

# ...AND NOW WHAT?

A HELPING HAND FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE SUFFERED A LOSS



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## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

**Dear Parents and Teachers:**

**We have the enormous responsibility of helping our children overcome the trauma brought about by a natural, social or psychology tragedy. Our goal is to facilitate a fast but complete recovery process followed by personal learning and growth. In other words, to develop together the appropriate answers for questions such as “And now what?” It is with this purpose in mind that we have written this workbook. When using it, whether with your students, your own children or others, please take into consideration the following suggestions:**

- 1. We aren't very effective trying to teach something we do not know or give something that we don't have. If you also have suffered the tragedy that your children are working through, it is very important that you participate in some type of grief workshop yourself, or at least that you have worked through the adult counterpart of the manual: “A Light in this Dark Valley.”**
- 2. If the children are assigned to do the lessons in this workbook as a mandatory task, or if left to perform them on their own, the learning will not be nearly as effective as will working with them in group or one-on-one, sharing their experiences and achievements. Every day or every other day, parents can sit the child on their lap and share the lesson either in writing or as an oral exercise. Teachers can design a dynamic group method to develop each lesson. We offer additional materials to aid with this type of approach. The epilogue may be used independently or as an extra lesson. You can split it up to present a play, a puppet show or use it with the drawings by Polly, etc. These drawings may also be used as a cut-and-paste art project, or as a theme to write an essay.**
- 3. This manual is designed for children between the ages of 4-12 years. The wording and comprehensive level are aimed to an average 8 year old. To use with younger children (4-7 years) it's better to do the lessons orally, making sure they understand the wording. With older children (9-12 years) you can supplement the lessons with more elaborate explanations and homework as found in “A Light in this Dark Valley” for example. This will make it more interesting and challenging for the older children.**
- 4. Please accept our most sincere invitation to take advantage of all the resources available as part of our full range of materials and programs in this field. Many are offered free of charge through Virtual Library at Global Facilitator Service Corps, <http://globalfacilitators.org>.**

**This publication and other services are made possible thanks to the financial and emotional support of many people. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to:**

- **To Rosalina “Rosie” Rivera of ATConcepts of Dallas, Texas, for her dedicated work in the translation, and to Eileen Ruete for selflessly giving of her time and energy to proofread and correct the texts.**
- **To María Polly Sorzano, for her wonderful talent as the artist that provided us with the drawings for the children.**
- **To Cristina Lombana and Patricia de Navarro of “Creative Studies”, and to María Cristina Buitrago, for the illustrations and texts used in the epilogue.**

**With lots of love and with our most sincere wishes for the prompt emotional recovery of your children and students... as well as your own,**

**Gil and Mechas**

***GILBERT BRENSON-LAZAN  
MARÍA MERCEDES SARMIENTO DÍAZ  
January 7, 2001***

Hello to our dear friends,

We are Gil and Mechas and we have many young friends all over the world. Our work is helping children like you when they have suffered a terrible and painful loss. Your parents are probably confused also and facing many problems because of this tragedy. Everyone asks: "And now...what can I do?"

Everybody is talking about the "tragedy", but what is a tragedy? A tragedy is a very sad and painful thing that happens to us. It's not our fault and there usually isn't anything we could do to avoid it or stop it. It is something that hurts us very much and causes many problems for us. It might be a violent act of nature, like an earthquake or a tornado or a flood. It might be a bad accident or a serious illness. In any case, we feel very, very sad, or scared, or angry and it seems like things will never get better or go back to normal.

The truth is that after a little while we will begin to get well. Our body and our mind and our feelings will soon be like new again and stronger than ever. Recovering from a disease or tragedy is a way for you to understand more about the world and about yourself, to grow strong and wise as a person.

In this workbook you will find 15 lessons that resemble the 15 stairs. If you try to go up these steps all at once, you will fall down. On the other hand, if you try just one or two of the steps, you won't reach the top. If you try to skip over them or go up too fast, you'll probably slip and not make it either. But if you carefully go one stair at a time, you will soon be at the top.

Go up these imaginary stairs step by step, taking on one at a time. Study one lesson per day or per week. By doing our homework we will reach our goal for recovery, personal growth and happiness.

Do you know what "epilogue" means? It's a sort of gift that authors put in their books for their readers. We have a very special gift for you at the end of this book: a story we think you'll enjoy very much.

We wish you much happiness, lots of fun in school and playing with your friends, and a quick recovery from this tragedy.

