



## **What We Gain Through Loss**

**By**

**Suzanne Giesemann**

Twelve souls on a 48-foot sailboat for seven days might seem a bit crowded, but in this case, it wasn't. The crew consisted of eight parents and our four beautiful children. Our kids needed no staterooms. They had each passed from their earthly bodies, but they were with us just the same. In fact, it was they who had planned this sailing adventure, and they went out of their way to prove it.

This most special vacation was conceived nine months earlier when my husband Ty and I were traveling through Arizona. I had been looking forward to meeting Elizabeth Boisson on our visit to Phoenix. I had learned of Elizabeth through her role as co-founder of "Helping Parents Heal." This unique support group encourages an open discussion of the afterlife to aid bereaved parents in the healing process.

When I called to let her know we were in town, Elizabeth invited Ty and me to join her and forty others at a special ceremony to dedicate benches in memory of the Boissons' son, Morgan, and Kyle, the son of another Helping Parents Heal couple. Ty and I marveled at the festive atmosphere as the cheerful group hiked the hilly trail among the cactus and desert scrub.

Many of those gathered had suffered the death of a child, yet they smiled and chatted easily with each other. When we reached the two benches, set atop a small mesa overlooking a narrow creek, the group gathered in a large circle. Yes, there were tears as the two couples said a few words about their children, but these were followed by a joyous cheer as each of us released a dove-shaped balloon into the air in memory of Morgan and Kyle. The biodegradable balloons drifted slowly upward like special envoys headed to Heaven.



After the return hike, we enjoyed getting to know the Boisson family and some of the other parents at a house party. There we met Jeff and Lynn Hollahan and instantly “clicked.” We cleared our schedules to meet for dinner at the Hollahan’s house later that week with Elizabeth and her husband, Cyril.

The next evening, Ty and I were driving north on the eight-lane highway southeast of Phoenix when Ty let out a shout. His outburst came not from a near accident, but from the sight of one of the balloons released at the ceremony. More like a homing pigeon than a dove, it flew directly at us, crossing our hood and soaring straight up our windshield.

No meteorologist could ever explain how the wind currents had carried Morgan’s balloon 37 miles to our exact location 25 hours after its release, but after years of serving as a medium, I can explain it in one simple sentence: The two worlds are closer than we think.

Two nights later as we traveled that same highway on our way to the Hollahan's house, I had a little chat with my unseen helpers in spirit. They know that I would be working as a medium 24/7 if I could, so they usually cut off my connection while in social settings. This night was different. "I want to be on duty," I said to them mentally as Ty pulled into Jeff and Lynn's driveway. "If these two couples' kids are around tonight, please let me sense them."

My wish was granted shortly after toasting our new friendship with a glass of champagne. Even though I hadn't yet seen a photo of the Boissons' son, Morgan, I suddenly became aware of their 20-year-old son standing by Elizabeth's left shoulder.

"Morgan is here," I said, "and he wants me to talk about the hot air balloon."

"Oh, my goodness!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "I just took a photo this morning of a balloon flying over our house!"

Current event reporting is my favorite kind of evidence from those in spirit. It shows they're still very much involved in our lives. As we celebrated Morgan's surprise visit, Lynn and Jeff Hollahan's 22-year old son dropped in.

"Devon is here, too," I said to Lynn, "and he's showing me an image of corn on the cob. Are you serving corn this evening?"

"No," she replied, "but I was going to." She then pulled out her cell phone and showed us a photo of several large ears of corn that her son-in-law had texted her earlier in the day.

These two simple yet meaningful validations opened the door to a flurry of details from across the veil about the boys' lives that I couldn't have known. Later, as we adjourned to the table to enjoy the healthy meal Lynn had prepared, the boys moved

with us. I continued to pass along the thoughts and images they conveyed through my consciousness.

Suddenly, I became aware of the presence of the spirit of my step-daughter, Susan. She stood at my right side and said, "What about me?"

I took in a quick breath. I rarely sensed Susan outside of meditation, but clearly she did not want to be left out of the party.

"I sense you're here, Susan," I said to her silently, "but you're going to have to tell me something I don't know if I'm going to prove it to everyone else."

"Well," she said, quite matter-of-factly, "Dad has a toothache."

Not having been privy to our telepathic communications, Ty must have been quite surprised when I turned to him out of the blue and said, "You have a toothache?"

He touched his jaw and replied, "Yes. It started this morning, but I didn't say anything about it."

