

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Possessions . . . Losing it All

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, May 1, 2015)

We are all so used to having our “stuff” around us. What would it be like to lose it all? Whether through a financial loss, divorce, theft, or fire, how do we handle loss? Many mental health resources typically list some basic stages, such as shock/denial/numbness, bargaining, depression, anger, to acceptance.

Dr. Marc Sanders, PhD, therapist on staff at Psychological Care and Healing Treatment Center, Beverly Hills (www.pchtreatment.com), offers us some clues from his article, *How to Handle Loss* (Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Quarterly, 2004).

“The most painful and difficult challenges in life involve loss. As we grow older, we experience many losses along the way: possessions, jobs, pets, health, relationships, moving, and death. Each time we experience a new loss, the experience of earlier losses can return, often making the present loss all the more distressing. Therefore, we must handle each loss with care and attention. Grief is the natural way we handle loss and it is unique to everyone. Although people express their grief in different ways, they often experience similar feelings and reactions.”

Sanders asks us to be aware of these reactions in order to understand what is going on after a loss is experienced. Those reactions reflect natural and normal grief

responses. According to Sanders, some of the more common reactions that take place include mental/emotional changes, such as fear of being alone or going crazy, sadness, guilt for things not done or said and for not having prevented the loss, anger at whomever caused or allowed the loss to happen and with people who don't understand, obsessive memories of what has been lost, and questioning spiritual and/or religious beliefs and meaning of life.

Physical changes involves sleep disturbances, irritability, difficulty concentrating, changes in appetite, and body aches and pains. Social changes can bring tension with co-workers, partners, and friends , difficulty feeling understood by others, concerns of burdening others, and feeling that others seem annoyed and impatient.

Sanders believes for many, the support of friends, family, and/or care-givers can be enough to move through the grieving process. "For others, the lack of support or the intensity of the physical and emotional reactions can indicate the need for professional help . . . Ultimately, handling loss is about understanding the grieving process and creating the time for the grieving process to happen."

Sanders gives us some tips for those who have suffered a loss.

- Remember there is no "right" way to grieve and no set time frame.
- Be open to letting others help by talking about what you are experiencing.
- Expect ups and downs as you go through the grieving process.
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to feel better.
- Don't expect the memories and feelings to go away too quickly.
- Don't make any big life decisions or changes.

- Seek professional help when the grief seems unbearable (e.g. support groups and/or individual therapy).

When it comes to helping a loved one, friend, or neighbor get through the loss, it can be difficult to know what to do or say. Sanders has some simple things you can do.

- Encourage them to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and memories.
- Encourage healthy behaviors, such as, eating regularly and exercise.
- Avoid reassuring comments, such as, “look at the bright side.”
- People who are grieving simply want to be heard and understood.
- Provide practical support, such as, planning meals, contacting friends and relatives, driving, paying bills, etc.
- Allow them to experience their feelings, no matter how painful the feelings might seem. Grieving is a painful process.
- Encourage professional help when there is excessive pain and more support is needed.

You can gain further information through a variety of mental health resources, including the American Psychological Association

(<http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/children-trauma-update.aspx>), and Texas relief organizations (http://texasimpact.org/Disaster_Response_Agencies). Also check out faith-based organizations and churches in your neighborhood.

Has someone you know or close to you recently experienced loss? How have you demonstrated care and concern for them? Sometimes just a listening ear and heart is enough. But if more is needed, think about how you could encourage them through their grief. Throughout this month’s lifeskill, *Possessions*, you will read stories about

courageous people journeying through their trial of loss. You will also read about the compassion of those who helped them not feel so alone.

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Losing it All . . . the Journey Ahead

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, May 8, 2015)

How do you even begin to tell the stories of families who have lost it all and are beginning their journey of recovery and healing? We often hear people say to those after the loss, "You will be fine. Only possessions were lost. You have your life and each other."

We understand this to be true for us all. For many the loss can be much greater, such as a fire that burnt down your house but also caused serious, even life threatening injury to your loved ones. Your loved one may even have succumbed and didn't survive the injuries. Even when it is considered "only possessions," any loss can forever impact one's life. Think about all the memories you have all around you . . . family photos, treasured mementos, financial records, including all the everyday items you depend on, even water to drink from your faucet and food ready to eat. These are just a few to begin with.