From your friends who will always love you,

*Gil & Mechas*

*2001*

## LESSON 1 - THE LOSS

No one could comfort our little friend Mary. A big, dirty old truck ran over her best friend: a floppy-eared Terrier named Snoopy. For days Mary cried and screamed and was angry with everyone. She didn't understand why this had to happen. It was horrible, unfair, and very sad. We understand Mary's feelings because we realize that any loss can be very painful.

You know how painful it can be for someone to lose a toy, a friend, a favorite pencil or the attention of someone special. Right now you may have lost someone in your family, a friend, your house, your favorite things, your hometown. Or everything you had in this world. We know it hurts you very much. The first step to getting better is to realize all that you have lost.

In the space below, please make a list of some of the things you have lost that were important to you. Then, on another sheet of paper, you can draw a picture of all of them:

## LESSON 2 - YOUR PAIN

Jimmy is three years old. His Aunt just gave him a delicious strawberry popsicle. He had only taken a couple of licks when he dropped it on the ground by accident. His mother didn't allow him to pick it up. Jimmy cried and cried. Finally his Mom told him: "Don't be so silly! You shouldn't be so upset over a stupid popsicle."

She didn't understand. We have learned that every loss, no matter how small, hurts. Your recent loss may have been very great and is very painful.

Please talk about your feelings of sadness, anger or fear. There is nothing wrong with expressing what you feel, even if someone tells you otherwise. On the other hand it's not necessary for you to continue feeling sad, angry or afraid just because someone else expects you to.

How do you feel right now?

How do you feel when you remember everything you've lost?



## LESSON 3 - YOUR COMFORT

Not long ago our son Eric lost a valuable coin collection. He didn't say anything to us because he was afraid we would be mad at him. He felt angry with himself and he also felt very sad. His older brother, Ben, realized what was going on. He encouraged him to share it with us.

Very fearful and with tears in his eyes, Eric told us about his loss. Of course we were angry but we were also able to support him and understand his pain. That day Eric learned that it's okay to seek love and comfort from others. Comfort helps to ease the pain.

During these days when you feel so much pain, you can ask for comfort at anytime from people such as your family, friends, teachers, and neighbors. For example, you can say, "I feel bad and want to be loved and spoiled for a little while." You'll feel better when you have someone with whom to share your grief.

Draw or write the name of three people who love you and from whom you would seek comfort and support.



## LESSON 4 - YOUR QUALITIES

We have a little friend Ellen whose mother recently died from a long, terrible illness. From that moment, everything went wrong for her. Ellen's grades went down, she was fighting with her friends all the time, and she was always in trouble with her dad and her aunt. She is a beautiful girl, intelligent and well-mannered. Before her mother died she liked herself. Now she feels ugly, clumsy and stupid. Has Ellen really changed that much?

Usually after a tragedy we are restless and are unable to concentrate. We want to fight with everyone. The worst that can happen is for you to convince yourself that these feelings are forever. It's not true. It is just a normal part of the process of getting better.

You are a very important person--very valuable! You are worth a lot! You are a beautiful and amazing person, created by God. Even if you don't feel well or are not behaving so well, a tragedy like this cannot change who you are and all you are worth. You are the same person as before with all the great qualities that made you so special. You can correct your behavior and return to the way you were before.

Make a list all your qualities, that is, all the nice things people say about you and about the things you did so well.

## LESSON 5 - YOUR TIME:

Last week Paul fell off the swing at school and broke his leg. Since then he has been very sad because his leg is in a cast and he thinks he'll never be able to play football again. His mother is trying to give him love and support. She tells him not to worry, that he will be back to normal in no time. Paul doesn't believe her because he feels so bad. Will he get better?

Have you ever heard someone say: "One day at a time?" It means that even though today things are very difficult, with a little time and patience they will get better. Time is on your side, but you also need to be patient and understand that things will get back to normal eventually.

Remember that with each passing day the sadness and the fear and the anger fade a little more into the past, and happiness takes over a little more.

On this page or on another sheet of paper, draw a picture of yourself doing what you most enjoyed doing before the tragedy:

**Have you changed?**

## LESSON 6 - YOUR THINGS:

When our dog Nioka was a puppy, we would sometimes give her a bone to play with and clean her teeth with. Like any other dog, she loved to go and hide it in her favorite place for another day.

One day, without realizing it, Mechas placed a big box on top of her "secret" hiding place and she couldn't reach her toys and bones. Needless to say Nioka was very sad and she became a nuisance, biting furniture and clothes. All of this because she missed her toys so much.

Just like Nioka, people need to have their own personal space to be able to put your things. Maybe you had a big loss in the tragedy... maybe you lost everything. If you haven't started yet, it's very important to begin to replace your things. Even if they are not important to others, they are to you and you have a right to have them and to keep them. You might want to have:

- a rock collection
- a special toy or doll
- the drawings by Polly
- marbles
- little toy cars
- many other things

Please be very careful. You don't like it when your brother or sister or friend gets into your stuff! We should always remember to be respectful and considerate of other people's privacy, young and old alike.