I turned to the rest of the group and announced with delight, "Susan is here, too!"

"Of course, she's here!" Elizabeth said. "Our kids love to have a good time."

The rest of the evening passed quickly with an easy flow of stories, laughter, and bittersweet memories. Even though we had all suffered great loss, each of us knew that death is only a transition.

Over the course of the evening, we discovered that the six of us had much more in common than our children's passing. We had each traveled widely and shared a common craving for adventure. This discovery led someone to raise the idea of

chartering a boat together. We quickly warmed to the idea, and realized that the larger vessels had four cabins. We needed to come up with a fitting couple to sail with us.

I immediately thought of Irene and Tony Vouvalides. Irene and I had become fast friends after I helped to connect her with her daughter, Carly, across the veil. Tony and Ty enjoyed much in common, including a love of boats. As the leader of the Hilton Head chapter of Helping Parents Heal, Irene communicated often with Elizabeth, but the two had never met face to face. A Caribbean catamaran cruise seemed an idyllic way to meet.

Lynn and Jeff were clearly open to making new friends, so by the end of the evening it was decided. If Tony and Irene agreed, we would head to the tropics the following winter. We felt fairly sure our kids in spirit had something to do with how easily the plans came together, and we knew they would be with us as we executed the trip.

We came together the following January from three different states, meeting on the island of Tortola. We had planned to dine at a local restaurant in Soper's Hole harbor on our first night as a group, but our kids had other plans for us.



We ended up at a different restaurant, seemingly by accident. As a consequence, we enjoyed the live music of an acoustic guitarist. Three songs into the musician's first set, Jeff shook his head in wonder and said, "Do you hear what's playing?" Lynn laughed and replied, "Of course! Blackbird!"

The Hollahans had shared the story with us earlier of how blackbirds delivered an unmistakable message from their son shortly after his passing. Now, every time they visit a venue with live acoustic music, “Blackbird” is uncannily the second or third song played.

“Carly always plays ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ for us,” Irene informed us. The guitarist entertained us from across the room, moving on to a fourth song as Irene described the rainbows she and Tony had already spotted prior to joining us on the trip. Her story lasted long enough for the guitarist to finish his fourth song. He was too far from us to have heard our conversation, so we gave Carly full credit when the opening chords of his fifth selection magically morphed into a modern rendition of



“Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

After that initial dinner ashore, we mutually agreed that synchronistic songs aside, we preferred the intimacy of meals aboard the boat to the noisy nightlife ashore. We spent hours laughing and chatting. We mentioned our children often—those with us physically and those in our hearts. While each of us wiped an occasional tear, laughter and smiles prevailed.

Our laughter sparked an interesting observation from Elizabeth: “Some people who don’t understand that life is eternal think that if you’re happy after losing a child, then your child must not have been important to you. They don’t understand that our kids are right here. There’s this very thin veil that separates us,” she said, adding, “How can we be sad when we know that?”



Our second evening together, Irene produced a deck of cards with questions designed to start conversations. From the deeper subjects, we quickly learned how much our philosophical and spiritual beliefs converged. Each question sparked a thought-provoking response except for one card chosen at random by Cyril.

“What was the most difficult thing you ever had to do?” he read aloud.

There was the briefest of pauses during which no one made a sound, and then Cyril silently placed the card on the discard pile.

There was no need to answer. By then we knew painfully well the story of each child’s passing.

Had Cyril answered aloud, he would have said that his most difficult act was taking the nightmarish journey to Tibet seven years earlier to claim the body of his son. Morgan and his fellow exchange students from Nanjing University in China had no intention of climbing the mountain on their field trip to Mt. Everest’s base camp. They only wanted to enjoy the sights and the adventure of being at 19,000 feet in the Himalayas.

Most of the students became disoriented by the lack of oxygen, some losing physical control of their bodies. Always concerned for others, Morgan tried to assist his friends, while suffering from his own debilitating headaches throughout the night. By morning, his breathing had become dangerously shallow, and his friends could not wake him up. The students placed a call back to Nanjing as they loaded him on the bus and raced for the lower elevations.

The group leader in Nanjing contacted Elizabeth at home in Arizona to alert her to Morgan’s condition. She immediately called one of the student’s cell phone number. By this time, Morgan had stopped breathing. Aware that the students were performing CPR on her son, Elizabeth asked them to put the phone next to Morgan’s ear.

