, dealt with it, I guess."

The impulse to call her, he says, just came out of nowhere.

*"Hey, Mom, it's me ... I miss you .... and I guess I'll talk to you later. Bye. Love you."*

It makes no logical sense, to dial a phone connected to nothing, and yet for the Sylvesters and countless others, speaking their grief to the wind seems to offer a certain kind of connection that heals.

Erin Sylvester said, "I think one of the most dangerous things that you can do to yourself is to keep your feelings, whatever they are, locked up inside. Something so simple, an old rotary phone on a tree, it's just crazy how much impact that that has."



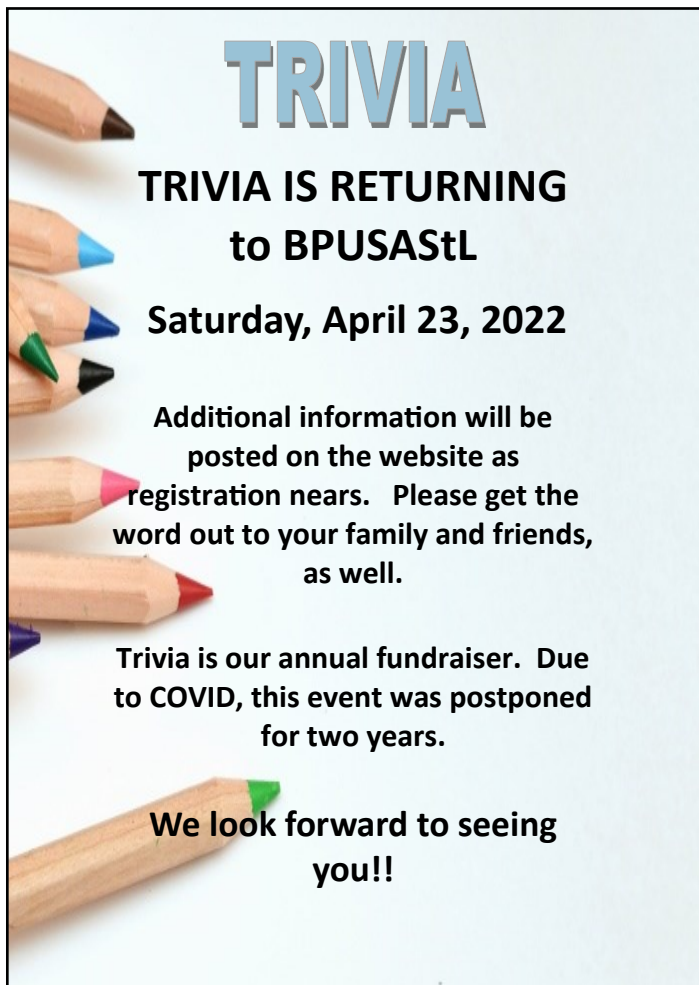
**Kyleene Bronder**

**Thank you to the Bronder Family for the wonderful trays of cookies.**

From The Bonders: “Knowing You Ministries began in honor of our daughter Kyleene who inspired us to open our eyes to those hurting hearts around us.”

The Bonders also accept help in cookie donations, either bought or baked, packaging and delivering.

If you wish to receive cookies during the month of December in memory of your child, please let someone on the BPUSAStL Board know. Or contact Deb Bonder with your address: [knowingyou@sbcglobal.net](mailto:knowingyou@sbcglobal.net)



**TRIVIA**

**TRIVIA IS RETURNING  
to BPUSAStL**

**Saturday, April 23, 2022**

Additional information will be posted on the website as registration nears. Please get the word out to your family and friends, as well.


Trivia is our annual fundraiser. Due to COVID, this event was postponed for two years.

**We look forward to seeing you!!**

“If you know someone who has lost a very important person, and you're afraid to mention them because you think you might make them sad by reminding them that they died--you're not reminding them. They didn't forget they died. What you're reminding them of is that you remembered that they lived, and that is a great gift.”

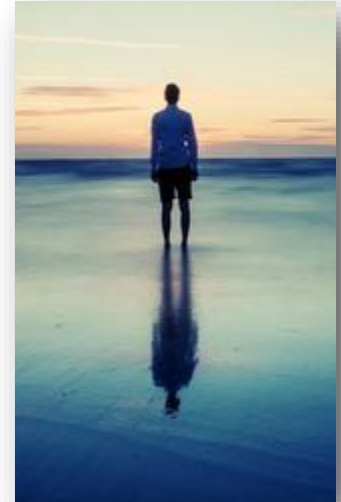
— Elizabeth Edwards

LessonsLearnedInLifeInc©



## *But You're Absolutely Normal!*

Grief is a normal reaction to loss, and it shows up in many ways you might not expect. If you've...