**Here you can draw a picture of the things that you like the most:**

## LESSON 7 - YOUR FAITH:

Besides Nioka, we also have in our house 25 beautiful fish in an aquarium. Every day we feed them with their special food. Sometimes we treat them to something really special, such as worms or insects. When it's feeding time they all come to the surface for their food. Once in a while we change the filters and the plants so that the water is always clean. If a fish becomes ill, we isolated it and give it the necessary medicine to get better.

If these fish could think, they would realize that they never lack for anything because we always take care of them. Sometimes they get sick or they are hungry, but we are always there, even though the fish don't realize this.

Our world is like a very big aquarium. Sometimes we are hungry, sad, in pain, or going through many other difficult circumstances. We think no one cares. Remember that there is always, always the One who sees and knows everything and is taking care of us—our Lord. It is important to remember that He is always there, watching over us and caring for us.

You probably say prayers to Him but have you ever thought about writing Him a letter? You can tell Him about what you feel and think. You can thank Him for being alive. You can tell Him about your needs as well as the needs of others. He takes care of you in many ways, through other people that take care of you, the trees, the animals, the sun, the rain and the land to harvest from. But He also can speak to you directly. He will answer your prayers and will fill your heart with peace and love.



**On this page, you can write your letter to God:**

## **LESSON 8 - YOUR CONFUSION**

Do you remember our friend Ellen? She was very confused after her mother's death. Her grandmother told her that she would see her mother again in heaven. Ellen waited, looked up to the sky and didn't see her. Her father told her that mommy was sleeping, but she wasn't on her bed. Her friend told her that her mother was buried in the cemetery. Poor Ellen was so confused! She didn't know what to think or believe anymore.

After any tragedy or loss, we are all very confused and have many unanswered questions such as:

- What happened?
- Why did this have to happen to us?
- What has happened to those that have disappeared?
- Why are Mom and Dad acting so strangely?
- When will this happen again?
- Why can't the grown-ups tell me the truth?
- Why do I have to live like this?
- When can we return to our home?

It's even worse when grown-ups don't answer your questions or say things that confuse you more, such as:

- It's God's will.
- You have to tough it out.
- It's fate. What will be, will be.
- Life is a sea of pain and suffering.
- Go ask your mother.
- It's the work of the devil.
- It's a punishment from God.

**We don't agree with these answers, especially the ones that place the blame on God. God doesn't punish you or anybody else with tragedies.**

**We believe you are entitled to better answers. It's best to go to someone you love and trust, such as a teacher, a family friend, a spiritual leader or your family doctor. You can also write to me. Here is a special address for our little friends:**

**Gil B.  
11 Sequin Road  
West Hartford, CT 06117  
United States of America**

**Make a list of the questions you have:**

**Who will you ask to answer them?**

## LESSON 9 - YOUR MEMORIES

Not very long ago our young friend Susie was traveling with her family when they were hit from behind by another car. Susie, her mom and her little brother were sitting in the back seat and they were seriously injured. All three of them were in the hospital for several weeks. They are well now, but Susie gets very scared every time she has to ride in a car. Her brother wakes up almost every night with nightmares about the accident.

You have suffered through a tragedy of your own. You might be having nightmares or other scary memories too! This is a very common reaction. Anyone that suffers a loss or a tragedy has many memories. It's a natural part of the healing and recovery process for both the body and soul

When you are having these nightmares and memories, or when you feel afraid, it's best to ask someone for comfort and help. If anyone makes fun of you or says you are silly, find someone else to talk to.



On the back of this page, you can draw or color the ugliest memory you have about the tragedy.

## LESSON 10 - YOUR FEELINGS

Jane's kitten, Misty, has disappeared. No one seems to know exactly how. Maybe her Mom left the door open or Jane was careless when she returned from school. The fact is that Misty is gone and Jane feels just awful!

How do you think she feels? You are so right! Jane is very, very sad. She has lost her very best friend in the world and all she can do is cry. She feels very angry and wants to hit something or someone. She is angry with her mom, at her bad luck, at Misty and at herself. Jane also feels guilty because she realizes that she should have tried harder to take care of Misty, and she feels bad for yelling at her mom. Jane fears that something very serious has happened and her kitten will never come back. All these feelings are bottled up inside. Jane doesn't know what to feel or think, even more so when some grown-ups are telling her how she should and shouldn't feel, for example:

- It's nothing to cry about. We'll get you another one.
- Why are you such a crybaby?
- Be brave! Don't be afraid.
- Girls don't feel angry.
- It's silly to feel guilty.
- Don't feel like that.
- You see? Why did you leave the door open?
- Don't cry! That won't change anything.