She told him she was proud of him, that she loved him, and not to be afraid. At that moment, she physically felt Morgan hug her from the inside of her own body, and she knew that he had passed. To this day, she knows he heard her final words to him.

For Lynn and Jeff, the most difficult thing they ever had to do was endure thirty days of hellish uncertainty after their son went missing in Frankfurt, Germany. One minute he was on his way back to a hostel after attending a concert with a friend, and the next minute he was gone. Colleagues where Devon had been teaching English in Prague knew nothing of his whereabouts. As time passed, many feared he had fallen in the Main River and drowned. He was not the kind of person to simply disappear. He was a loving, responsible young man, deeply loved by all who knew him.

Jeff became the family spokesperson to news outlets in the U.S. and Europe. He and Lynn and their daughter traveled to Germany and personally joined in the search, setting up camp at a hotel near the last place Devon was seen. Their family lived with uncertainty and dread until the most unwanted of news arrived from the German police: They had found Devon's body one hundred kilometers down river from Frankfurt. By then, Lynn already knew her son had passed. A blackbird told her so.

Lynn's body shook for months.

For Irene and Tony, their darkest days began four years earlier when Irene's daughter Carly complained of severe leg pains. Tests determined the cause was blood clots from a large tumor at the base of her esophagus. A bright star on many levels at Boston College, Carly always strived to be the best, but the one distinction no one wanted for her was being the youngest person on record with esophageal cancer.

Tony remarked that he had never seen a mother and daughter as close as Irene and Carly. In sickness or in health, Irene doted on her daughter, but especially so during her illness. Whatever Carly desired, Irene got it for her, including a goldendoodle named Linus. A rambunctious puppy was the last thing Irene wanted to care for while



doing everything she could to save her daughter's life, but Carly had a way of getting what she wanted.

In her straightforward fashion she said, "I'm 24 years old and I have cancer. I can have anything I want and I want a dog."

Carly got the dog.

In spite of being physically tortured by her treatments, which included the complete removal of her stomach, Carly never complained. The family maintained hope that she would recover, until three weeks post-surgery when Carly suddenly grew faint and collapsed in her mother's arms. Irene ran to call 911 while Tony cradled Carly, but she slipped away before help could arrive.

The scene replayed in Irene's mind like an unending nightmare until healed by a gift of grace. (For a video of this healing, [click here.](#))

For Ty and me, our most difficult goodbye occurred ten years earlier with the phone call that no parent ever wants to receive. We were aboard our sailboat an ocean away in Croatia when we received a cryptic email to phone home. When Ty's daughter Susan's husband answered the phone and Ty asked how things were going, Warren replied, "They're not going well."

Susan was six months pregnant at the time, and we feared she might have lost the baby. The reality was far worse. Warren's pronouncement included the three most unimaginable and final words we could imagine: "Susan is gone."

A sergeant in the Marine Corps, Susan had been crossing the flight line of the helicopter maintenance squadron where she was stationed in North Carolina when she was struck by lightning. The storm was over ten miles away when the bolt came out of

the blue. The doctors worked on her for seven hours, but there was nothing they could do to save her or her baby, Liam Tyler.

Susan had wanted to volunteer to deploy to Iraq, but her husband talked her out of it. He said it was too dangerous.

Our respective memories passed through our minds in a flash with that one game card question, yet we paused only long enough for a brief moment of reflection. We had each learned that our thoughts determine our experience, and we consciously choose those thoughts.

Yes, we were each devastated initially, but thanks to undeniable signs, visits in dreams, magical synchronicities, irrefutable evidence from mediums, and the personal sense of our child's presence since their passing, we know they are still very much with us. Today, moment by moment we make a conscious choice to focus on this awareness. This knowing that death is not the end transforms grief into gratitude ... gratitude that our kids are simply in another dimension and we will see them again.

Only a few hours earlier the eternal nature of the soul was accentuated after Susan mentally whispered in my ear, "Let's have a party!" This was my sign that she and Morgan and Devon and Carly wanted me to do a group reading. They had no intention of letting us enjoy this vacation without them.

We humans gathered in the cockpit, with one couple on each side of the large square dining table. I explained that I expected each child to share messages along with verifiable facts about themselves that I couldn't possibly know so that their parents would know I was connecting with them directly.

I reported immediately that one of the two boys was showing me a small fedora-type hat that he used to wear. "That's Devon!" Lynn and Jeff reported in unison.