- ◆ been angry with doctors or nurses for not doing enough
- ◆ been sleeping too much or not enough
- ◆ noticed a change in appetite
- ◆ felt no one understands what you're going through
- ◆ felt friends should call more or call less or leave you alone or invite you along more often
- ◆ bought things you didn't need
- ◆ considered selling everything and moving
- ◆ had headaches, upset stomachs, weakness, lethargy, more aches and pains
- ◆ been unbearable, lonely and depressed
- ◆ been crabby
- ◆ cried for no apparent reason
- ◆ found yourself obsessed with thoughts of the deceased
- ◆ been forgetful, confused, uncharacteristically absentminded
- ◆ panicked over little things
- ◆ felt guilty about things you have or haven't done
- ◆ gone to the store every day
- ◆ forgotten why you went somewhere
- ◆ called friends and talked for a long time
- ◆ called friends and wanted to hang up after only a brief conversation
- ◆ not wanted to attend social functions you usually enjoyed
- ◆ found yourself unable to concentrate on written material
- ◆ been unable to remember what you just read...**you're normal.**

These are all common reactions to grief. They take up to two years (or more) to pass completely, but they will pass. You'll never forget the person who has died, but your life will again become normal, even if it is never exactly the same. Take care of yourself. You will heal in time.

*Lovingly lifted from The Compassionate Friends, August/September 2021 Newsletter*

# IF GRIEF COULD SPEAK (5 THINGS IT WOULD SAY)

Posted on [June 22, 2016](#) by [Mo Minahan](#) in [grief](#)

## **If grief could speak it would say, *I'm sorry.***

I'm sorry it's me that arrived at your doorstep instead of love. But I am made of love too. In fact, it's because I love so much that I hurt so much when I lose the people I love.

## **If grief could speak it would say, *You can survive.***

I know you may not want to. I know life may not be worth living without them. I know the earth collapsed beneath your feet. I know a part of you died with them. And I know you can survive, one breath at a time, one moment at a time, one day at a time.

## **If grief could speak it would say, *Please don't hide me away.***

I know when people see you with me they get uncomfortable. I know your friends don't know what to say to me. I know it's easier to hide me away when you have company over for dinner.

But I'd like a seat at the table. Will you let me speak? Will you listen to me? I can't promise I'll be polite or calm. I may raise my voice because I'm angry or I may collapse in a pile of tears, but if I can let it out then I don't have to hold it here, in you.

I'd like to create some more space inside you for all of us to coexist. You, me, love, anger, laughter, peace, hope, joy... there's enough room for all of us in your heart.

## **If grief could speak it would say, *I love you.***

You may not love me, but I love you. I love how you love so big. I love how you keep taking care of your babies who lost their papas or their mamas. I love how you keep taking care of that space your loved one took up even though they're gone. How you leave their favorite book in the same place, how you leave their clothes folded, how you let them live a little longer in the things left behind. I love how you don't let the world forget they were here, that they mattered, that they were a part of you. I love you.

## **If grief could speak it would say, *Find your own way.***

There seem to be a lot of "experts" out there about me. They say I arrive in stages and they make it sound like I'm something to get over, like the flu.

What I can tell you is there is nothing wrong with me and there is nothing wrong with you. I am not a sickness, I am grief. I am a valid experience and emotion and there is no right way to hold me. There is just your way. No two people receive me the same way. Let's find our own way to dance together, to cry together, to break together, to heal together.

Let's find our own way through this brief and beautiful life.



<https://moniqueminahan.com>





No one noticed the coat hanging on the chair.  
It was a secret I did not share.  
It was his coat, it is his coat, I should say.  
You would see him wearing it on a cold winter day.  
So I hang his coat when the family gathers here.  
It is my way of always keeping him near.  
He will always have a place at our family table.  
I will hang his coat as long as I am able.

### The Card

I looked for your name at the bottom of my card.  
Just for a second and the pain hit hard.  
I will never see your name written there again.  
Things will never be as they should have been.  
There will always be an emptiness where your name should be.  
There will always be empty arms and those belong to me.

