

# LOSS and FOUND

NEWSLETTER

FALL, 2003

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In response to the changing face of the support systems for young widowhood, this is sent with the hopes that you are finding help and perhaps helping others along the way. Kathy and I send our love and support to all.

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## 1. NEWS, EVENTS

### a. Our PBS Interview.

For those of you who missed our interview on BETWEEN THE LINES, the show will be seen nationally on PBS very soon, and our interview will be aired along with authors such as Mario Puzo, David Halberstam, Joseph Wambaugh, etc. We'll let you know as soon as the date is definite. **We will make the interview available on our website in the very near future.** The interview has been played in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago a few times each.

### b. Gary's new show.

The future plans for my play, **INTERRUPTIONS**, awaits a better economy. But I will be producing **ON HOLD**, tentatively around March of 2004, in Los Angeles. **ON HOLD** is a one-person show which includes reminiscences and character studies of people with whom I've had contact in the past. The premise: I'm calling a radio talk show psychologist. Anyone who has ever called a talk show knows that you can be "on hold" for a long time! I make the call at the beginning of the show, and I'm "on hold" for the duration of the show. By the end of the show, I've gotten so much off my chest

that I no longer need to talk to the talk show psychologist. Once everything is in place, there will be info and pictures on our website.

### **c. The TV movie.**

TV movie made from **LOSS AND FOUND/INTERRUPTIONS** is coming along. Many people have asked us about that. As I've said before, it's a strange business, so don't get excited yet. All of the interest could result in a movie, or nothing. Who do you think should play Kathy and me? Maybe we shouldn't ask that question...

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## **2. APPEARANCES**

**The interviews below are all archived on**  
**<http://lossandfound.com/appearances.html>**

### **a. VITAL OPTIONS - THE GROUP ROOM with Selma Shimmel**

Sunday, August 24 7-9pm in Los Angeles

Originally aired Sunday, August 24 1-3PM Pacific. Their website is  
<http://thegrouproom.com>.

The Group Room Broadcasts in about 40 cities throughout the US.

We are on for most of the last 1/2 hour of this two-hour discussion.

### **b. COPING WITH CAREGIVING with Jaqueline Marcel**

Saturday, September 6 4:40 Pacific time

On WS radio on the internet

A twelve minute discussion. Their website is

<http://www.wsradio.com/copingwithcaregiving/>

### **c. GET READY FOR LOVE! with Viveca and the Buck**

Thursday, September 11 7PM Pacific

This is the first of several interviews. **We'll be back on this show on January 29 .**

<http://www.wsradio.com/getreadyforlove/>

### **d. Interview on KLBC, channel 2, at 7am on Friday, February 7, 2004**

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## **3. OUR SEMINARS**

### **a. BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT EXPO, Pasadena**

SPECIAL EVENT SPEAKER

Saturday, September 20 at 11:00

Sunday, September 21 at 2:00

### **b. Henderson Nevada public libraries seminars February 7,8, 2004**

### **c. Los Angeles Public Libraries, dates to be announced.**

Kathy and I continue to present our seminars, and we're gratified that we can help so many people. We're starting a series with the Los Angeles, Orange County, San Fernando Valley, and Las Vegas public library systems. We'll be presenting seminars for some of the education extension programs. We'll announce the dates as they solidify.

If your group, library, or company would like us to speak, you can contact us. We plan to do a lot of traveling with the healing words.

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### **3. SEND US SUPPORT GROUP INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH OTHERS**

We often receive requests from people looking for support groups. New groups pop up all the time, and established groups might well have escaped our investigation, so anything that you can add to our list would be of help to others. You will be doing a good thing. Don't assume that we have heard of your group, unless we suggested it in the first place!

No new groups this time.

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### **5. GRIPES**

The ten worst things you can say to a widow or widower:

1. "You should be relieved that he/she died. My divorce was so messy." Kathy and I have heard this one many times.
2. "The children must be such a burden to you now that you are grieving." For us, they represented a challenge, a responsibility, and a way to center things away from us and toward a positive goal.
3. "Snap out of it." This sometimes comes from people who have a difficult time dealing with the emotional issues when talking to widowed people, or just insensitive people.
4. "You grieve one month for every year that you were married." A strangely common but patently absurd formula.
5. "God never gives you more than you can handle." We don't believe that God created this tragedy in our lives, and it's up to us to handle anything that happens to us.
6. "Trust the insurance company, they've been doing this for a long time." And the doctors, and the lawyers... A certain degree of trust, with a very open, observant mind.
7. "You have to clean out the closet immediately."
8. "You never have to clean out the closet." You will do it if and when you are ready. I needed to do it pretty much right away. Kathy waited. I did save some things for our girls, for when they grew up. Most of that proved to be out of date by that time.
9. "You need to go out and get drunk for a few weeks." Other responsibilities still exist.
10. "You should get rid of all of the photos of him/her and get on with your life." If you are dating seriously, having many photos displayed throughout the house could be a negative message, but there is no need to erase a part of your life. The natural

evolution has taken place with Kathy and me; our deceased spouses are significant in our memory books, but not on display. But we've been married now for eight years. We both feel more comfortable this way, really more comfortable for each other's sensibilities. But we do refer to videos and photo albums often.