Indeed, Jeff later shared with us photos of Devon on his iPad, several of which included a distinctive gray fedora exactly as he'd shown me.

I then turned to Irene and reported, "Carly wants me to talk about a round spot on her upper arm that looks like a vaccination scar. She didn't like it at all and would have wanted to hide it."

Irene sat up straight and announced to the group, "It was a birth mark. Right here." She pointed to her upper arm. "Carly was incredibly self-conscious about it. She would cover it with makeup and she wanted plastic surgery to get rid of it."

With these two distinctive validations, the party got off to a great start. For the next hour I passed along evidence that our kids tossed out like popcorn, back and forth from one couple to the next. One of the boys showed me a ride that he had taken on a camel. Morgan talked about a scholarship he had earned and one that his parents had given in his memory. Carly wanted me to mention a tie-dyed cloth that she showed me tied at her waist like a skirt. Irene clearly recognized this sarong that adorns her ashes on an altar in the Vouvalides' home.

Even our Susan threw in a few evidential messages, and then the four children showed themselves to me sitting around us on the boat, like an Indian pow-wow. Devon



mentioned that he had experienced something similar when he was in the Boy Scouts, adding further evidence that Jeff was at one time a troop leader.

"They want us to know they planned this vacation for us from the other side." I said.

There was no way to prove such

a statement, but backed up by the plethora of evidence they shared with us, we knew that it was true.

As the reading came to an end, a small boat motored past our cockpit. The occupants gave us a friendly wave, and I smiled, thinking, “If they only knew what we’ve been doing.”

What we’d been doing, was proving yet again that death is not the end. This impromptu reading was not the first for any of us. Elizabeth, Cyril, Lynn, Jeff, Irene, Tony, Ty, and I had all been reunited via evidence-based mediums with loved ones who had transitioned. As a result, we didn’t tip-toe around the subject of death. Most importantly, we think about and talk to those in spirit frequently, knowing they are more with us now than before they passed.



No other vacation could have provided such intimate togetherness. With a spacious galley connecting our cabins, within minutes of arising each morning we were in each other’s presence, sharing hugs and smiles. Moored most evenings in sheltered coves off lightly populated islands, distractions were few. The lack of shopping and entertainment made no difference to any of us. The communal existence of preparing and sharing food, enjoying the beauty of nature together, savoring the sunsets and the stars brought us closer than any of us had imagined it would.

What stands out in my memory of our time on the water is the tangible love that seasoned each moment. Never have we enjoyed such openness, honesty, and caring. There was no ego on that boat—no grouching, no guardedness, no comparisons or catty criticizing. We women went without makeup, our hair was frizzy and wind blown, and yet we laughed. Without embarrassment, we bared our arms and legs, but mostly, we bared our souls.

Our nearly non-stop conversations ranged from the mundane to the deep, from the humorous to the poignant. We spoke of those who didn't believe in an afterlife who drowned their emotions in drink, preferring nightly numbness to experiencing their feelings. We discussed friends who didn't know what to say after our children passed, so they said nothing at all, disappearing from our lives as a result of their own awkwardness. We agreed that talk isn't necessary when a listening ear or a hug will do just as well. Just being there for one who is hurting is often the best medicine.

There's no right way to grieve, we decided, but you don't have to be in that dark place forever. Once we know that our loved ones who have passed are still with us, death is no longer the tragedy it initially seemed to be. When we discover that the demise of the physical body leads to another chapter in our eternal existence, we learn that death has much to teach us about life.

A vacation with eight bereaved parents might not be at the top of everyone's wish list. We were members of a club no one would willingly choose to join, but we enjoy a bond few achieve in this earthly life. We have found that once in this club, friendships are deeper, each



moment is more precious, and life holds more meaning. Because we've known great sorrow, we know greater joy.

Does someone have to die to get to this place? Sometimes, the answer is yes. That's the way it works in the school of life. Sometimes it takes a giant wake-up call to awaken to the One Great Truth: It's all about love.

-00-

*Suzanne Giesemann is an author, spiritual teacher, and evidence-based medium. To read a channeled account of what life is like in the afterlife, download a copy of Suzanne's e-book "Awakening" at no charge on her homepage at <http://www.SuzanneGiesemann.com>. Suzanne's book, Messages of Hope, is highly recommended for those who have suffered a loss and/or are interested in credible information about the afterlife.*