

# CRUMBLLED OAK LEAF



Words of Grief  
and Hope

Patricia Gavros

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## Dedication



Though we grieve for those we've lost, the journey through grief can make us stronger, with our memories as treasures that no one can take from us. They are there, within our hearts, to bring us comfort in remembering. In loving memory of my brother, Jerry, for whom these words were written.

Junior, you're always in my heart.

Love,

*Pat*



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## Preface



March 6, 2002, close to midnight, he sat in his Ford Explorer in a parking lot in downtown Palatine and revved the engine. Suddenly, without warning, he sped full-tilt toward the brick building that housed a school for gifted children. Several seconds later he smashed through the exterior wall and all the way through to a second room where the vehicle came to a halt, filled with bricks and debris from the violent impact, leaving its occupant unconscious and critically injured. Thank God it was night and there were no children in the school.

A couple sitting in their car in the parking lot watched in stunned horror and then dialed 911. My phone rang at 12:30 a.m., and as I raced downstairs to retrieve the call, I knew something had happened to Junior. This was the culmination of over forty-eight hours of failed attempts to get help for him, to no avail.

Several days before, he had been ejected from a nearby hospital and put out into the night even though he was experiencing psychotic episodes

and thought he was receiving messages from the X-Men. I called the hospital and spoke to the psychiatrist who had evaluated Jerry, who told me my brother was simply depressed. When questioned further he plainly stated, “There is a secondary issue and that is that your brother does not have insurance.” I’d have to take him to a state hospital, but once he was out and thinking people were going to hurt him, there would be no getting him to voluntarily go into a psychiatric facility.

I contacted the local police department and was eventually told to leave my brother alone because I was antagonizing him. I told the policeman that I feared my brother would get in his big rig and drive down the highway and do something terrible. He simply scoffed at me and assured me that was unlikely.

When we arrived at the hospital in the early morning hours we were told that my brother Jerry would not survive. He had a broken neck and a pan fracture of the face (meaning all of the bones in his face were broken). His head was swollen to the size of a basketball and he was having intermittent seizures. Little did they understand my brother’s incredible will to live and the valiant fight he’d begun, but after forty-one days of pain

and struggle, he left this world. That forty-one days was tantamount to being lost in the wilderness. It was an emotional rollercoaster like no other I'd ever been on, and the pain left behind, the feelings of guilt, confusion and anger, were almost too much to bear. My journey of grief had begun.

I never intended to write a book, or to share these words with others in such a public way. Instead, writing was my way of dealing with my grief, personally and privately; a way of expressing all of the terrible pain locked inside. However, after a year or so, I began to share these selections with friends who'd suffered losses, and I was amazed at the positive response I received. During my journey of grief I realized that death, and grief, are universal. No one in this world, regardless of ethnicity, social and economic status, age, etc., will escape the inevitability of losing someone they love, or the accompanying grief which follows.

This is not a how-to book, or a step program. It is not a formula for how to grieve, but instead it is the complicated, yet simple process of thoughts that occurred as I grieved. It gives words to what others might not be able to express and some semblance of comfort in knowing we are not alone. It is my sincere hope that others who are grieving

will find comfort and hope in these words, and that they will become a springboard for their own journey through grief. I don't have the answers ... no one does, but I have a lot of the questions that arise as a result of loss and the grieving process.

We can try to hide from grief and feeling the pain. We can pretend to block it out, try to forget, try to substitute something to take up our time and energy, but we cannot escape the inevitability of feeling the pain of grief in whatever way it may manifest itself. Embrace it, feel the pain, ride the waves of emotions, name the confusion, anger, disbelief, emptiness and all of the other accompanying feelings. By acknowledging our grief, we can move from despair to embracing the precious gift of God's days, with gratitude and hope. We are living. We must move forward, remembering those we've lost, but building new lives and memories. Moving forward with our lives honors those now gone.

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*“Death is a debt we all must pay.”*

–Euripides



## A Brother's Eulogy



Dear Junior,

I wanted to tell you a lot of what I felt when you were on your feet again and talking. Now this letter will have to do. You've been the best brother a little boy or man could ever have. Whether it was playing Cowboys and Indians in the fifties or working on trucks in the new century, it was good to do it with you. You were always ready to help on a house project and you made me feel good when you asked my advice on things. You made me feel smart and important.

We talked about old car trips to Iowa and up north, trips to retrace our youth and reminisce. How about that modern marvel, the cell phone?

I'll really miss those countless conversations we had when we were trucking late at night or early in the morning. Whether it was directions to a stop or a little bitching to ease the strain, you were there.

Mostly, though, just to talk and dream of what could be. You can't be replaced, Junior. There's not much good in wishing for what could have been, but I do. I wish for the very best of everything for you. More than anything, I wish for you to be happy.