When you hear comments like these from grown-ups, it's because they feel uncomfortable with your pain and they are trying to help. In any kind of tragedy, EVERYONE, young and old alike, ALL OF

US have strong feelings such as: anger, fear, sadness, and guilt. It is a very natural reaction and you have a right to your own feelings, and to share them with someone else. Your feelings are not bad, they are normal, they are a part of you and they are necessary in order to get better.

Your feelings are not bad. How you deal with them can be a problem. They can be very harmful if you hold them back and keep them inside. If you go wild and begin yelling and screaming, you might hurt yourself or others.

It's important to find someone you can trust to help you understand and give you comfort, someone who will listen to you and not criticize you for feeling what you feel.

List your most frequent feelings:

I am afraid when:

I am angry when:

I feel sad when:

I feel guilty when:

Who would you like to tell about this list?



## LESSON 11 - YOUR PAST

We had the opportunity to see some photos of Johnny when he was a small child and we were very sad. He was very good looking, bright, active and successful in school and sports. He was very popular in his town. When Johnny was 11 years old, he became seriously ill and was left paralyzed from the neck down. He couldn't move his arms or legs. Doctors told his family that Johnny would never get up again from his bed.

Johnny was very sad and wanted to die. His family tried to encourage him, but all Johnny wanted to do was lie in bed and watch TV. He was convinced there was no reason for him to live.

The first thing we did when we visited Johnny's family was ask his parents and his brothers and sisters to make a list of all his positive qualities and of all the things he used to do well. Almost immediately, Johnny and his family began to realize that many of the qualities and abilities on the list were not affected at all by his illness. Many of them could be done from his bed. From this point on Johnny began to change his attitude.

When we go through a tragedy, we often forget how good life was before it happened. We don't remember all the fun things we used to do and how much we enjoyed them. You can never go back, but you certainly can remember. Like Johnny, you can decide which part of your past you can do again.



**Write down or draw the things you most enjoyed doing before the tragedy. Then, look at all of them and choose the ones you would like to do again.**

## LESSON 12 - YOUR PRESENT

When Johnny read the list of things he used to do, he realized there was so much more he could do and that he wasn't doing. The first thing his parents did was to bring in a tutor. He had always enjoyed school so they brought school to him. He also remembered how much he enjoyed singing. So he would listen to music for two hours every day. He was able to learn lots of songs that he performed while his sister played the guitar. Johnny was quite a comedian, so he read joke books and memorized them. He was able to entertain the children at the hospital where he had been treated for six years.

Johnny understood the importance of not only remembering his past talents and activities, but also of doing these things again and of learning some new ones. You can take a good look at your list of abilities and decide to do some of your favorite activities again also. Write five things you could start to do right now.

**Which one will you begin with?**

## LESSON 13 - YOUR FUTURE

Johnny wasn't satisfied with just doing schoolwork, singing or learning jokes. He wanted more out life. When he told his parents that he wanted to finish high school and go to college, everyone laughed at him and thought he was crazy. They knew he had made a lot of progress but they thought that this would be too ambitious on his part. He had the use of one arm and could feed himself. He could move his head and one of his legs, and he had also learned how to move around in an electrical wheelchair. But how could he finish college?

We had the opportunity to visit with Johnny again around this time. We encouraged him to make plans for the future, to imagine how he would feel when he was successful, what his life would be like. Johnny knew that God would bless him with the strength and intelligence to achieve his goals and we knew that Johnny wasn't crazy and his dreams were possible!

Anything is possible...if you want it bad enough. In life you can achieve whatever you set your mind and heart to. Of course, you don't have to decide on a career today. But, you can continue to go to school, participate in a sport you enjoy, be a good friend, a good student, brother, or sister, and enjoy your friends or anything else on your list. If you have any doubts or questions ask for help from someone you trust and respect.

On the next page, draw a picture of what you will look like and what you will be doing when you are a successful and happy adult.

**Before you finish this lesson, would you like to know what happened to Johnny?**

**Thanks to the help and support of a group of people that believed in him, Johnny finished high school from his bed with a radio connected to his school. He then went to college in his wheelchair and graduated as a lawyer, the top student in his class of eighty.**

**Within just three years, he became what he had always wanted to be and what no one had believed he could: Attorney General of the State of Minnesota, where he did his work from a wheelchair, still telling jokes and singing at the Governor's parties.**

## LESSON 14 - YOUR GROWTH

Our friend Lee doesn't know what to do. His grandmother gave him a big table to use for his homework and for drawing but it has one problem. It's a beautiful table, big and strong, but one of the four legs is shorter than the others, so the table is always wobbling.