Do you have any "worst things" to add to this list? I kept the list to ten, for brevity, but there is more. I'd love to hear from you about this.

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## **6. PROFILE OF A SUPPORT PERSON**

We profiled **Hope Edelman** last month. Here is a little more about Hope.

The best place to start for information and understanding of what it means to be a motherless daughter is to read Hope Edelman's book "Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss". Here you will find information on grief, what effects early mother loss has on a girl as she goes through her life, different coping styles and commonalities among all of us who experienced early mother loss.

The follow-up book, "Letters from Motherless Daughters" was written by Hope based on the incredible response to her first book. "Letters from Motherless Daughters" is a selection of the letters from motherless women who were moved by Hope's book. Reading this may help you feel less alone.

Hope Edelman began writing about mother loss after she could not find any resource materials on this subject. Her book, *Motherless Daughters* (Addison Wesley: 1994) is the first in-depth study of this subject. Hope Edelman is a graduate of the University of Iowa Writing Program. She lives and writes in Los Angeles.

### **From Kirkus Reviews , March 15, 1994**

According to the testimony in this oddly comforting volume, women never get over missing dead or absent mothers, whether they were 2 or 22 or even 52 at the time of loss. Edelman's mother died when she was 17, leaving her to cope with a grief-stricken father and younger siblings as well as her own feelings. Although she left for college the following year and later led an adventurous, independent life as a journalist, she discovered one day when she was 24 that she missed her mother so much that she was in physical pain. From that experience came a magazine article and this book. Extensive interviews and correspondence with hundreds of motherless women (self-selected through answers to ads and other outreaches) and dozens of experts taught Edelman that losing a mother through death or desertion at any age has ramifications throughout a woman's life. Even when grief is adequately expressed and the remaining family members are supportive and loving, motherless women find themselves longing for the lost parent at critical junctures in their lives: the first day of school, onset of menstruation, loss of virginity, marriage, childbirth, menopause. Daughters tend to anticipate death at the same age as their mothers' demise, in particular if it was the result of a physical or psychological disorder that might be inheritable, such as cancer or depression. Also discussed are the tricks of

memory that turn the lost mother into a paragon or a wicked witch, and the difficulties experienced in adult relationships due to anger and fear of being abandoned again. As the author says, "[My mother's] presence influenced who I was, and her absence influences who I am." Many women will find this book painful, but it's reassuring to have the company of others when dealing with the complex emotions and lifelong effects of a mother's loss.

### **Book Description**

In the tradition of *Passages and My Mother, My Self*, this unique, personal, and ground-breaking New York Times best-seller -- the first of its kind -- explores the profound pain of mother loss among women and is available here for the first time in paperback. "When my mother died, I knew no woman my age who had experienced mother loss. I felt utterly and irrevocably alone. In college, where new friends knew only as much about me as I was willing to reveal, I told few people my mother had died. I searched the university library and local bookstores for writings about mother loss. In each book I found about mother-daughter relationships, I quickly flipped ahead to the chapter about a mother's death, but discovered they all assumed the reader would be in her forties or fifties when her mother dies. I was eighteen." -- excerpt from *Motherless Daughters*.

Not only for motherless daughters, but for all women who want to better understand the mother/daughter relationship, this beautifully written work inspired an Anna Quindlen column; appeared in the New York Times, Ingram, Barnes & Noble, and San Francisco best-seller lists; and received an extraordinary amount of media attention including a feature on The Today Show. Hope Edelman lost her mother to breast cancer when she was eighteen. Unable to find a book to help her understand and cope with that loss, she decided to write her own. She posted notices asking motherless women to share their experiences with her, and was unprepared for both the number of responses she received, and for their emotional intensity. Eventually meeting with 92 women and surveying 154 by mail, Hope was able to compare how mother loss affects daughters differently depending on their ages, their relationships to their mothers, their father's attitude, and the support or dependency of siblings. But more important Hope's book explores what these women share -- a void in their lives they cannot seem to fill. Their common experiences and insights will help motherless daughters, and those who care about them, come to better understand how this painful loss shapes lives forever.