**Both written By:**

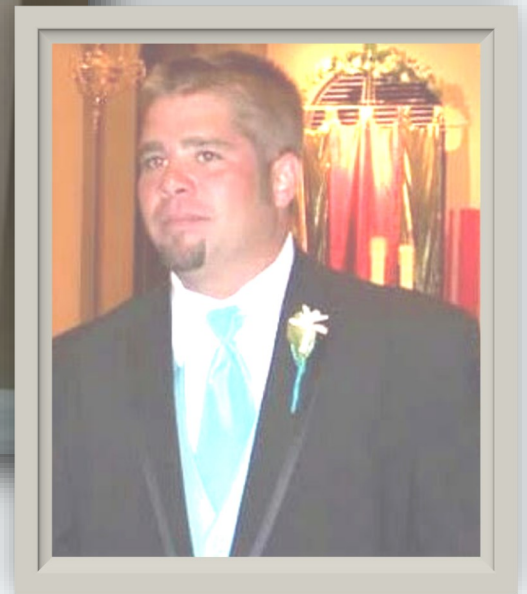
**Lorna Korte, Eric's mom**

**BPUSAStL**

I gaze at my reflection; I can't believe what I see.  
I see age and sorrow, this isn't me.  
I look deep in the eyes of the woman standing there.  
I don't recognize her, I just stare.  
It's not the lines that worry me so.  
I'm looking at a person I do not know.  
The eyes that once sparkled now shine no light.  
This isn't me; this can't be right.  
Where did I go, why did I leave?  
I look in the mirror, it's hard to believe.

### HIS COAT

This is Eric's coat that was hanging on the Korte family's dining room chair this past Thanksgiving. Eric's mom, Lorna, also wrote the words.



**In Loving Memory of**

**Eric Korte**

**May 1985 - July 2015**

### Grief

*Danielle Campoamor is a reporter for TODAY Parents and referenced BPA as a resource. Four BPUSA families volunteered for an interview. The entire article can be found on the website below. One of our BPUSASTL members shared Harper's story...page 12 of this newsletter.*

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGIIvtJhgfcPCSskSwCnsMgXjWN>



**"The big key for people mourning or grieving is that there are no rules that they have to follow," said Jill Cohen, a certified family grief counselor in New York.**

TODAY Illustration / Getty Images

TODAY Illustration / Getty Images

## Grieving parents share how they make it through the holidays

Navigating the holiday season while grieving can be challenging.

By [Danielle Campoamor](#)

While the holiday season is often associated with joy, excitement, and meaningful family time, for countless people it's also a time of great sadness. A reported 800,000 individuals have died from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, their friends, family members, and loved ones now facing either their first or second holiday celebration with an empty chair at the table. And in the wake of a deadly string of tornadoes, that left at least 90 people dead, entire communities are grieving not only the loss of life, but a home.

Whether a person is mourning the loss of a life, a home, or just a sense of normalcy, learning how to navigate the holiday season while grieving can be challenging, especially when loss and grief are still considered "taboo" topics that, when discussed, can make people feel uncomfortable.

"I think people don't realize that people are grieving during the holidays, or how jarring it is for those people to watch the joy going on around them," [Jill Cohen](#), a certified family grief counselor in New York, tells [TODAY Parents](#). "Even in general, I don't think people understand that so many others are grieving, they just don't show it."

Cohen says there is no "right way" to grieve, and that it is important for everyone — be it the person who is grieving or the people supporting them — to know that grief does not look one specific way, either.

"The big key for people mourning or grieving is that there are no rules that they have to follow," she says. "The mandate is to do what feels comfortable — nothing more, nothing less."

Even though there is no grief playbook, Cohen says it can be beneficial for people in mourning to be in community with other bereaved people, not only to remember that they're not alone but to learn what has worked for others when faced with the

TODAY spoke with four bereaved parents who have navigated the holiday season in the wake of their loss, to learn what advice they would have for those who are mourning the loss of a loved one this year. From practical tips and resources, to simple sentiments of solidarity, these grieving parents have found a way to help others during a difficult time. Here's how they manage to navigate grief and the holiday season, in their own words.

Continued on Page 11

Continued from page 10

**Kelly Pillman, 36, from Missouri**

*Kelly lost her daughter, Harper, when she was 15 months old in 2018. Harper was silly, curious, independent, and a daddy's girl who loved to snuggle and who brought a bright light to her family's life.*

"My faith played a large part in my ongoing grieving process. I'm thankful that my parents put Jesus first — that's what Christmas was about. But it wasn't until that first Christmas without Harper that I experienced Christmas for the first time and truly understood the meaning of Christmas. It wasn't until I experienced that hopelessness, despair, and utter darkness that Christmas became this shining hope. Because of God's son, I can grieve with great hope that I am going to see Harper again.