I know I'll still be looking for your truck coming at me in the distance, and I'll miss those frequent sightings on lonely roads. It won't be the same without you. If you see someone we know, say hi from us. I know you'll be going to the right place. We all love you, Junior.

Love,  
*Nick*









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*“He who has not looked on Sorrow  
will never see Joy.”*

–Dante Alighieri







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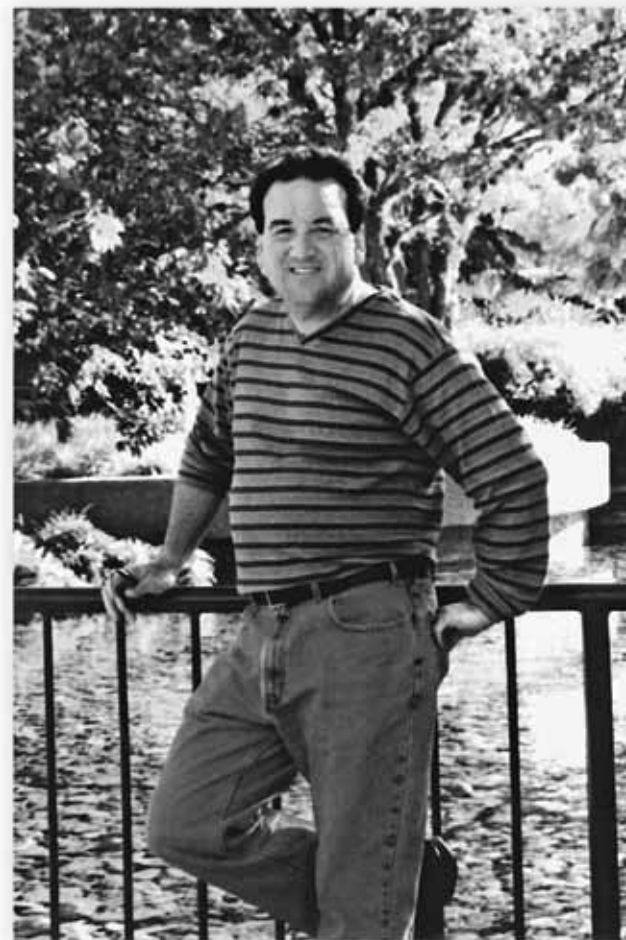
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*“Love is, above all else, the gift of oneself.”*

–Jean Anouilh



In Loving Memory



Jerry (Junior) Fanelli

## Acknowledgements



I never started out to write a book, but as I shared these words of grief with many of my friends, I began to understand the power contained in expressing the many feelings that accompany that powerful grief. With the encouragement of my friend Donna Monti, I began to believe that publishing this book was a possibility. Thank you, Donna, for your belief in my writing and your words of encouragement, and for planting in me that seed of desire to publish *Crumbled Oak Leaf*. I owe much gratitude also to my book designer, David Moratto, who understood my vision for this book from the outset and helped to truly honor my brother's memory. Thank you, David! Working with a novice isn't always easy, but his patience and willingness to help guide me to the creation of a beautiful book was achieved. Also, thank you to my editor, Jane Mackay, who assisted in fine-tuning my manuscript.

Immeasurable thanks to many of my closest friends (you know who you are), who have always

appreciated my gifts of poetry and tributes; you've made me realize how much those of us left behind cherish these words. Through your appreciation I realized the power of words. I have a saying that all of my friends know. When I give someone a tribute poem, I say, "If I made them cry, then I've done my job."

My brother, Jerry, was blessed with good friends and I can't forget them for trying to help him during those last terrible days before his accident. Thank you for your many calls, visits, prayers and support. A special heartfelt thanks to Barb and Dan, Pat and Terry, Jack, Bill, and Diane, and anyone I've forgotten to mention. To his special friend, Lynn Gibson, who visited him daily, I owe deep gratitude; you were an angel to my brother and our family has never forgotten your love and kindness.

## About the Author



Ms. Gavros grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, where she has resided for most of her life. The only girl of six children, she is from a Boys-R-U's family that includes five brothers (four living), two stepsons and her son. A person who never tires of learning and trying new things, she has enjoyed numerous undertakings during her life. The businesses or jobs that her entrepreneurial spirit has led her to work at form an eclectic list: providing secretarial service, making wedding cakes, teaching ballroom dancing, owning a custom window treatment and interior decorating company, and rehabbing old homes, to name a few.

She has traveled extensively throughout Mexico, having visited that country more than forty times and briefly lived there on several occasions. Her knowledge of the culture, crafts, architecture and people is extensive. You'll note that a number of the selections within this book were written while visiting the towns of San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato and Los Guayabitos, a small fishing village near Puerto Vallarta.

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