

Avatar



TeenHelp.org's eZine
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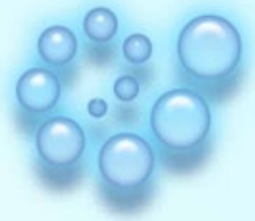


Table of Contents



- 3 **December in Review**, by Jessie
- 4 **The Many Faces of Grief**, by Gidig and Jessie
- 6 **Online Safety and You: Protecting Yourself**,
by Jer
- 8 **Self expression**
- 9 **The wind down**

Letter from the Editors

Hello everyone and welcome to the second of four "Winter Edition" installments of Avatar, TeenHelp's monthly eZine!

In this edition you will find "December in Review," a brief timeline of major news events from December, as well as two articles, one on grief and a second on online safety. As always we hope you will check out the self expression section! Horoscopes will return in the March 2009 issue (Volume 2, Issue 9) which will be released on time.

Take care,
The Avatar Editors

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Your valuable contributions are what make Avatar what it is. Please submit us your content, whether it be an article, poem, joke, game, photo, drawing or anything else you have to share!

Email us at
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The TeenHelp Times

December 2008



By Jes (Jessie)

December 1

- In Canada a coalition Government, led by Stéphane Dion, is formed by the Liberal Party, New Democratic Party, and Bloc Québécois with the intention of toppling the Conservative Government.

December 2

- The 2008 cholera outbreak in Zimbabwean has claimed 425 lives and affected 10,000 people since August 2008.
- The Reserve Bank of Australia cuts interest rates by 100 basis points to 4.25%.

December 4

- PM Vladimir Putin says Russia may cut gas supplies to Ukraine if payment for gas already consumed is not made.
- President of Uruguay Tabaré Vázquez following the vetoing of an abortion decriminalisation bill.

December 5

- The US Department of Labor reports that nonfarm payrolls contracted by 533,000 in November, the worst monthly job loss since 1974.

December 6

- After the discovery of contaminated fodder The Republic of Ireland recalls all Irish pork products.

December 7

- Rioters storm through central Athens after a Greek law enforcement officer kills, by gunshot, a teenager throwing stones at the police.

December 8

- Standard & Poor's becomes the first credit rating agency to downgrade Russia since 1999.
- Stéphane Dion announces his plans to resign as leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.
- Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four co-defendants announce their intentions to plead guilty to charges relating to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

December 9

- Governor Rod Blagojevich (D-IL.) is arrested by FBI agents among allegations of corruption and selling of US President-elect Obama's Senate seat.
- Almost 1,400 workers are laid off in the Republic of Ireland as a result of the Irish pork crisis.

December 10

- The White House and US Congress agree on a proposal for a US\$15 billion bailout package for three major US automakers.

December 12

- Proposed bailout of US automakers fails.

December 14

- Muntadhar al Zaidi, Al-Baghdadia TV journalist, throws his shoes at US President George W. Bush during his farewell speech in Iraq.

December 16

- The IL House of Representatives votes to begin an impeachment inquiry against Rod Blagojevich.
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations signs a charter to make itself a legal entity.

December 17

- In Peru, ruins of an ancient city are discovered.
- The UN passes a resolution allowing foreign countries to conduct military raids on land or by sea in pursuit of Somali pirates.

December 18

- 75,000 people in Papua New Guinea are displaced by flooding caused by tidal swells.

December 19

- Internet and telephone transmissions between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia are disrupted.

December 21

- Canada announces a US\$3.3 billion bailout for its automotive industry.

December 22

- Automobile dealers in Mexico demand a US\$3 billion bailout package.

December 23

- The world's fifteen leading gas-producing countries sign the charter of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, making it a formal organization.

December 25

- Israel moves closer to an invasion of the Gaza Strip after a Palestinian militant attack.

December 30

- Eight of eleven snowmobilers buried by avalanches in British Columbia, Canada, are found dead.



The Many Faces of Grief

By Maria (Gidig) and Jes (Jessie)

Losing someone is never easy. Whether they are a loved one, a friend, or an acquaintance, we often find ourselves at a loss when faced with death. Even the death of a stranger can make us feel sad, small and alone.