I also started, and asked other people, to buy toys to donate to other children — it's hard when you're buying gifts for people, but you're not buying for your child who passed away. In that first year I ended up with 500 toys to donate. Now, we're officially a nonprofit called [Happiness for Harper](#). I can't describe how doing for others helps your own heart. It doesn't have to be big, but try to help someone else in your time of grief because it will really help your heart, especially if you're doing it in your loved one's honor."

If you or someone you know is struggling with grief during the holiday season, you can visit [Whats Your Grief](#) and the [Bereaved Parents of the USA](#) for support and additional resources.



**Harper Pillman**

I heard the most  
beautiful word today.  
It was your name.

Love  
Beyond  
Stars



signup for free newsletter: [lovebeyondstars.ca](http://lovebeyondstars.ca)



# MEETING TIMES & PLACES

**\*\*\*Call for meeting status\*\*\***



<b>BUSINESS / FACILITATORS MEETINGS</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>
<b>ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME!</b>  <b>CONTACT: Mike &amp; Jeanne Francisco</b> <b>636.947.9403</b>	BJC Hospital St. Peters 10 Hospital Drive Room A/B St. Peters, MO 63376	<b>Contact Mike.</b> <b>Meeting dates vary</b> <b>depending upon</b> <b>unforeseen events.</b>	9:00 AM

<b>GROUP MEETINGS</b>	<b>MEETING LOCATION</b> Some are currently on pause pending COVID restrictions	<b>FACILITATOR(S)</b>	<b>DAY</b>	<b>TIME</b>
St. Peters / St. Charles, MO	Knights of Columbus Hall 5701 Hwy N St. Charles, MO 63304	Mike & Jeanne Francisco 636.947.9403	1st Thursday - <b>Please contact facilitators for meeting status</b>	7:00pm
St. Peters / St. Charles, MO—Siblings Facilitator	Same as above	Samantha Schaefer 636.293.1099	Same as above	7:00pm
West County Group St. Louis, MO	Shaare Emeth 11645 Ladue (Ballas & Ladue) St. Louis, MO 63141 Library -	Jacque Glaeser 636.236.5103 jlynn63021@yahoo.com	Fourth Tuesday, members will be emailed reminders. Contact facilitator for schedule	7:00pm

<b>SPECIALIZED MEETINGS</b>	<b>MEETING LOCATIONS</b> All may be on pause pending COVID restrictions—phone facilitators	<b>FACILITATOR(S) / CONTACT(S)</b>	<b>DAY</b>	<b>TIME</b>
GRASP: Grief Relief After Substance Passing	Concordia Lutheran Church 505 S. Kirkwood Road Kirkwood, MO 63122	Mary Ann Lemonds 314.330.7586 grasp.stl@gmail.com	Sundays	5:00 pm
Life Crisis Center Survivors of Suicide	9355 Olive Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132	314.647.3100	Wednesdays	7:00 pm
PALS: Parents affected by the loss of a child to suicide	St. Luke's Hospital (Hwy 141 & 40) St. Louis, MO 63017	Linda Fehrmann <b>Currently meeting on line</b> 314.853.7925 lindafehrmann36@gmail.com	4th Saturday	10:30 am
Survivors of Suicide	Provident Behavioral Health	Linda Fehrmann 314.853.7925	1st & 3rd Monday	6:30 pm
Trees of Righteousness Grief Support Group—Any loss	Christian Hospital in the main lobby conference room—Please call Johnnie for correct location, dates and times	Johnnie Coleman 314.740.3602	3rd Tuesdays	6:00pm to approx. 7:30pm

BPUSA Virtual Bereaved Sibling Chapter — Ages 18+	Please email <a href="mailto:bpvirtualsiblingchapter@gmail.com">bpvirtualsiblingchapter@gmail.com</a> for the zoom link.	Katie Alger 845-443-0614	Last Thursday	7:00pm
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# TELEPHONE FRIENDS

## BPUSA ST. LOUIS CHAPTER CO-CHAIRS:

**Mike & Jeanne Francisco**

**Landline: 636-947-9403**

Accident, Auto	Theresa DeMarco	636-544-3478
Accident, Non-Vehicular	Bill Lagemann	573-242-3632
Adult Sibling	Samantha Schaefer	636-293-1099
Drugs/ Alcohol	Mary Ann Lemonds	314-330-7586
Grandparents	TBD	
Child with Disability	Linda Frohning	314-721-5517
Illness	Marilyn Kister	636-634-6019
Jefferson City	Sandy Brungardt	314-954-2410
Murder	TBD	
Only Child /Single Parent	Donna Arnold	314-608-3655
Suicide	Linda Fehrmann	314-853-7325