We just can't take lightly any loss for ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our community. According to Mortgage Bankers Association, between 2005 and 2008 over 1.2 million households lost their homes due to the recession. In 2011, the Statistic Brain Research Institute reported (7/8/2014) almost 4 million home foreclosures. Fortunately for some, in 2013 the loss was reduced to 1,369,405. But the numbers are still

overwhelming when you are one of the stats. Then add those losses from fire. The National Fire Protection Association's September 2014 report, *Fire loss in the United States During 2013*, estimated 1,240,000 fires. "These fires resulted in 3,240 civilian fire fatalities, 15,925 civilian fire injuries and an estimated \$11.5 billion in direct property loss. There was a civilian fire death every 2 hours and 42 minutes and a civilian fire injury every 33 minutes in 2013."

Throughout this month's lifeskill, *Possessions*, I felt it was time to honor families whose courage, strength, and faith have sustained them while weathering their often horrific trial of loss. You will also read about the compassion of those who helped those grieving to not feel so alone.

One story close to home, of which many of you may know, involved families in the Herff Ranch Subdivision, Boerne community. In February, 2015 the Weir Family received extensive damage to their home and belongings. Their neighbors, Scott Kenney, had an explosion in their house causing a fire to spread to adjacent homes.

The fire completely destroyed the Kenney's house with its contents. Then the fire spread to the Weir residence that also destroyed their house and most all their belongings. Scott Kenney sustained severe burns to at least 50 percent of his body and is currently in recovery. In addition, the Bennet family home adjacent to the Kenney home was also severely damaged. No one in the Weir and Bennet families were injured.

The Herff Ranch Community, neighbors, friends all immediately stepped up to offer support in whatever way was needed. Among the many who were on the scene at the time of the fire included Bergheim and Leon Valley Volunteer Fire departments,

Kendall County EMS, Boerne Public Works, city and county fire marshals, as well as Boerne Police and Kendall County Sheriff's deputies. The Hill Country chapter of the American Red Cross was also there to assist in whatever way possible.

Many started efforts via Indiegogo online fundraising accounts, which were established to support the Weir, Kenney and Bennet families through their losses. The funds donated to the Kenney Family totaled \$5,905.50, Weir Family \$5,347.50, and Bennet Family: \$483.60. In late March, these funds were disbursed through the accounts set up at Centennial Bank. Meadowlands opened a Sonora Bank account, and the funds have been disbursed in equal amounts to each of the three families.

As of the date of this article, Centennial Bank (contact person, Brandi Leigh, 830-816-5199) is still accepting donations for the Kenney and Weir families. These accounts have been open since the day after the explosion. Broadway Bank (contact person, Amanda Lara, 830-249-2547) donation account for the Kenney family, which was set up a day after the explosion as well, is also still accepting donations.

You can also check out the Facebook group "Herff Ranch - Community Support" to see what other needs the families may have. According to Michael Schultz, Boerne Mayor, "The final status of the explosion outcome is still under the State Fire Marshall and nothing has been released." The State Fire Marshall office confirmed that investigation of the Boerne Herff Ranch Fires is still ongoing, and scientific testing is still being conducted. However, there is supposed to be a joint meeting of all stakeholders in the near future that may hopefully provide results and determination of their investigation.

In the next article, the amazing and selfless efforts of the Red Cross will be covered that benefit families throughout Texas and the nation. Hopefully, there will also be an update on the Texas Department of Insurance/State Fire Marshal's completion of their investigation of the Herff Ranch home fires. And be sure to continue supporting these precious families by donating to those fundraising accounts still open. Our community has demonstrated in so many spectacular ways how much we care for each other in times of loss. Let us continue to shine!

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Losing it All . . . Help On The Way

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, May 15, 2015)

When losing it all means starting over, where do you even begin? We all are just living our lives day to day and doing the best we can. Then we are hit big time with a major financial loss. We may also lose our jobs, a loved one, or our home and possessions either via foreclosure or fire.

With any loss, the impact is monumental in our lives. As mentioned in the first article of this series, many mental health resources typically list basic stages of recovery, such as shock/denial/numbness, bargaining, depression, anger, to acceptance. The memories never go away of that time. Yet, there are so many healing memories of those who stepped up to help the minute the loss hit you.

As covered in the previous article, the families in the Herff Ranch Community who lost their homes and possessions by fire, family, neighbors, and friends all immediately stepped up to offer support in whatever way was needed. Fundraising accounts were immediately set up to help with their financial and material needs. In addition, among the many who were on the scene at the time of the fire included Bergheim and Leon Valley Volunteer Fire departments, Kendall County EMS, Boerne Public Works, city and county fire marshals, as well as Boerne Police and Kendall County Sheriff's deputies.