Many times, we are left wondering “why”. When we lose someone, we may lose a piece of ourselves, as well. When confronted with death we are also confronted with the reality that we, ourselves, will not live forever. We are forced to admit that no one is invincible. For maybe the first time in our lives we understand just how fragile human life is, and it can be shocking, frightening, and leave us feeling alone and helpless. However, it is okay to feel these things. It may even be “normal” and expected. Something we often forget, when coping with loss, is that we do not have to be strong. We are allowed to cry and to talk about it and even feel angry.

Shock

At any point while coping with death, you may experience shock or denial. It seems impossible to believe that even though you were laughing and talking with someone, not long ago, you will never see them again. It may be helpful to remember that while you can never make new memories with them, the ones you have of them are yours to keep, forever. Nothing can take these memories from you, not even death.

Pain and guilt

You may feel depressed, sad or guilty when someone dies. Remember that you are allowed to feel this way, but you also do not have to. If you experience feelings like these, make sure to do something for yourself to ensure you don't become too overwhelmed with depression. If you feel any of these emotions are taking your life over, consider talking to a grief counselor or other health professional.

Anger

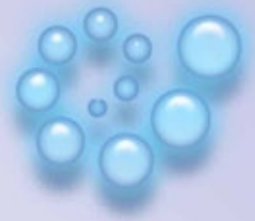
It's not fair; it might feel like nothing will ever be okay again. You have been cheated out of a lifetime of memories with someone wonderful. How could someone be taken from you like that? How could they leave you? After losing someone you might feel angry—over lost chances, having to face the rest of your life without them, or even with them. Know that while it is okay to experience anger, your loved one would not want you to feel this way. Try to use your anger productively and positively instead of allowing it to take over your life.

Reflection and loneliness

It's not unexpected that after losing someone you will begin to reflect on their life and how they have impacted your own life. You may begin to feel lost and alone in your grief without them. During these times it is important to know and remember that you are never alone. Don't be afraid to reach out to others and speak about how you feel.

Progress and rebuilding normalcy

It may be long before you completely accept the loss of someone that you begin to rebuild your life. Things will begin to return to normal and you will return to a routine, although it may not be your old one. Sometimes it may be easier to build a whole new routine and work hard on sticking to that to prevent yourself from getting overwhelmed by the emotions that come with such a life changing event.



The Many Faces of Grief (continued...)

By Maria (Gidig) and Jes (Jessie)

Making peace

Making peace with death is perhaps one of the most difficult, life-long battles you will face. Just when you think you have accepted death, something happens and you realize that loss still hurts. No matter how much time you give loss, it is important to remember that while death will always be with you, it may become easier, with time.

Setbacks

When coping with death, you may experience setbacks in making peace. Doing things like visiting gravesites, talking to a lost loved one's family members, or seeing a photograph may cause you to re-visit one or more stage of grief. When this happens, it is important to talk to a loved one or therapist. It is okay to experience setbacks, but they do not have to be the start of a long depression.

Losing a child or teenager

When we lose someone who has lived a long life, it is almost as if it is expected. We understand that age interferes with life, and that at the end of a long life, people pass. Young people, though, aren't supposed to pass away. It does not fit in with our ideal model of life, to see a child, teenager, or even some adults die. Children should bury their parents, so when the elderly out-live the young, it can have a devastating effect on many lives. While losing an older person is never easy, you may feel at more of a loss when you lose a young person. Know that while it is hard, you will get through this.

Suicide

Suicide can be one of the most sudden and heartbreaking ways to lose a person. It can be difficult to comprehend why someone would want to leave you behind and you may never understand what hurt them so terribly that they would take their own life. When facing a suicide, it is important to try and believe that your loved one is in a better place. Even if you do not believe in Heaven, simply reminding yourself that they will never hurt, again may help to ease even a little of the pain.

Ways to remember

There are many things you can do, in honor of a loved one's memory. Journaling, online memorials and art-work are just a few examples. Trying different things will help you to find the best way of remembering, for you.