**As always, for up-to-date information on BPUSASTL events, visit [www.bpusastl.org](http://www.bpusastl.org)**

### Representation in Lieu of Meetings

Franklin County, MO	Bill & Vicki Lagemann	573.242.3632
	Cindy Morris	314.954.1810
Tri-County, MO	Brenda Wilson	573.438.4559
OPEN ARMS (Parents Left Behind)	Kathy Dunn <i>kathydunn333@yahoo.com</i>	314.807.5798

### Newsletter Submissions

Cut-off date for our next issue is

**February 15, 2022**

Send your submissions (poems, articles, love gifts) to:

Newsletter  
PO Box 1115  
St. Peters, MO 63376

or to :

[snowwhite6591@gmail.com](mailto:snowwhite6591@gmail.com)

Your writings may help someone.



### OUR COMMITMENT



Part of **BPUSASTL's** commitment to you is that we are the space where our parents and families communicate. Printed in your newsletter are articles to educate and ones that are private expressions of writers. We offer our writings only for your reflection. Sometimes serving nature or establishing routines signal solace to the writer. Often they turn to religion or spirituality for comfort and guidance.

**BPUSASTL** share these insights not only for your contemplation but also to acknowledge our community's many and rich sources for strength and hope.

### MY CHILD DID EXIST

I've lost a child, I hear myself say,  
And the person I'm talking to just turns away.  
Now why did I tell them, I don't understand.  
It wasn't for sympathy or to get a helping hand.  
I just want them to know I've lost something dear,  
I want them to know my child was here.  
My child left something behind which no one can see,  
So, if I've upset you, I'm sorry as can be.  
You'll have to forgive me, I could not resist.  
I just want you to know that my child did exist.

[#saytheirname](https://www.instagram.com/saytheirname)

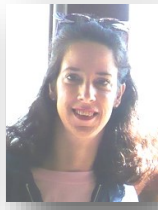
# Children of BPUSASTL's Board Representation



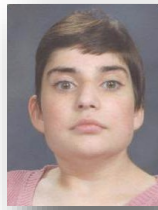
**Julie Bardle**  
*Daughter of Marilyn Kister*  
Newsletter Editor



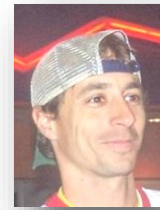
**Joseph DeMarco**  
*Son of Theresa DeMarco*  
Treasurer



**Jennifer Francisco**  
*Daughter of Jeanne & Mike Francisco*  
St. Peters Group Facilitators & Co-Chairs



**Natalie Frohning**  
*Daughter of Linda Frohning*



**Mickey Hale**  
*Son of Jacque Glaeser*  
W. County Group Facilitator & Secretary



**J. P. Rosciglione**  
*Son of Terre Rosciglione*  
Trivia Coordinator



**Rosie Umhoefer**  
*Daughter of Rosann Umhoefer*



**Matthew Wiese**  
*Son of Kim Wiese*



**Arthur Gerner / Emily Gerner**  
*Son & Granddaughter of Margaret Gerner*  
Founder of BPUSASTL

## Children of BPUSASTL's Special Events



**Aaron Cole**  
*Son of Courtney & Justin Lehmann*  
Trivia Coordinators

**Danny Brauch**  
*Brother of Samantha Schaefer*  
St. Peters Group Sibling Facilitator



**If you wish to make a love donation - IN ANY AMOUNT - We will include a picture of your child(ren) (See page 2-3 of this newsletter)**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ NAME OF CHILD(REN) \_\_\_\_\_

BIRTH DATE(S) \_\_\_\_\_

ANGEL DATE(S) \_\_\_\_\_

I WOULD LIKE A LOVE GIFT DEDICATED TO MY CHILD(REN) IN THE MONTH OF: \_\_\_\_\_

I WOULD LIKE TO DONATE IN LOVING MEMORY OF \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIL TO: P. O. BOX 1115, ST. PETERS, MO 63376**

Always defend  
your right to  
heal at your own  
pace. You are  
taking your  
time. You are  
allowed to take  
your time.

WWW.LIVELIFEHAPPY.COM



SAVE THE DATE!