You are beautiful and strong too! And you have four parts of your life that support you, like the four legs of a table:

- A physical part to keep your body strong and healthy.
- A mental part to learn with and to feel all your feelings.
- A social part to be a good friend to your friends.
- A spiritual part to love God and His creation.

After a tragedy many of us begin to wobble like Lee's table because we forget to enjoy and take care of one or more of these parts so we can continue to grow and develop.

### **PHYSICAL:**

- Eat healthy foods.
- Sleep at least eight hours a day.
- Keep your body clean,
- Play and run a lot!
- Don't get near people that are smoking.

### **MENTAL:**

- Pay attention in school.
- Be responsible with your homework.
- Talk with someone you trust about how you are feeling.
- Understand that your family and friends are suffering also.
- Read one book a week.

**SOCIAL:**

- Be a good brother/sister, son/daughter, and friend.
- Make new friends.
- Love and share with others.
- Respect the rights of others.
- Defend your own rights, without hitting or insulting others.

**SPIRITUAL:**

- Spend some "quiet time" talking with God everyday.
- Learn to love and take care of nature.
- Take care of your animals and plants.
- Take care of your things and those of others.
- Remember that God loves you. You are one of his children.

**How are you taking care of each one of your parts?**

**Physical:**

**Mental:**

**Social:**

**Spiritual:**

**What are you going to do from now on to take better care of them:**

**Physical:**

**Mental:**

**Social:**

**Spiritual:**

## **LESSON 15 - YOUR SUCCESS:**

**We are going to have a great party. Everyone is invited: Gil, Mechas, Rosie, Eileen, Polly, Cristina, Patricia, María Cristina, Mary, Jimmy, Eric, Ben, Ellen, Paul, Nioka, the 25 fish, Susie, Jane, Misty (who came back), Johnny, Lee, their families and everyone's parents. Our most important guest...is YOU.**

**We want to celebrate your success! You have been through a tragedy and you have recovered. You are now a smarter and better person because you have learned how to survive and get better.**

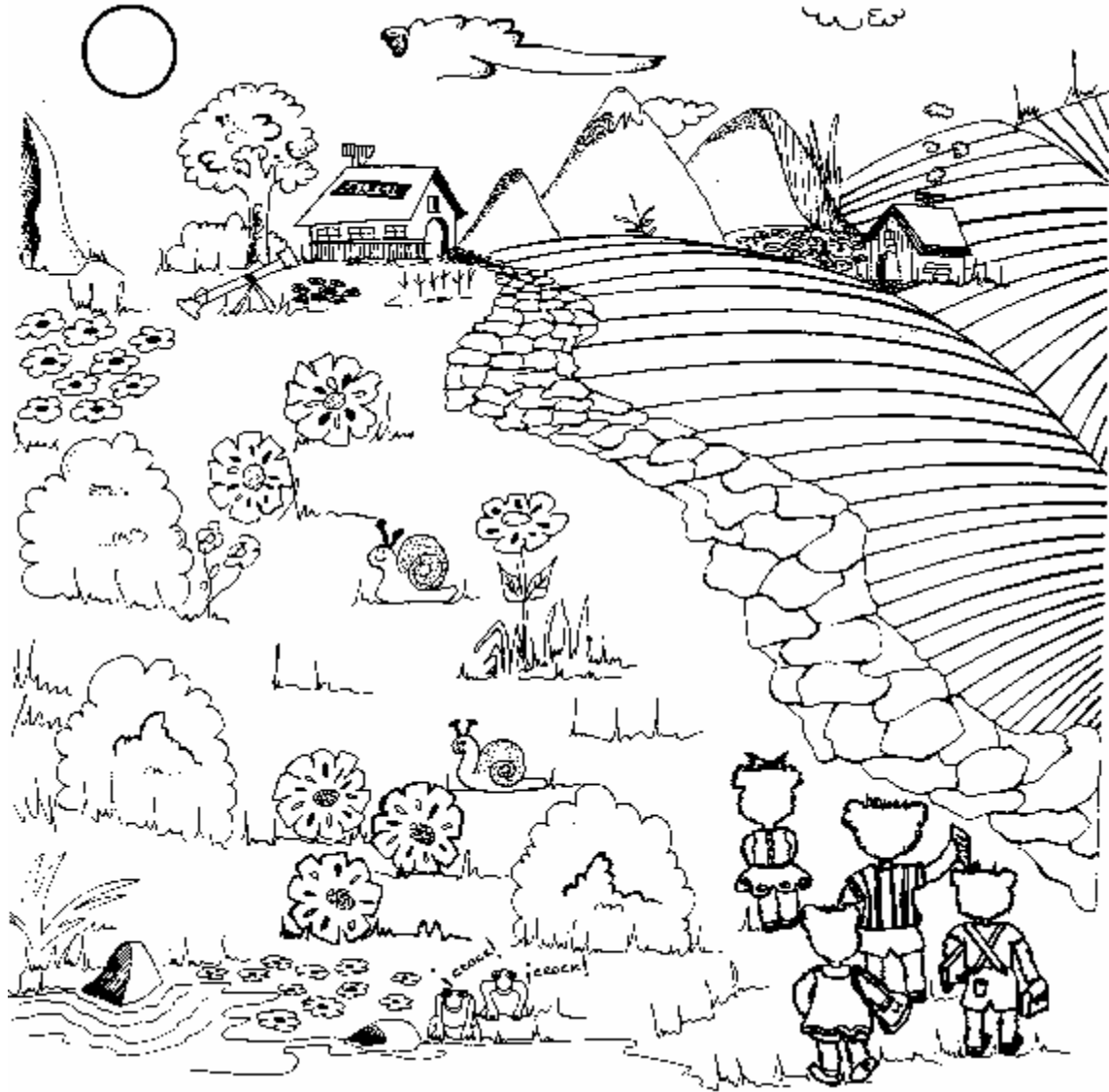
**Would you like to celebrate with us? Right now you are more intelligent, stronger, loving and have a much better understanding about yourself than before the tragedy. You have many reasons to celebrate! You have a lifetime to grow, develop, and enjoy your accomplishments especially with the lessons you have learned through this manual.**

