

A photograph of a butterfly with orange and black wings resting on a piece of paper. The paper has handwritten text in black ink. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage.

A
TEAR-*Stained letter*
Vern Beachy

*Surviving Multiple
Sclerosis and my
wife's suicide*

Chapters Outline for A Tear-Stained Letter

Surviving multiple sclerosis and my wife's
suicide.

Chapter 1) Mr. Bleachy?

Those two words began a rollercoaster ride that has many lows but few, if any, highs.

Two Memphis homicide detectives violated the first rule of Public Relations, or relating one-on-one to a person: the sound of a person's name is the sweetest thing anyone can hear. When the detectives have the utterly pathetic job of a death notification to a family member and they crucify the family member's name...there is nothing that can be done to ease any pain.

I will talk about that god-awful day and night that changed my life. The notification visit was only the first stop in my horrendous experience with the 'crack' detectives in the MPD.

Chapter 2) 201 Poplar

The official notification of Melinda's death by two Memphis police detectives was horrendous, but it got worse.

Much worse.

Chapter 3) Three Days Late and a Million Dollars Short

It took the owner of the Condo where Melinda died three days to pick up the phone and talk to me. He didn't even show up at our house. The phone conversations consisted of back and forth hang-ups and shouting on his part and brought forth one of the worst things anyone has ever said to me.

Chapter 4) Flying Solo

Taking an airline flight from Memphis to my wife's hometown for her funeral was an exercise in comatose actions. I was in a fog. I didn't see much of the airport, the plane or anyone who may or may not have occupied the seat next to me or the Stewardesses that may have trotted up and down the aisle making sure passengers got what they needed or wanted.

No stewardess could've given me anything that would have filled the empty space that now occupied my life.

I wrote a letter to Melinda during the hour-plus flight but the ink ran on most of it because I couldn't shutoff the 'waterworks.' Only three words came easily: "I Love You." But I also managed to scribble out the word 'why?' over and over again.

Chapter 5) The Squeaky Wheel

The overriding lesson I learned in my 17 years as a broadcast journalist was: The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

After my horrendous experience dealing with the Memphis Police Department I was ready to squeak...and I got the grease.

Chapter 6) Dear Melinda

This chapter of my book will be the start of the letter to my wife. I will talk about how I feel, what I went through in the days and months following her death (and what I continue to deal with on a daily basis).

The sequence of events is a jumbled mess of sympathy cards, condolences and questions. Many questions. But somewhere in my body I found the strength to carry on for one day and then another and then yet another until I strung a few of them together and it turned into a week.

Chapter 7) Moving on Up (to Iowa)

Every grief counselor I have talked to and every brochure I have read tells you not

to make any drastic changes in your life for at least a year following a traumatic event. I didn't adhere to that advice because I moved from Tennessee to Iowa two months after Melinda's death. I had to.

I'll use this chapter to explain why and how.

Chapter 8) Lost

I will talk about how faith in God saved my life and what I did to help cope with the enormous pain of losing my wife.

Chapter 9) A Grief Experience: Exit Stage Left

I learned early on in the process of grief that I couldn't do this alone. I surrendered to the black cloud. I wanted help. I needed help. "This," whatever "this" is, was new to me and I couldn't handle it alone.

My future looks black, a lot darker than it did when a family doctor in Albuquerque told me he thought I may have multiple sclerosis.

Losing a spouse to suicide makes multiple sclerosis seem like a walk in the park on a sunny day.

Chapter 10) My Own Prison

One night while sitting at Melinda's home in Memphis (before we got married) she asked me to tell her what it's like to have MS, and put it in story form.

I walked back to her office, sat at her computer and started typing. 20 minutes later I printed out a story I called My Own Prison. The title was a good indication of how I felt; my body was diseased and I couldn't do anything about how I felt...no one could. I wanted to "get away" from the buzzing and burning, but I was in prison with no release date in sight. MS is a life sentence and many times you want to hurry up and finish it.

I printed out the pages, gathered them up, walked back into the living room and gave them to her.

She started reading the story and began to cry.

Did you learn anything?

I learned everything.

Chapter 11) Leave 'em at the Door

Tysabri. Not a cure for MS, but really close. I now leave my crutches and wheelchair at the door.

Chapter 12) Melinda “Got” MS

I love the saying: Nobody gets MS until they get MS. That is true for many people, but Melinda “got” MS. She knew what I needed even before I knew I needed it. That is based, solely, on love for another person. She told her father her lot in life was being with me and taking care of me.

Chapter 13) On a Monday in May

The kids ask. Melinda took me to the Memphis Zoo one summer day and it was the first time she ever pushed me in a wheelchair. The kids asked me about my condition, while their parents just stared, not saying a word.

Chapter 14) Prosperity of Absence

One time when Melinda was in a rather depressed mood, she told me that I would be better off without her. That comment brought vehement denials from me and another “I love you” reassurance.

But, I can now walk because of a new MS treatment and it angers me. I can now make coffee and drink it without spilling a drop and it angers me. I now can drive without any problems and it angers me. It angers me that Melinda isn't here to dance with me and enjoy my newfound freedom. It also angers me when people tell me how well I am doing and some could say I am doing much better without Melinda and THAT REALLY ANGERS ME.

Chapter 15) The Butterfly effect

Give me a sign, any sign.

Visiting Melinda's grave more than a year after she passed I was asking her to send me a sign that she is alright. I wondered what she was doing, how she was doing, anything to show me she is at peace. Just then a butterfly landed on her grave and spread its wings and lingered a few minutes before flying away.

Chapter 16) Just Press Puree

When something like the suicide of a spouse happens, promptly stuff you entire life in a blender and hit puree.

Chapter 17) Learning to Fly and Flushing Gumby

A silly little childhood experiment came back to help me in adult life...it was about

persistence.

Lessons learned from my parents and how it helped me deal with life. In teaching me how to fly, my Dad gave me some advice that proved valuable in nearly every situation: ease into it and don't make any drastic moves. Life is the same way: don't make any drastic moves and go easy.

Chapter 18) My Best Friend

Melinda had said "I didn't marry a man with MS: I married my best friend who just happens to have MS."

Chapter 19) What if?

Many people who grieve play the "what if" game. I will talk about my feelings of guilt and the "what if" scenarios.

Chapter 20) A Report of Death.

What to do when the autopsy report comes in the mail? Should I read it? Does it really matter?

Chapter 21) Scanning my mind

While I was getting my second MRI since Melinda passed away, I was thinking about my diseased body, when it would end. My chest became heavy, my breathing labored and I started crying.

Bang. Tick, tick, tick. The machine was loud.

The tears streamed down my cheeks and into my ears.

Bang. Tick, tick, tick.

Chapter 22) Laughing Again

In one of our many conversations we had since Melinda passed away, I told my brother that I didn't think I would ever laugh again. Life was not pleasant anymore and I saw no reason to, nor could I envision anything that would prompt me to laugh out loud. My heart was heavier than my entire body.

But I did laugh again and I remember the exact moment and what prompted my hilarity.