

How Butterflies Changed My Life



By Sarah Rosen

My mum Helene and I were as close as any mother and daughter could be. She really was the best mum I could have ever wished for.

And when Michael and I got married in 2004, I could not wait to make her a grandma and for her to see me become a mum myself, as well as for us both to enjoy this incredibly special part of our lives together.

Unfortunately, this was not my reality. Just 8 months later, in April 2005, my beautiful mum was diagnosed with lung cancer, and she died exactly a year later, on erev Pesach 2006.

At that time, I was 8 months pregnant with my first baby Ethan. Watching her become so ill and visiting her in the hospital and hospice during my pregnancy was the hardest thing I have ever done.

We were both too scared and upset by what we knew the future was soon to bring.

Mum knew that I would find it incredibly difficult to both cope with her death and become a mum without her. So she made me promise that I would seek support when the time came. However, there was no group, that I could access, that was able to help me.

I just needed to talk to people who understood what it was like to be a mum without a mum.

I wanted to be with people who knew why I found it so upsetting to see other new mums pushing their buggies around Brent Cross with their own mums; who understood why I could not, and still cannot, bring myself to make chicken soup on a Friday night – because mum was always going to show me how to make it; and why I found it so hard that she was not here with me to share Ethan's first smile, and help me when he cried.

In 2007, when Ethan was a few months old, I decided that if no suitable support group existed then I needed to honour my promise to my mum and set one up myself and help others who found themselves in the same situation.

So, with the help of a number of charities including the Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service, we created a new group for the parents of young children who have themselves lost one or both parents.

We called it Butterflies, as when I was a child, I enjoyed going to butterfly farms with my mum. The aim was to share our experiences and give each other the emotional and practical support that we wish could have been provided by our mums.

Some participants had lost their mum quite recently. Others had lost their mums many years earlier, and although they had already grieved once, their emotions flooded back once they had become mums themselves.

Over the years we have run many groups for new mums and Butterflies has continued to evolve – especially of course during the pandemic when people met online. The groups are facilitated by JBCS counsellors, to whom we all owe a huge debt of gratitude.

The feedback has been wonderful. One person said, *"Joining Butterflies was a real turning point for me. I knew I was with people who understood what I was going through, and we supported each other, and I began to learn how to manage my grief and enjoy being a parent."*

And so, to the future. Unfortunately, there will always be a need for Butterflies, and we are hoping to run two groups each year. I want to ensure that anyone who finds themselves in this terrible position knows there is support out there for them.

If you know of anyone who would benefit from joining a future Butterflies group, please contact JBCS at 020 8951 3881 or enquiries@jbc.org.uk to find out more.

A poster for the Butterflies Bereavement Support Group. The left side features several colorful watercolor-style butterflies in shades of blue, green, orange, and pink. The right side contains text. At the top right is the logo 'Butterflies' in a large, elegant script, with 'Bereavement Support Group' in a smaller sans-serif font below it. In the center, a red heading asks 'Are you a MUM OR DAD (of young children) WHO HAS LOST A PARENT?'. Below this, a black paragraph states: 'Butterflies aims to offer support within a caring, confidential and relaxed group which is facilitated by professionally trained bereavement counsellors.' Further down, it says 'Please contact JBCS' followed by the phone number '020 8951 3881', the email 'enquiries@jbc.org.uk', and the website 'www.jbc.org.uk'. At the bottom right is the JBCS logo, which includes a stylized flame icon and the text 'JBCS Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service' and 'JBCS Charity Reg No. 1047473'.

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