BEREAVED  
PARENTS  
of the USA



**BPUSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
National Gathering 2022**

*"REFLECTING AND CONNECTING"*

**July 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Le Méridien St. Louis Clayton Hotel  
7730 Bonhomme Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63105**

*Consider attending this conference, in 2023 it will be held in a different city. National will make the location announcement later.*

## WELCOME

We are the parents whose children have died. We are the siblings whose brothers and sisters no longer walk with us through life. We are the grandparents who have buried grandchildren. We come together as Bereaved Parents of the USA to provide a safe space where grieving families can connect, share our stories, and learn to rebuild our lives. We attend meetings whenever we can and for as long as we find helpful. We share our fears, confusion, anger, guilt, frustrations, emptiness, and feelings of hopelessness, knowing these emotions will be met with compassion and understanding. As we support, comfort and encourage one another, we offer hope and healing. As we confront the deaths of our loved ones, our shared grief brings us to a common ground that transcends differences, building mutual understanding across the boundaries of culture, race, faith, values, abilities, and lifestyle. Together we celebrate the lives of our children, siblings, and grandchildren, sharing the joys and the heartbreaks as well as the love that will never fade. Together, strengthened by the bonds we create, we offer what we have learned from one another to every bereaved family, no matter how recent or long ago the death.

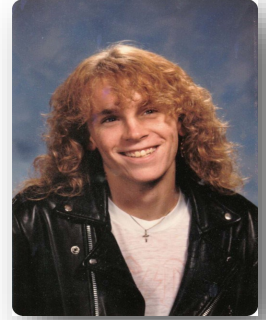
We are the Bereaved Parents of the USA.

We welcome you



## My Brother John

Continued from page 1



*“No Matter what you do, I’ll always love you”* This is what I’d say to John as we would have our typical sibling fights (which he would always win).

This is my brother – Born May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1971, died August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1998.

That Monday morning started a little different than normal mornings – my car was in the shop & I was waiting for dad to take me to pick it up. While waiting for him, in our coffee-smelled kitchen, John came down the back stairs with his laundry basket filled with clothes. The reason why this was different than other mornings was John work the bakery shift at Bread Co. – he would go into work around 9pm and work thru the night until the early hours of the morning. He usually would bring some yummy breakfast treats that he baked, but this morning all he brought was his dirty laundry down the stairs – no treats for me.

We had small talk that included “why are you up so early?” “What are you doing?” And “Where’s the fresh bagels?” – Stuff like that. I told him why I was still there, waiting for dad to take me to get my car. When I asked him about being up so early – he said he had lots of laundry to do and had to run some errands before work. That last errand would be the one that took his life.

That afternoon, John stopped by a house, to get his “quick fix.” Afterwards, John said he felt tired and would sit down and rest. He sat down in a recliner and fell asleep. He would never wake up. The drug he took was mixed with a foreign substance (we found this out afterwards). John didn’t want to die; he just couldn’t beat his addiction. For years he sought help, treatment – but his addiction always won. He would go in and out of treatment centers – saying and doing all the right things, however, John was the type of person that couldn’t say “no” – he couldn’t just walk away, and his drug friends knew this & it ultimately helped in his death on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1998.

### Growing Up

John was the 3<sup>rd</sup> child and the oldest boy – we have two older sisters. Since I’m the youngest, my story about John is thru a little brothers’ eyes as well as some stories from our sisters and mom. Supposedly, as a baby, John would constantly volunteer to help change my diaper, even though he was 2 or 3 at the time and my older sister would have done a better job, but he was the only one that offered to help. Early on, I was “his baby” and he wanted to take me everywhere. Even at night, he would beg mom to let me sleep in his room – now, I’m not sure how that would work since I was a baby and he was going on 3 or 4 at that time (this story was told to me from our mom), especially since I was still in diapers. Not to say growing up with him was any different than other siblings growing up in the 70’s and 80’s – we played well together/ we didn’t at times, we fought over Star Wars toys, who got the corded remote to the tv, (yes, I said corded-remote), who got to sit up front with mom – etc, etc.

When we moved in 1977, I was finally old enough to share a room with my big brother! We had bunk beds – which was really cool back then. Well, the bunk beds lasted one night – John, being on the top bunk, fell off. After that night, the two bunk beds, twin beds, were placed in each corner of our room. Even though we had separate beds, I would usually ask if I could sleep in his bed. My affection for him, turned in admiration – I always wanted to be where he was – if he was with his friends, I wanted to be with his friends, if he played sports, I wanted to play those sports too.

Our neighborhood had several families with kids my age & my siblings, as well as them going to the same grade school & high school. For some reason, John was the coolest kid on the block and in the neighborhood. The kids would ask for John to come out and play – and I would always run after him, asking if I could tag along and play. My memories seem to include always wanting to be on his team or begging him to let his little brother play – it didn't matter what he was doing – I just wanted to be with him – he was my big brother, who I admired greatly.