Online Safety and You: Protecting Yourself

By Jer (Jer)

Did your mother tell you not to talk to strangers? Probably. This bit of advice has been repeated time and time again by parents who are afraid that someone might hurt their children. Let's face it, not everyone in the world is trustworthy.

With the advent of the Internet, especially social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, predators have found a new way to find and track down potential targets. A dedicated person can run a search for anything that you've entered on any websites, assemble a profile on you, and find you. Fortunately, there are resources you can use to protect yourself. Following a few basic guidelines will help ensure that you never become the target of an online predator.

One: Personal Information

The best way to avoid becoming a target is to release as little personal information about yourself as possible. Personal information includes, but is not limited to, last name, address, telephone number, cell number, Social Security number, credit card number, name of your school, your picture, etc. The only websites that should ask for your SSN are government websites, and only enter your credit card/bank account numbers in sites where you're going to buy something; however, even in this regard, be very careful with where you enter them. See *Online Safety and You: Protecting your Computer* for more details on this.

Most social networking sites, forum boards, and the like will not require entry of personal information in order to register or login. Most sites will simply ask for a valid email address for account activation. Some sites (such as TeenHelp and MySpace) give you the option of filling out a brief profile about yourself, including things like interests, hobbies, music tastes, etc. However, this is not required, and if you are uncomfortable with providing any information about yourself, you need not do so.

Going by an online pseudonym (such as a false name, or a screen name) is a great way to avoid predators, as the pseudonym will be something your friends and associates can identify as being yours, but they will have no idea whom you really are. If you choose to go by a pseudonym, consider that the same pseudonym entered across several different websites could potentially give online predators a path to follow, on which they can collect bits and

pieces of information about you from different websites. It is wise to adopt a different screen name for each site you visit.

Two: Privacy

On many social networking sites, it can be very easy to find someone who fits certain requirements. For example, a predator could go on MySpace and run a search for all users who are 18 years old and female from a certain area. If a predator happened to run a similar search, he or she could effortlessly find your profile and begin collecting information. To combat this, set your profile to private. Anybody who tries to access your profile will see that the profile is restricted and will then have to contact you to obtain permission to view it. See the section below on dealing with strangers who try to talk to you.

A common option is to set profiles to 'friends-only.' This means that only you and your contacts can view your profile.

Most instant messaging clients have a privacy option generally called an allow list. If you choose to enable your allow list, then anyone who is not on your contact list cannot see your status or send you instant messages. If someone adds you then you can either block them or allow them. This is a great option for privacy as it allows you to control who sees your online status and who can send you messages.

If someone attempts to contact you and you do not recognize them, be very wary. If they ask for any personal information, they could be a predator, and you should stop talking to them and block them from being able to contact you. Predators may even impersonate a friend from school in order to gain your trust; you can combat this by asking them a question that only that friend would know the answer to.

However, this is not to say that you must reject every new person who tries to befriend you. Some people are genuinely good people who just want to make a friend, or talk about something, or something equally innocent. Whether or not you give someone a chance is up to your personal judgment, but always take care.



Online Safety and You: Protecting Yourself (continued...)

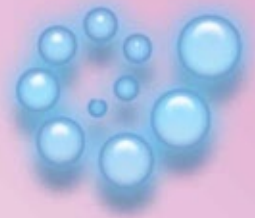
By Jer (Jer)

Three: Meeting Offline

If you make a friend who lives in your area and decide to meet them offline, be extremely careful. For predators this is the point at which you are put into direct contact with them, allowing them to study you further or perhaps just make their move at that point. Here are a few tips on meeting an online contact:

- Never go alone. Bring a friend, a parent, or a family member with you.
- Only agree to meet in a well-populated area during the daytime. For example, in the lunchroom at school (if you're both students) or at a coffee shop somewhere. Ensure that you are familiar with your meeting area of choice.
- If you have a cell/mobile phone, make sure you bring it with you in case trouble arises and you need to call someone.
- Don't go anywhere or do anything you aren't 100% comfortable with.
- Do tell someone you trust where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Always keep an eye on your food and drink--the possibility of it getting spiked is low but not zero.