The Hill Country chapter of the American Red Cross was also there to assist in whatever way possible. In speaking with Jacques DuBose, Executive Director for the American Red Cross serving The Texas Hill Country, the Red Cross has helped so many families with immediate needs as well as long-term recovery.

During 2014 and most recently, the Red Cross has helped 49 families with three to four family members per household. The Red Cross has “provided financial assistance for immediate needs like shelter, food, clothing, emotional support, hygiene items and medications. We work with each impacted family to determine what was lost in the disaster and what they’ll need to get back on their feet.”

According to DuBose, the Red Cross “. . .is usually on the scene of a disaster within a couple of hours of getting the phone call. After everyday disasters like home fires, the Red Cross is focused on immediate needs to make sure the family has a safe place to stay and their basic needs are being met. Then, we work with each family and property owner to connect them with other resources if they’ll need help finding new housing in the long-term.”

DuBose explains that with larger disasters, such as hurricanes or tornadoes that garner significant media attention, there is often an outpouring of public support and donations. The Red Cross will then have a larger access of resources for helping the families in need. “After the immediate safety and personal needs of the affected families have been met, additional funds may go towards long-term recovery programs—which means months and years of continued support in the community.”

The Red Cross also offers other services and client support such as Home Fire Preparedness Campaign, Service to Armed Forces, Pillow Case Project for students,

and Disaster Preparedness for Seniors By Seniors, and more. To learn more about the Red Cross, visit their website, www.redcross.org/Kerrville; or contact Jacques Dubose at (830) 257-4677 x 1131.

In the next article, you will read what some families shared in their Red Cross Grant Application for this year that experienced loss (names removed for privacy). You will also learn how the Red Cross helped these families in their recovery.

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Losing it All . . . Red Cross to the Rescue

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, May 22, 2015)

In the previous articles, we learned how our communities rally to the aid of those in our neighborhoods who have suffered loss of their homes, possessions, even lives. You also read about how the Red Cross helps those with loss in so many areas of life. To give you a glimpse of the extent of this organization's assistance, here are stories offered by families who submitted a Red Cross Grant Application for help this year. Names have been withheld for privacy of these families.

Family 1: "We had a home fire that was a complete loss. We were asleep and woke up to find our home on fire in the kitchen. We were able to get out with the clothes on our back. It was a very frightening experience. The Red Cross was there to help us. It was devastating for our family as we lost our cat and our home in the fire. Our daughter, who is in second grade, was distraught and traumatized by the fire.

The American Red Cross Hill Country Chapter provided shelter, food, clothing, counseling, and more. They gave our daughter a Comfort Kit and a stuffed lamb which she grabbed, hugged, and named Lamby. She said he would replace tiger, a stuffed animal she lost in the fire. The volunteers and staff were so compassionate and helpful. I was humbled and filled with gratitude. They even helped with prescriptions that had to be replaced because of the fire."

Family 2: “We were called by friends and learned that our duplex was on fire. When we arrived the Fire Department was fighting the fire and the American Red Cross was onsite talking to our neighbors who lived in the other side of the duplex. After talking with the Police and fire department we met with a Red Cross Volunteer and the Director. They explained how the Red Cross could help us deal with Disaster and work on a Recovery Plan. We went through some paperwork and then the Red Cross was able to set us up with lodging and support to get food, clothing, and other necessities. We lost everything in the fire.

The Red Cross even helped me to get a new eye exam and new glasses. I had no idea the Red Cross assisted families that are impacted by fires like this. We have found another place to live and the Red Cross helped by talking to the landlord and assisting with the required deposit. They sent a check to the Landlord and we are very grateful for all the American Red Cross does to help.”

Family 3: “On January 7 of this year, my home burned down. When the fire started, my twin children, my dog and I were all inside. I was able to get the children and dog to safety, though shoeless and without jackets in 29 degree weather. I then attempted to go in to grab my purse. My purse contained our lives. My ID, all my credit and bank cards, our social security cards, all my cash and the keys to both my vehicles.

Reaching it was impossible. As we sat in my car in the neighbor's driveway watching our house burn (I drive a Ford with a keypad on the driver's door, and my spare keys were in the console), I had no idea what would be next. One of the first responders asked me if I 'd like the Red Cross called. My initial reaction was, ‘This isn't some national disaster. Don't waste their time.’ Then I looked at my children and what

was rapidly becoming less and less of my home, and I thought, ‘ Why not? What else have we got to lose?’