**Share your success and joy with your family, schoolmates, and friends. Review all the lessons with them or on your own. Give thanks to God for His blessings and to all those who have helped you. Finally, celebrate!**

**How are you going to celebrate?**

## EPILOGUE: A LIGHT IN THE DARK FOREST

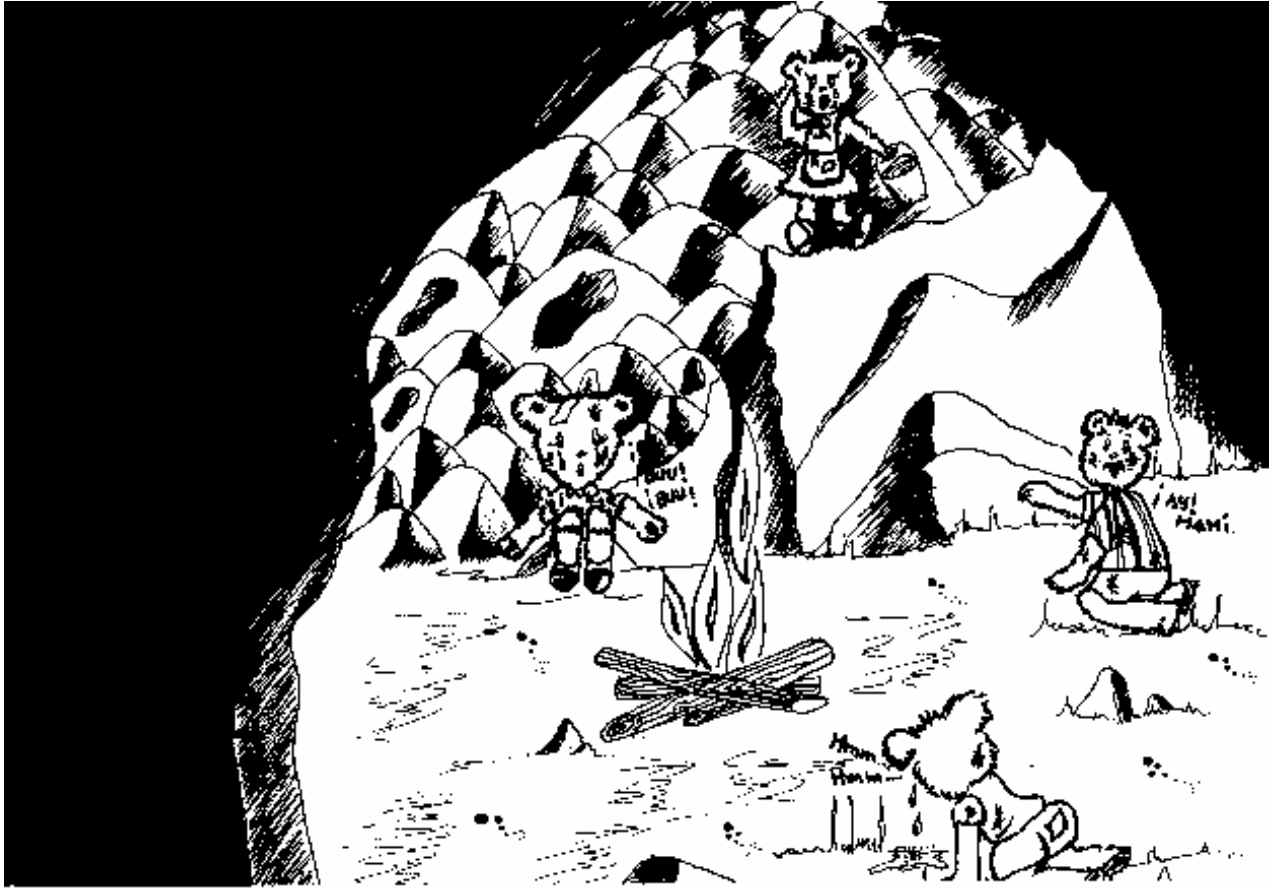
It's dawn and everything is beautiful in the Manzanero Valley, a beautiful forest with a sparkling creek running through it. Big trees and delicate flowers grow under the splendid sun, refreshed by the caress of a late afternoon rainfall. Little by little the inhabitants begin to wake up. The start of a new day is announced by the arrival of birds and other creatures, except for Mr. Owl, who prefers to lie down and sleep after a long night of work.