If you follow these tips, then you can still fully enjoy the Internet and meeting new friends or catching up with old friends safely. It is still relatively unlikely that anyone will want to stalk you, but it is certainly better to be safe than sorry.



Self expression

Ridge Road By Strider

*You remember the house on Ridge Road
told you and the Devil to both just leave me alone.
If this is salvation, I can show you the trembling.
You'll just have to trust me.
Fin by Anberlin*

The city towers above us, hiding the stars
we once wished upon.
I sense them there and wonder
if it was them or us who disappeared,
but you would rather face the dark,
carrying your load
of lost hopes, lies, and old smiles alone,
without a star to wish upon.
But still you see the stars and how they once glowed.
You remember the house on Ridge Road.

I was young then; you were older
and whenever you beckoned I followed
without a thought as to where I was going
or what I would become in the end.
No second glances, only last chances to prove myself to
you.
Look at how much I have grown
since then. The jars of fireflies have been smashed,
the ripped jeans roughly patched, and the blood prom-
ises
bled through. With the future left an unknown
I told you and the Devil to both just leave me alone.

Ridge Road (continued) By Strider

The house was torn down, an archaeology site
of resurfaced memories never to be catalogued.
Leaving them would help, you told me, and I listened,
but doubted. Again, I followed you.
In the place of no stars and no wishes, I still hope
that this will change, and that I will stop lying
to myself. It was supposed to be better here
and it is, you say. I wonder who the bigger liar is.
You promised more than a happy ending.
If this is salvation, I can show you the trembling.

I kept the photograph taken by the stream,
the one of you and me catching minnows.
You pushed me in that day.
The picture should have caught your smile.
I ripped it to pieces when you weren't watching,
hoping it would free
the knot in my chest. No such luck.
You made me promise not to hold any grudges
but now there are too many.
And you'll just have to trust me.



As always, to contribute to the Self expression section of Avatar, or Avatar in general, email us at avatar@teenhelp.org

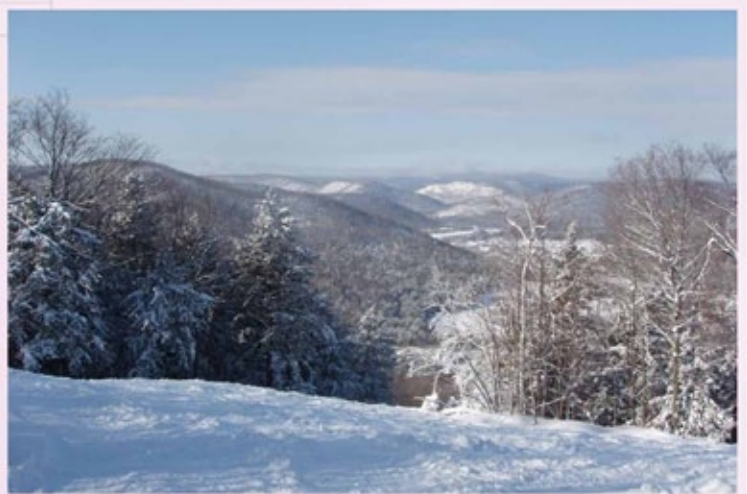
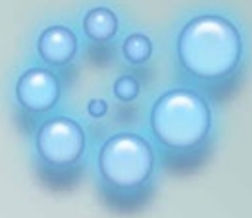


Photo by Matt



The wind down...

Acknowledgements

Image sources

Colored Pencils: www.everystockphoto.com

Press hat: www.usagold.com

Thanks for reading!

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of Avatar! Any comments, questions, suggestions or criticisms can be directed towards the editorial team. You can also send us any submissions you have for Avatar, which are a really important part of keeping Avatar alive. We appreciate any submissions that are made to us. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you enjoy the next edition of Avatar!

The Avatar Editors.

Please visit us at the Avatar page, www.teenhelp.org/avatar, or email us at avatar@teenhelp.org.