### **Synopsis**

Explores the profound impact of the loss of one's mother on women of all ages, offering a thought-provoking study of the nature of mother-daughter relationships and sharing insights and experiences designed to help motherless daughters cope with their loss. Reprint. NYT. K.

### **For *Motherless Daughters* by Fern Kupfer**

It was the serendipity of being in another city and running into my daughter's friend in front of a bookstore that gave me pause. "Jill," I said, releasing her from a hug: "I was

just thinking about you." I was just thinking, in fact, to remember to send a book I had bought for her as a college graduation gift. The book had been sitting on my desk for a month. Why hadn't I sent it?

The book is "Motherless Daughters - The Legacy of Loss," by Hope Edelman. My daughter's friend, like the women interviewed for this book and like the author herself, is a motherless daughter. Jill's mom died of ovarian cancer 14 years ago.

I bought the book and read it first myself, seeing Jill on every page. But I put off sending it to her. An odd gift, one that was sure to make the recipient cry her eyes out.

Jill and I stood on the corner talking. Before we parted, I blurted out: "I'm going home today and putting something in the mail for you, Sweetie." I knew that saying it would make me keep my promise.

Jill's friendship with my daughter over the years had sensitized me to a new understanding about differences in the family. While everyone knows children whose parents are divorced, children raised by single women, children whose families are realigned in unusual and modern ways -- hardly anyone knows a child who doesn't have a mother. We presume that everyone has a mother.

In elementary school the teachers casually announce: "Take this home to your mother; ask your mother to fill out this form to give you permission for . . ." When Gabi and Jill were in junior high, the English teacher gave a composition assignment: Write about a disagreement you've had with your mother. As part of the graduation ceremony at a high school in Iowa, each girl filed out of the auditorium and placed a single red rose in the lap of her mother.

Hope Edelman's startling book examines the consequences of mother loss on women. While Edelman admits that losing a mother is devastating to a child of either sex, she also believes there are particular ramifications for female children, who lose not only a parent, but a role model, someone who serves as a gender guide through the tricky rituals of womanhood.

Edelman, who was a teenager when her mother died of cancer, describes the rage and loneliness of her own loss. And in her moving prose she also tells the stories of more than a hundred other women who were too young to lose a mother, other women who, no matter what their age or occupation or lifestyle, define themselves by this loss. As columnist Anna Quindlen once wrote: "I was 19 when my mother died. For a long time, that was the only thing you needed to know about me."

What happens when a girl loses her mother is that the girl loses a piece of who she will become. And all the ordinary rites of passage that young women go through -- from getting their periods to buying prom dresses to getting married to having their own babies -- make motherless daughters feel wounded all over again.

With a mother's death (or abandonment) it is not only the mother that you lose, but it is also the idea of the mother you always wanted: the one whose face is riveted to yours during every school concert; the one who would give you the blouse off her back if you admired it; the one who taught you to write thank-you notes and how to walk in high heels; the one who loves you no matter what; the one whose love is so pure and fierce that she would give her life to save yours.

A few days ago I received a letter from Jill. She wrote: "I'm not sure how to say thank you for giving me a piece of my life. The book is something that I have been wanting and needing for so long . . . it's good to feel that I am not alone and that it's okay to be suddenly thrown back into moments of complete pain and grief and to want nothing more than to talk to my mother . . ."

Motherless daughters. One of the author's observations is that some women find strength and purpose not in spite of their loss but from it, because as girls become women they still turn to the mother they long for, the mother whose shimmering presence, even in memory, continues to shape a daughter's life.

So Hope Edelman, still in her 20s, has written an important book, one that will help so many people. Now she is going on book tours and talk shows and traveling all around the country to share what she has learned from her research and her life.

And my daughter's good friend Jill plans to become a gynecologist. This summer, at 22 years of age, before she even begins medical school at the University of Iowa, she is doing research on the causes of ovarian cancer.

I look at these young women, so talented and bright, their whole glorious futures before them, and I can only think: Oh, sweethearts, your mothers would be so proud.

Fern Kupfer is a novelist and writing professor at Iowa State University. She is a frequent contributor to *Working Moms' Internet Refuge* .

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## **7. WHAT ARE YOUR NEEDS?**

What do you need that you are not receiving now? Can we help? Or do you just want to talk about it?

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## **8. New resources for widows and widower, and others: THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT FOUNDATION**

We're interested in any other new resources that you might be able to share with our readers.

