

# WHO IS POURING INTO YOU?

Wise words from Lisa Christian, Director of Counseling Services at AVP



C.A.R.E.S NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Victim Support Services Division

# LONG TERM CARE



*Dr. Janet Etzi, Psychologist*

It is an honor and privilege to work with men, women, young people, and children who have lost someone they love to gun violence or have themselves been victim to a violent crime. The root of the word victim is one who is sacred. The work we do together, the listening, talking and sometimes crying is nothing short of sacred to me.

This brief writing will address Grief, Recovery and Long Term Care, in the hopes of helping all of us to heal. The short term effects of traumatic loss are difficult enough to bear. They often include shock, overwhelming pain, anger, sleeplessness, and on and on. But the longer term effects of these experiences can be just as devastating, and sometimes more so. One reason that they can be harder to manage is that they tend to be more hidden. Relatives and friends tend to pay less attention as everyone must get back to some kind of normal routine. All my clients report to me that unless you've been through this impossible grief and traumatic stress, you can't fully comprehend what the everyday is really like. Living is stressful under the best circumstances. The trial of finding a normal way of living again after the loss of a son or daughter, or as one is recovering from multiple gunshot wounds, is extraordinarily difficult. It is not uncommon to question one's core beliefs about the meaning of life. The lost loved one is missed in every cell of one's being. A Mother can find herself crying at work as she hears about yet another shooting. A Father can become engulfed in helpless rage as he wonders why his son's killer has not been caught. A shooting victim can sink into despair as his or her body is damaged and causing severe pain.



## **LONG TERM CARE CONTINUED**

There is no right way to grieve or to recover. Everyone is different. There is no correct time frame for recovery or grief. Even though loved ones care and want to help, they often don't know how or even end up saying the wrong thing. And for many, the approaching holidays will be the first time their son or daughter or cousin or friend is not present. The following suggestions and ideas are not my own. They come from all those who have opened their hearts to me and allowed me to learn from them. I know they want me to pass on what I've learned to others.

As the holidays approach, many of your friends and relatives will insist that you not be alone. They may argue that it is unhealthy for you to be alone. Only you can know what you need as you continue to grieve, recover, and heal. Remember! Everyone is different. Let your heart guide you. Grief is the heart's way of learning to let go of the earthly presence of your loved one. Only you can know how this will happen for you, in any given moment, on any given day. You can explain to others that "I appreciate your care and concern. I'll let you know as it gets closer to the day. I don't know how I'm going to feel and I have to trust my instincts, my heart."

As the weeks and months pass, don't be surprised by any type of reactions, emotions, thoughts, anxieties, angry outbursts, etc. The overall point I want to make is to be extremely compassionate towards your own self. Loved ones, friends, and therapists can support you and listen, but only you can go through the process of healing, which is often very painful. Be patient with yourself. Ask for what you need, even if that means asking to be left alone. Or ask someone to cook a meal for you or go for a walk with you or just sit with you in silence.

When people try to say supportive things that aren't supportive (Time heals all wounds; God only gives us what we can bear; It will get better), know that they mean well. Most people are very uncomfortable with extreme grief and don't know how to respond to it.

As time goes on, and you move through many different facets of grief and recovery, you will experience a multitude of emotions, some painful, some joyful, others mysterious. Remember to be patient with yourself and to be open to learning about yourself, about others and about Love. Life is precious and those we have lost and those who are with us make it sacred.

**From, Dr. Janet Etzi**



## **Two Years Feels Like Yesterday**

It's been two years since the murder of my brother, but it feels like yesterday. As I write about how I'm feeling at this present moment, I can hear his laughter haunting my thoughts. My mind is replaying all the times I told him he was my heart, and I would always protect him. But sadly, I feel like I failed.

What could I have done to stop his murder?

What were the red flags?

Why did this happen?



Although I know there was nothing I could do, the pain won't allow me to write his murder off as fate. My brother, Allen Taylor Jr., was murdered six days shy of his 35th birthday. Sadly, the day after, we visited our oldest brother's grave. As I sit in the middle of pain and anger, I can only think about my mother. My mother brought three children into this world, hoping to see all of us succeed, get married, have children, and live contently. She believed that the three of us would outlive her and be a support for one another. As she always quietly mumbles, "Parents aren't supposed to bury their children." I cannot imagine her pain, as I am a mother and understand our unbreakable bond with our children. We remember the emotional rollercoaster of giving birth, the softness of our newborn baby's skin, their first steps, their first heartbreak, the tone of their voice, their smile, their laughter, their cries, and their joy.

I know it's difficult for my mother because my brother's murderer has not been captured. It also hurts that the last words she heard from my brother were, "I'm going to the store. I'll be right back." The next time she saw him was in a funeral home. "He looked peaceful," she said, holding back tears. He did look peaceful. I remember kissing his forehead, only to feel the coldness of his skin, noticing the dried blood around his ear that lingered—reminding me that someone had taken him away from us.



## **Two Years Feels Like Yesterday Cont.**

The person I loved since he entered this earth was now a frozen shell in front of me. I felt my heart break into a million pieces. I kept calling his name during the funeral, hoping he would get up from this horrible prank. But he didn't. My brother was gone, and nothing I could do would change that.

The one thing I can change is making sure that I keep his memory alive. So as a form of therapy and coping mechanism, I made a short documentary about my brother: Sometimes I cry in June. My film documents the conversation that I didn't get the opportunity to have with my brother. The goal of my film was to humanize my brother and show audiences who he was, his goals, and why his life mattered. The documentary featured my mother and me, the two women in his life that he said had his heart. My documentary won the Best Short Documentary Award from the Indie Eye Film Festival and has been selected for screenings at numerous film festivals both nationally and internationally.

In the Summer of 2022, I created the Bout Mine I Matter Youth Gun Violence Prevention program, affectionately titled after my brother's clothing line, Bout Mine. High school students ages 13 - 18 who were directly impacted by gun violence learned video production skills by creating a short documentary. I also provided a trained behavioral health counselor to teach participants de-escalation techniques for violence and how to process trauma. In addition, all participants received a stipend for participating, catered lunch, and snacks. Finally, I hosted a red-carpet premiere of the Bout Mine I Matter documentary my students created and raised \$600 to give to my participants. I aim to continue this program as either an after-school or summer program for teens in the Northwest section of Philadelphia.

I hope my brother is proud. It hurts that his life was taken for these initiatives to be created. But I guess this is how we find beauty in the pain of loss. Not a day goes by that I don't miss both of my brothers, and it doesn't get easier, but seeing my student's eyes light up, their smiles, and their laughter keeps me going.

To learn more about Shameka Sawyer and the Bout Mine I Matter Gun Violence Prevention Program, visit [www.5shorts.org](http://www.5shorts.org).

**Two Years Feels Like Yesterday**

by

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