Even though he was 2 years older than me, he always seemed older than he was. I mean by that – as it was described to me after he had died – John was described as having “an old soul.” For example, 1983 most kids his age were listening to Michael Jackson, Duran Duran, Journey, GoGo's – basically anything on the new tv show MTV. Instead, John found “Heavy Metal” and would sneak downstairs to watch Friday Night Videos, where they showed Heavy Metal videos – bands AC/DC, Jimmy Hendrix, Quiet Riot, Megadeath, Metallica.

### **Music, Cujo, Buffy & The Pink Power Ranger**

Early on John would listen to music our mom liked – from The Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Who, Elton John or whatever record – (yes, I said record), mom would put on. As his appreciation in music grew, so did his taste in music. His taste in music went the opposite direction compared our sisters, as well as our neighborhood friends. For him, he seemed to find meaning, or have a connection to the lyrics of the music – he would try to figure out why certain songs were written, followed up by telling anyone who would listen to his stories about the song/lyrics. He found it fascinating Jimmy Hendrix played the guitar differently than other guitarist of the time. This ultimately made him curious about playing guitar. John was able to teach himself how to play by listening to the music – although I think some of the early lessons helped too – but don't let him know.... This became a passion of his and he kept with it. Ultimately, his loud playing and late night playing of his guitar helped me make the decision to move out of our room.

From Hendrix, to Clapton, from Rush to Metallica, from Megadeath to Quiet Riot – John continued down a different path with music and even thought everyone else were a “bunch of butt heads” for not liking “Heavy Metal.” As a teenager, he was asking to go to concerts and would sneak out to go to concerts. In 1991, Guns & Roses played at Riverport and John had to be there to watch Slash (the guitarist play) and hope to get one of his guitar pics. I bring this concert up because it made the news. John and some of his friends were in the “mosh pit” – which is an area very close to the stage – close enough to hear them sing and play, without the speakers. Some of John's friends were “trying to get their goat,” so to speak and the leader singer started yelling back – things escalated, the stage collapsed, and folks got hurt. John was one of the ones injured and was escorted to the police station. This was one of many concerts he attended where the night ended in a dramatic fashion.



### **Cujo, the cat**

Our family loved all animals – we had several animals growing up. At one point we had 10+ cats, a dog, a Scarlet Macaw (the big, colorful parrot), a ferret, a black snake (who we fed every Sunday before church) and a hamster. John had a special place in his heart for animals, but he especially loved cats. I don't remember how he came to have the stray, black & super soft cat – who would later be called Cujo – all I remember is John found him and the cat went to him and John brought him home. Just like his tastes in music, John had a unique taste in books – reading vampire novels, horror novels – which is why his cat was called Cujo. John really liked the Stephen King book – Cujo, which was about a feral, big dog. Cujo was big, but not mean at all. He was just a big, soft cuddly cat. John would say Cujo would meow sometimes when he would be playing his guitar (probably meowing saying too loud). Mom would say, Cujo would jump to the window and meow as soon as John would pull into the driveway – like he knew the sound of his car – weird.

After John died, I believe Cujo gave some comfort to mom. She would say Cujo still “smells” like John & that gave her comfort. Fast forward several years later – our folks had moved to Key West and mom brought along Cujo. As with most living creatures, cats die too & Cujo died on August 3<sup>rd</sup> – the same day John died.

### **Buffy The Vampire Slayer**

As you can see John is wearing a leather jacket – Side note – this picture is his Senior Year Photo from high school. Out of respect for our sister, I added this piece, since she remembered this and I did not – and from her point of view, this is part of her memory of John. I don't know which came first – Buffy the Vampire Slayer or his fascination of vampires – in any case, he would always make time to watch this show – either at home or when he out at a friend's house. Full disclosure, I have not watched this show – however, from what I have been told, the vampires where leather jackets – maybe, just maybe, that's where he thought wearing a leather jacket in the morning, night, summer, fall, spring, winter, to work and on dates – was cool??

### **The Pink Power Ranger**

John must have loved attractive, fierce, made-up women, who could kick butt – The Pink Power Ranger is another example of this. Although, she was made up, looking back mom & our sisters were considered attractive, fierce, loyal and who could probably kick butt – so maybe there's a correlation between The Pink Power Ranger, Buffy and mom and our sisters – maybe??? Another side – The Pink Power Ranger doll and Buffy is buried with John.

### **Drugs**

My apologies to everyone in the audience for this upcoming topic, it is a very sensitive topic – however this is the way John lived & the cause of his death – I will do my best to be sensitive to the fact that this is a hard & sometimes ugly topic.

Since 1998, I have been coming here – early on was always with my mom & sometimes by myself and sometimes my family would join me – my lovely wife Cheryl & our daughter Mackenzie & our son Elliot never got to meet John.