Within an hour of the initial phone call, I had two Red Cross volunteers talking to me, asking me what I needed, giving care packages to my children, estimating my immediate financial needs, and basically just letting me cry and giving me hope. By the time we finished, all of us had toothbrushes and all other immediate essentials, vouchers for clothing, a debit card with enough money to cover those immediate expenses (even my prescription medications) and a much more positive outlook on the situation. Without the Red Cross, I'm not sure what we would have done that night and in the few days after. I will be forever grateful.”

None of us really know the depth of loss and grief these families endured. Yet, with their stories we can begin to understand how vitally important help from the Red Cross gave them much needed hope, healing, and help in finding a new home.

Have these stories tugged at your heart? Even if you don't know the families in need or are unable to personally reach out to them, you have the Red Cross as your connection of compassion and care. So, donate today by simply going to the Hill Country Chapter website and click “Donate Now.” It's that simple to make a one-time gift or a recurring donation. You can even become a volunteer.

To learn more about the Red Cross (www.redcross.org/Kerrville), you can contact Jacques DuBose, Executive Director, American Red Cross Serving The Texas Hill Country at (830) 257-4677 x 1131, or email Jacques at jacques.dubose@redcross.org.

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Losing it All . . . Help Keeps Coming

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, May 29, 2015)

Throughout this month of May, we covered lifeskill, *Possessions*. Our focus was on the courage and hope of those who have experienced loss, and the compassion and care of those who have stepped up to help. I never could have imagined how much more could anyone take until we all witnessed this week the wreckage across not only our beautiful Texas hill country but also throughout Texas and other states.

The many news networks, weather channels, and Facebook posts are continuing to share devastating reports and images showing the deluge of storms, damage, and loss of life hitting our Texas communities over the Memorial Day weekend. Rainfall in parts of Texas reached record levels, resulting in rivers and creeks overflowing, reaching well above flood stage. Roads, bridges, and lake dams collapsed as well, with homes being destroyed, particularly in the Wimberley and San Marcos areas. Add to that tornadoes, heavy winds, and more.

However, we have to remember these severe storms in Texas were actually happening throughout the month of May, not just this last weekend. According to Reuters and Accuweather.com (May 25, 2015, *Texas governor says deadly flooding is worst ever seen*), "Parts of the area have received more than 1½ feet of rain since May 1, six times what the area typically receives in all of May."

Devastation has occurred in our Texas Hill Country communities, as well as Fort Worth/Dallas, Austin, and Houston. According to the National Weather Service the Trinity River in Fort Worth/Dallas area climbed above 40 feet last Sunday night — well above its 30-foot flood stage. Downtown Austin experienced massive street flooding as well. The Blanco river crested above 40 feet, more than triple its 13 ft. flood stage.

The damage and risk to life and property has continued this week and is moving through other states. According to the Texas Office of the Governor, on Tuesday, May 26, Governor Abbott issued an Emergency Disaster Proclamation (<http://gov.texas.gov/news/proclamation/20941>) for 46 counties.

“Severe weather, tornadoes and flooding continue in these and other counties in Texas. THEREFORE, in accordance with the authority vested in me by Section 418.014 of the Texas Government Code, I hereby amend my proclamations of May 11, May 15 and May 25, 2015, and declare a disaster in Archer, Bastrop, Blanco, Bosque, Bowie, Caldwell, Cass, Clay, Collin, Comal, Cooke, Denton, Dewitt, Eastland, Fannin, Gaines, Garza, Grayson, Grimes, Guadalupe, Harris, Harrison, Hays, Henderson, Hidalgo, Hill, Hood, Houston, Jasper, Johnson, Kendall, Montague, Navarro, Newton, Nueces, Parker, Red River, San Jacinto, Smith, Van Zandt, Walker, Wichita, Williamson, Wilson, Wise, and Zavala counties.” In addition, Abbott authorized further mobilization of state resources to assist impacted communities.

As reported on May 26 by CBS Houston, “In the U.S., a line of storms that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes dumped record rainfall on parts of the Plains and Midwest, spawning tornadoes and causing major flooding that in Texas destroyed or damaged more than 1,000 homes and forced at least 2,000 residents to

leave their homes. 'You cannot candy coat it. It's absolutely massive,' Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said after touring the destruction."

According to Breitbart Texas (May 25, 2015) over 300 Wimberley homes were swept away by the waters. "Governor Abbott called the continuing flood damage in central Texas 'absolutely devastating.' After flying over the Blanco River area on Monday, Abbott talked about the 'tsunami-type power' that destroyed hundreds of homes along the river. 'This is the biggest flood this area of Texas has ever seen,' said Abbott, according to a Reuters report."