Watch for the **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT FOUNDATION** in the near future. It's a new resource that Kathy and I are well into the process of creating. We will be hosting an awards banquet, honoring six people each year, who have contributed to the quality of

others' lives in a significant way. This is defined by an ongoing commitment rather than one isolated incident.

We invite your nominations. We will honor people from all walks of life, all nationalities both famous and unsung. We also invite nominations for people to serve on our Board of Directors and our Honorary Board.

The proceeds of this program will be allocated to young widows/widowers who have a demonstrated financial hardship brought about by the death of a spouse.

Additionally, we will be holding symposia in Los Angeles, and hopefully in New York. We will be announcing these within the next few months. The cost will be minimal, and the subject matter will concentrate on improvement of quality of life, communication between people, and generosity that people can show in times of stress.

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## **9. WE INVITE YOUR COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOOK OR ABOUT YOUNG WIDOWHOOD IN GENERAL**

This section is for you. If we don't know the answer, we'll refer to another specialist in the field. As we state in the book, we are not psychologists, but we do have our own experiences and those of others to draw upon. We ALWAYS get permission to use your questions.

### **FROM A READER:**

I am 29 years old and John, my husband and father of my children, died unexpectedly six months ago. He was a fire fighter and died trying to save a family. He was able to save a little boy, but he never made it out of the building after that. I have 2 children, Mike, age 8, is very ill, requiring constant monitoring and around-the-clock care, and Haley, age 10 is terribly obsessive-compulsive, even more so since her father's death. I don't know what to do or how to feel better but I can hardly get out of bed and stop crying. I don't know which depresses me more, losing John or my children's problems. I can't seem to do enough to help them. I love my kids more than anything but I hurt so badly and miss John so much. What should I do?

Thanks for listening.

### **DEAR READER:**

Here are a few ideas for you. There is no quick fix for any grieving situation, and the problems that your children have require special care and attention, but there are some basic things you can do to help things along. Your situation is very difficult, and your pain is very understandable.

- a. Seek out a support group. If you can't find one in your area, let me know where you live and I'll look up the list that I have. Many churches have support groups.
- b. Seek out psychological help. Many health plans pay for all or part.
- c. Be sure that you are receiving the Social Security benefits that you may be entitled to. If not, and if you need information, email me.

- d. Write your thoughts in a journal. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or anything. Just write them down. It's amazing how much it can help.
- e. Be sure that you are getting the right amount of sleep and that you are eating properly to maintain your energy.
- f. Do something nice for yourself from time to time.
- g. Don't be afraid to seek help with your children, especially given the circumstances! Be sure that your children are getting adequate medical help, including second opinions.

None of this will provide a quick fix, but it might help. My heart goes out to you. Take care.

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## 11: OUR SEQUEL

We are working on a sequel and **WE WANT TO INCLUDE YOUR EXPERIENCES, BOTH THE WORST OF GRIEF AND THE BEST OF RECOVERY FROM GRIEF. Like a support group in print.** Diaries, thoughts, and ideas from young people, with a wide range of issues. This book will be written by **YOU**. We want to thank those who have generously contributed already!

The book will be divided into **three parts**, each with the experiences of young widows, widowers or their children.

**If you would like to contribute, contact us! We are accepting submissions.** This is an extension of the previous deadline because of some interesting new "stuff" going on with **Loss and Found**, which is taking more of our time than we expected.

We'll be including famous people who are generously contributing short chapters, some resource people, and mostly YOU populating the book.

You should contact us first before sending your submission, so we can discuss any specific questions that you might have. We anticipate using the words of 35 people in chapters ranging from 600 to 4000 words. You choose your own length.

**BOOK TWO** of the Young widowhood support collection:

**LOSSES AND GIFTS: Coping with the loss of a young spouse or parent** (working title).

Part One:

**Between the Tears:**

**The Journey between Tears of Sorrow and Tears of Joy**

Young widows and widowers, in their own words.

Part Two:

**When a Child Loses a parent:**

**Monumental Loss of the Small**

Stories, diary entries, artwork, quotes from children.

Part Three:

**Beyond the Tears:**

**Competing with and/or Living with a Memory**

People who have gotten past the worst part, and may or may not be in a relationship

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**12. CLOSING REMARKS**

Kathy and I want to thank everyone who has written to us with your kind and supportive comments. We try to help people and make them feel better. Your words make us feel like maybe we are making a little difference, in a positive way. We cherish these moments.

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**LOSS and FOUND: How We Survived the Loss of a Young Spouse**

by Gary and Kathy Young (Calabash Press)

<http://www.lossandfound.com>

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At Barnes and Noble, Borders, Amazon, and independent stores.

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