

# Deepening Bonds & Linking Objects

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The relationship that I continue to share with my daughter Jeannine following her death in 2003 has on most days, allowed me to embrace a peaceful perspective.

As part of our ongoing relationship, she has regularly communicated signs of her presence. In the beginning, I longed for signs because the pain of her physical absence was unbearable. Today I still welcome signs from my daughter but no longer rely on them. Jeannine makes her presence known when I need it most or simply when she desires contact with me. I also know that I can communicate with her anytime and engage in activities that allow me to deepen the continuing bond that we share.

I can also recall positive memories of the father-daughter relationship that I shared with Jeannine; by simply looking at a physical object associated with those memories. What follows is my experience with one such object and what it taught me about my relationship with my daughter.

Dennis Klass, Ph.D and author of *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents*, defines linking objects as “physical objects that seem to contain the child’s presence.”



When Jeannine was approximately fifteen, she insisted that we go to our local auto store and buy an air freshener for the vehicle that I had owned at the time. Jeannine even offered to pay for it. When I asked her why, she simply replied: “Your jeep stinks.” She picked out an air freshener that she liked and that I ended up buying with my own money.

I am sure Jeannine offered to pay for it initially because she knew that without some incentive, I wouldn't have gotten one. Shortly after Jeannine's death I found the air freshener in my garage. I thought it disappeared after I traded in my vehicle. The universe wanted me to find this item because it was another reminder of the wonderful relationship we shared during the 18 years she was alive.

Today I can still hold the air freshener or simply visualize it and vividly recall the events of that day. I can tell you, for example, where we were standing in the store, the physical features of the clerk that waited on us, and that it was summer. Jeannine always comes alive through the story associated with that air freshener.

### ***Empowering Ourselves***

Continuing bonds are a common, healthy, and enduring element in the resolution of grief. – Dennis Klass et al. 1996 The death of our children is one of the most disempowering events we will ever experience. In the aftermath, we can choose to empower ourselves by consciously engaging in activities that deepen the bond with our children.

### ***Here are some suggestions:***

- Find an item that reminds you of your child. If it is a blanket, wrap yourself in it, or cologne or perfume, spray yourself with it. Whatever item you choose, find a quiet space and time and invite your child to spend some time with you. Reflect on the great times that you shared and wish to share in your new relationship.
- Light a candle or burn some incense. Look at a photo album, or photos that you have on your computer. They can be pictures of friends, family, or pets. Share your specific memories of those photos with your children quietly or out loud, whatever works for you.

- Take a walk in nature or a leisurely drive. Bring your child's picture or your unique linking object with you. Allow the positive memories to flow.
- Choose an activity that reflects the relationship that you shared with your child when he/she was alive.
- Be aware of what you experienced. Did you have a sense of peace, a chill or chills or discover other evidence of your child's presence?

### ***Coming Under Scrutiny***

You will find that certain individuals will question or scrutinize how you choose to transform your grief. They may believe that ongoing life long relationships with our deceased children are somehow unhealthy or even pathological.

They may simply not understand . Don't let anyone script your path, don't let anyone take your power away from you. Jeannine's favorite Disney character was Tigger because he bounced and was the only one. Our children were all Tiggers , bouncing to their own rhythm and sharing their own unique gifts with those who were fortunate enough to cross their paths.

As you embrace the notion of continuing bonds in transforming your grief , be Tigger and bounce down your path any way that you see fit. As long as you aren't hurting yourself or others in the process, it is all good. It is crucial that individuals experiencing catastrophic loss support and witness each other's process of transformation so that we can learn from each other, in the aftermath of catastrophic loss.

*Those who were seen dancing were thought to be  
insane by those who could not hear the music-  
-Frederick Nietzsche*

David J. Roberts, LMSW, became a parent who experienced the death of a child, when his daughter Jeannine died of cancer on 3/1/03 at the age of 18. He is a retired addiction professional and an adjunct professor in the psychology and psychology child-life departments at Utica University in Utica, New York. Dave is a featured speaker, workshop facilitator and coach for Aspire Place, LLC. Dave has also been a past national workshop facilitator for The Compassionate Friends.