John got into drugs and the “wrong crowd” early on – he was always afraid to say “no” – making this relationship toxic & unhealthy – but he was the type of guy who wanted to please everyone, no matter the consequences. I don’t recall a specific age when this started – maybe because our mom tried to hide his addiction and their pain – hoping it would get better. There were times when John would go into treatment & sneak out and not be found for several days – worrying the heck out of our family since we did not know where John was or what had happened. There were many times, as a freshman in high school and John was an upper classman – his friends would approach me in-between classes, during lunch or after school – asking where John was or, better yet, if I had any drugs on me. Later, I found out that this type of activity really upset John – he had told his friends to never approach me or talk to me about that lifestyle – John would tell them that “I was the good, clean kid.”

I don’t remember every time John went into treatment, but I remember this one time that still resonates with me – During my Senior year in high school, John was in college at a local community college – he was caught with drugs during a traffic stop. He was sent back into rehab. As a family, we visited him in his room – mom was devastated (again), crying and asking what she can do. Dad was angry and putting the blame on someone else – very awkward situation that seemed to be in slow motion – never ending. John had to tell his story – so we all listened, even though dad would interrupt constantly, making the room more awkward by the minute. I even tried to be the “silly little brother” by lightening up the mood with silly antics – this made it more awkward since no one laughed or noticed. As our visit was ending, we all said our goodbyes and words of encouragement. John yelled for me, asking me to come here (by his bed) – he said, “promise me you won’t do this to mom.” I said something along the lines of “sure,” or “you bet.” He then grabbed my hand and said, “I mean it, I don’t want mom to go thru this again, promise me you’ll never try drugs.” I promised him and to this day have never tried them. My memory isn’t always the best, but I recall this interaction like it was yesterday.

Unfortunately, that was not the last time he was in rehab. One time, during Christmas break, while I was home from college – mom asked me and our dear friend, who knew John and his addiction – she asked us to see if John would go out with us – you see, we were your typical college boys – we would go out for a little while and then go home and play Sega or whatever video game system we had. But this night was different – John said yes to us taking him out with us. We went to dinner, had a few drinks, and chatted about life. John was very open with us and admitted the challenge he constantly has with his addiction. We showed him & told him there are other ways to have that “feeling”, without using drugs. He pointed out; all my childhood friends don’t play in that world – we said because we choose not to. During our Christmas break, we took him out more nights – hoping we can create a healthier behavior – showing him other ways to go out and have safe fun, outside of the world of drugs. Ultimately, our efforts failed. However, looking back, I cherish that time – he opened up and we shared a clean, fun experience with him for several nights during that Christmas break.

After college, I moved back home – John was living there too. I had learned John had been clean for a while. Unfortunately, John knew how to trick/beat the system – which meant he was not clean. What we learned was he would get his “fix” right before working the night shift – this type of drug gave him the feeling like he was constantly energized – which helped him working throughout the night.

## **You Should Never Bury Your Son**

That fateful Monday started relatively normal but ended with grief, anger, frustration, confusion – all the emotions we all share in this room. Over the years, my grief is still with me, every day, every night when we say our prayers – my son & daughter even include John in their prayers – however, if there is some joy in my story about John, it's I was able to see him that morning and talk with him for a while – this memory is happy since he wasn't in pain or sad – he had that smile on his face that you see now in the picture behind me.

## **Closing**

For over 20 years, I've honored John and my mom, even after she passed away with my attendance & now honored to speak in front of you. Like many of you, I have sat in silence, waiting to hear the name we've been missing for so long – listening to parents, siblings and grandparents share their grief-stories of how they lost their loved one. Occasionally, while walking thru the refreshments words may be shared from recognizing someone that has been here for a few years. Now, I still hold on to my grief, but I truly look forward to this event – perhaps to share a story about John with someone who has lost a sibling, or to listen patiently while a parent or grandparent tells me about their son, daughter, grandson or granddaughter they recently lost. Now, I don't try to leave quickly after the event, now I try to, lack of a better word, enjoy the company we keep, in this group that nobody wants to intentionally join.

Thank you for the past presenters, speakers – listening to you has given me the courage to be up here, knowing I can speak about John without judgement and perhaps with some curiosity about how John lived – thank you for sharing your beautiful children, grandchildren, and siblings' story. And lastly, Thank you to my beautiful wife Cheryl, our lovely daughter Mackenzie and our handsome son Elliot for listening to me tell them about their Uncle John.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you a little bit about John, allowing me to continue to honor his memory and our mom's wish. This is John.