Since current forecasts foresee continued storms, wind, and further damage, the Governor's Office along with the Texas State Operations Center (SOC) and Texas Emergency Management Council remain at an "elevated activation level and is continuing to monitor weather conditions and coordinate with the National Weather Service."

The Governor's office has also listed the following public resources involved in the state's continued response to the massive damage and risk to life

<http://gov.texas.gov/news/press-release/20935>):

- **Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS):** Assisting with reconnaissance, search and rescue efforts, and providing personnel and resources as needed.
- **Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD):** Conducting search and rescue missions during flash flooding/water incidents in affected areas.
- **Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS):** DSHS have mobilized resources, equipment and personnel to provide medical assistance as needed.

- **Texas Military Forces (TMF):** TMF has deployed aircraft and high-profile vehicles, and continues providing assistance with search and rescue missions as needed.
- **Texas Task Force 1 (TTF1):** Air and boat rescue squads have been deployed for search and rescue missions as needed.
- **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ):** Continues to monitor dams and river levels in the affected areas.
- **Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT):** Crews have deployed resources to address flooding conditions and debris cleanup impacting roadways.
- **Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC):** Personnel continue to work with utility companies to resolve power/utility issues.
- **Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA):** Assisting communities to apply for funds administered by TDA that will help with storm cleanup and rebuilding.
- **Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD):** Organizations continue to provide shelter and other mass care needs as requested.

In the private sector, HEB stepped up to help on May 25 and 26 in San Marcos and Wimberley communities. HEB provided Disaster Relief Cleanup Kits to residents returning to their homes. Their Mobile Kitchen was also in San Marcos during the week serving hot meals and bottled water to victims of the floods, first responders, and volunteers. HEB also provided 4,000 bottles of water to Jacob's Well Elementary since the school's water system is currently not drinkable. They also are assisting the impacted communities of Lockhart, Luling, and Pflugerville through its local stores. Visit HEB online at <http://bit.ly/1IVzS1H> for relief distribution locations and times. The Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Comfort (830-995-3708) is also providing immediate aid to

families affected by the storms. Be sure to check your local businesses, churches, and service organizations you support to join in on the efforts of so many in need.

For other resources closer to home in Kendall County the EMS is center stage for providing pre-hospital patient care. Their primary responsibility “. . . is to insure the survival, comfort, safety and confidence of the patients while providing care.” The EMS staff is certified in Basic Trauma Life Support, Pediatric Life Support, and Advanced Cardiac Life Support. Every one of their much needed skills have been put to use in times of emergencies and disaster, such as what we have all seen in our communities as of late. To learn more about what the EMS is doing, contact Kendall County EMS Department, Jeff Fincke, EMS Administrator, 830-249-9343 (http://www.co.kendall.tx.us/default.aspx?Kendall_County/EMS)).

Another helping hand is the Ranch Hand Truckfitters (800.366.9712, www.truckfitters.com). Truckfitters are providing a donation drop for people who want to help the Wimberley community but are unable to bring items to the affected area. Their stores to drop your items off (food, clothes, monetary donations) are in San Antonio (2625 Broadway) and Boerne (32954 IH 10 West). As of today, the stores are taking a truck to Wimberley to drop off all donations at a local donation station. They will continue to help as long as it is needed.

Knowing that the Red Cross is always on the front lines helping those in emergencies and loss, they teamed up with HEB to deliver HEB hot prepared meals and drinks in their Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) to impacted residents of San Marcos and neighboring communities as communicated by County Emergency Command. According to KSAT News, Whataburger is donating \$100,000 to the Red

Cross to support flood relief efforts. Also free meals will be given to first responders in uniform in New Braunfels, San Marcos and Kyle between May 26 to June 9.

The Red Cross biggest need right now is financial donations and volunteers. According to Jacques DuBose, Executive Director, American Red Cross Texas Hill Country chapter, Toyota of Boerne (June 2) and Nissan of San Marcos (June 3) have partnered with the Red Cross for a one-day fundraising event, with volunteer opportunities on site. All your donations (100%) will stay In Texas and support those affected by the spring storms, flooding, & tornadoes. For more details and to volunteer, contact Jacques at (830) 257-4677 x 1131. (www.redcross.org/Kerrville).

As we continue watching what is unfolding with everyone's rescue and recovery efforts, each of us can find some way to help these courageous organizations, businesses, and public services. Your prayers, helping hands and heart are essential. Get connected in whatever way you can today.

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