



# Journey

Newsletter of the  
National Catholic Ministry  
to the Bereaved

Volume 15, No. 4

Winter 2005

## HEALING HUMOR

by Martha Burke Tressler

This afternoon, a quiet Friday, we are now a couple of weeks into Central Standard time in my part of the country. CST to me means short, dark days. No matter that Thanksgiving and Christmas, happy times for me, are just a few weeks away. No matter that I just realized that I have vacation time coming which will give me some much-needed "Sabbath time." These days of little light and much darkness depress the heck out of me.

I'm twenty-three years past the deepest pain of my life, yet, on days like this the pain of that loss feels raw. Maybe it's that my husband died in October and was buried just a couple of days before CST blanketed us in winter darkness for that year. So, in the quiet of this Friday, I went to my file drawer and pulled out my precious file of back issues of the "Joyful Noiseletter."


This is an ecumenical publication which calls itself the "Epistle of the Fellowship of Merry Christians." I spent an hour looking for an old joke about Jesus and St. Peter for a friend. I didn't find it, but I chuckled my way out of the impending darkness.

This exercise led me to ponder the importance of humor in my life and in the lives of all of us who are bereaved. During that first bleak year there was very little in my life that I considered funny. I could watch television with others and the jokes would go past me. The rest of the people in the room would roar and I would just smile weakly. The most outrageous jokes just didn't seem funny. Grief wounds our entire being, including our sense of humor. I felt as if mine had been punctured and all the fun had leaked out of me.

I can't remember exactly how long after my husband's death it was, but I heard someone say a phrase I had often uttered. One of my co-workers muttered. "I just can't believe him. He can't get anyplace on time. He'll be late to his own funeral."

In a blinding flash of light, I remembered how many times I had said those very words about my late, beloved, perennially tardy spouse. At the same time, I realized it had actually happened.

My husband was on a business trip to Honolulu when he had a fatal heart attack. He died on a Friday. Nothing official happens there on weekends, so nothing could be done as far as arrangements were concerned until Monday. By the time all was completed, it was late on Tuesday and the transportation to the airport missed the last plane to Chicago. We had to



In our daily lives, water  
crystals teach us very  
important things

—*The Hidden Messages in*

*Water* by Masaru Emoto

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

- 1 Healing Humor
- 2 Message from the President
- 4 Because You Asked: Stressing Laughter
- 5 Humor And Healing
- 6 Dates to Remember
- 7 Where Was God in the Tornado?
- 8 Blessed are those who Mourn: They shall be Comforted
- 9 Blue Christmas
- 10 2005 Consolation Ministries Leadership Award
- 10 The Interpreter
- 10 The Dash
- 11 Movie Review:  
*Patch Adams*
- 11 In Memoriam

(Continued on page 3)

*(Message from the President continued from page 2)*

Your ongoing commitment of talent and treasure is critically needed to carry on the heritage and mission of NCMB. We welcome your recommendations and suggestions as to how this might be accomplished. We want NCMB to be accessible, vital, and user-friendly to those providing the ministry of consolation to the bereaved.

I and the Board of Trustees will make every effort to keep you informed about our future directions.

May the God of mercy and consolation continue to bless you in your ministry.

**John M. Cherek, President**

We are all born with a sense of humor, but it is a gift that we must develop as we age. The payoff is not only joy in our souls, but health and wellness.

—*Tickle Your Soul* by Anne Bryan Smollin

*(“Healing Humor” continued from page 1)*

postpone the funeral one day. My husband was late to his own funeral.

With this realization, I walked into my office, sat down, and laughed until I was weak. Then I wondered if my laughter was appropriate. After all, I was laughing about the circumstances of a funeral and the funeral of my husband at that. How could anything about that devastating loss be funny?

Nothing about the loss itself was funny. Nothing at all! But the indisputable fact that he was late to his own funeral remains. In life, this was the guy who was lied to about the starting time of events, so we could get him in the door on time. If I wanted to find deeper meaning in this, I think it would be that the healing laughter I experienced that day was a final gift from him. Laughter is a great releaser of tension. Tight jaws and stiff necks relax. We feel looser and more free.

My office is in a cemetery. There is a subculture of cemetery humor. Most of us have seen collections of funny inscriptions from markers in old cemeteries. All of us who work here have heard some of the stock remarks about our workplaces which have only stopped being funny because we have heard them so often. We laugh at just about every aspect of life. Why not about death? It is a part of life.

So I now have developed a new philosophy of humor. “If it’s funny, go ahead and laugh. In fact, laugh until you cry. Then thank God for the return of your sense of humor”.

**Martha Burke Tressler** is the coordinator of the Bereavement Ministry sponsored by Catholic Cemeteries of Chicago. She is responsible for training parish volunteers, serving as a resource for bereaved persons and serving as a liaison with other bereavement organizations. She has been appointed to the NCMB Board of Trustees.

I believe in the sun  
even when it’s not  
shining;

I believe in the stars  
even when I see  
them not;

I believe in God even  
when I don’t see  
God.

—Words written on a  
wall at Dachau prison