**Mother Bear lovingly awakens her five cubs: Tammy, Tommy, Timmy, Theresa and Tanya. The little bear cubs prefer to stay in bed, but Mother Bear manages to get them going so they won't be late for school. They take a quick bath and dress. Grandma Bear prepares breakfast, while Papa and Grandpa Bear lovingly watch them as they prepare for another day of walking through the forest to gather honey and fruits for food.**

Soon after breakfast, the five bear cubs give their parents and grandparents a kiss and a hug and leave happily for school, singing and jumping. On the way, they merrily say hello to some little friends that do not go to school yet. They are still very young and watch the bear cubs with envy as they enjoy rolling and playing in the high grass on their way to school.

As our young friends approach their school, something very strange begins to happen that will affect them greatly. Suddenly it gets very dark in the forest, it starts to rain very heavily and there is a horrible, loud noise. The little bear cubs are scared and gather together to look around. They see nothing that indicates the terrible tragedy that's about to happen. Immediately the trees begin to fall down and the other animals in the forest are running around scared, screeching and looking for shelter. It seems as if a giant is smashing the forest. The cubs hide in a small and humid cave at the top of a hill, confused, trembling with fear, and embracing one another for protection and support.



After a while everything is silent: a horrible and dreadful silence. Our young friends don't have a clue as to what has happened. After a few minutes, Tommy and Tanya, the oldest ones, see a light outside. They leave to investigate while the others remain quietly in the cave. Not long after, they return with a terrible look on their faces and tears in their eyes. Full of fear, Tammy asks, "What has happened?"

At first no one responds, and finally Tommy answers. With a lost look in his eyes and speaking very slowly, "The dam broke and all the water from the mountains has flooded the valley. There is water everywhere. Our family and home have disappeared, as well as those of many other animals."

"This isn't possible!" said Timmy.



**"It's horrible!" Tanya mumbles over and over again while sitting on the floor covering her face.**

**Still refusing to believe what their brothers and sisters said, Timmy, Tammy and Theresa leave the cave to see it with their own eyes. Soon they confirm that everything the older cubs had said was true. Their beloved forest was now just a huge swamp and they feel very, very bad. Timmy screams desperately, walking along the edge of the water and hopelessly calling for his father. Tammy wants to go back into the cave and not come out until things go back to the way they were. Theresa cries bitterly for her family and friends that have drowned.**

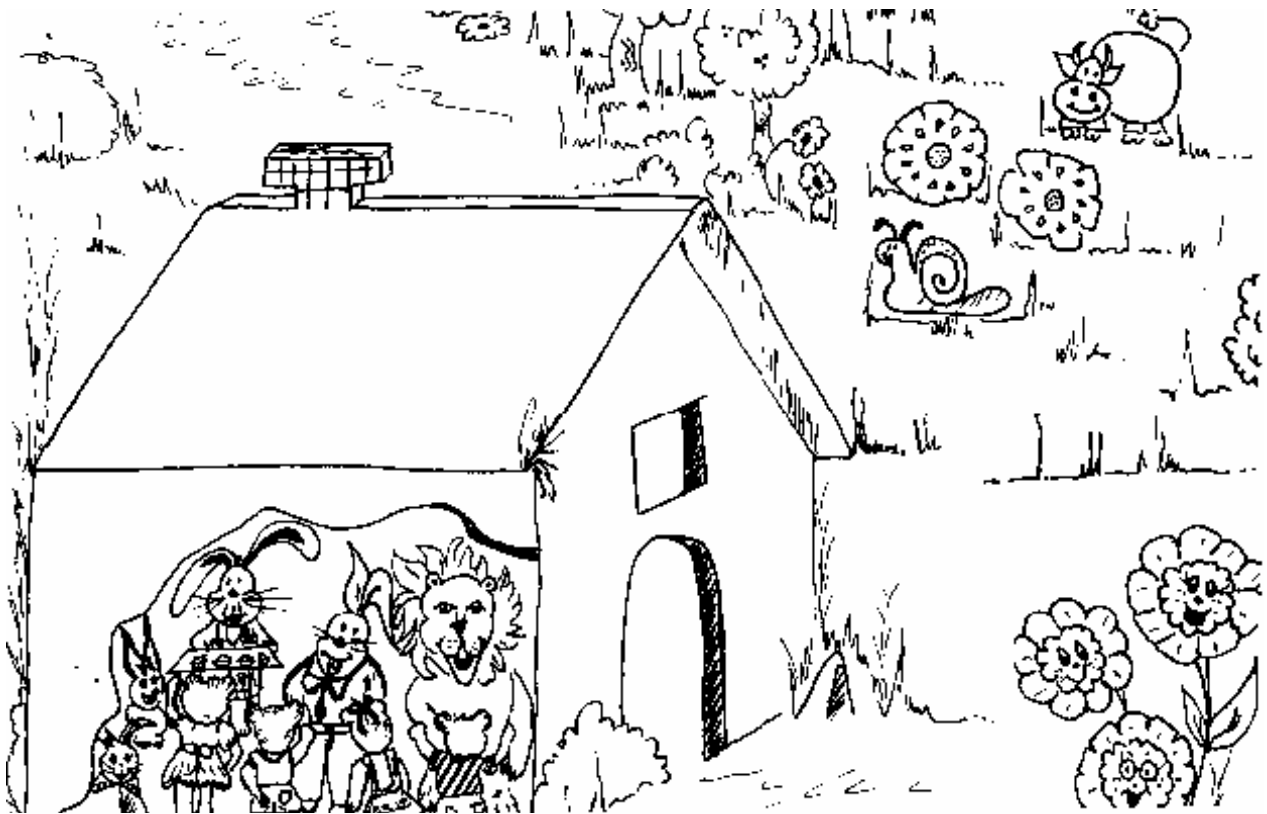
**Tanya acts as though she is sleeping. She doesn't want to believe what has just happened, and she doesn't want to do anything. Tommy hits every tree he encounters and yells into the air "Why did this have to happen to us?"**

**Soon many animals arrive from other nearby forests. Almost all the other animals understand the pain of the bear cubs and want to help them and all the other animals affected by the tragedy. Elliot Eagle organizes a group of other birds to help get the smaller animals out of the water. Dr. Franklin Fox sets a first aid post to take care of all the victims. Some of the animals really don't know what to do. Others make promises they can't keep. Some of them just come to snoop around and others come to steal.**

**Robert Rabbit and his family offer our friends, the bear cubs, a place to stay. It's a nice little cave behind their house where they will be safe, but maybe a little uncomfortable. It's just for awhile until the flooding passes and they can return to rebuild their**

house. The bears thankfully accept the aid of the rabbits because they have nowhere else to go.

After a few days, Tanya and Timmy notice that the Robert's mother feels bad every time the cubs cry or speak of their sadness, fear or anger. The rabbits act cheerful so they do not have to feel the cubs' pain. Theresa and Tommy feel bad about asking for anything since the rabbits have been so good to them. Everyone is confused, moody, sad and afraid, but they do not want to say anything. Sometimes the cubs just spend the day sleeping



and letting others to do everything for them. Many of the other animals want to help them, but they don't know how.

With each passing day the cubs feel worse and worse. Timmy often complains of what he calls a "headache in his whole body." Tammy is very nervous and spends her days dreaming of her life before the tragedy and speaking of the moment when Mother Bear will return (we all know this will never happen because she is dead). Theresa is very, very sad. She fills up two buckets with her tears every day and at night keeps half the forest up with her crying. Tommy fights more and more with his brothers and sisters and has become very rude, even with those trying to help him. Tanya is bored with everything. Nothing matters to her anymore. She continues waking up every night with horrible nightmares.

After some weeks of these problems, the Rabbit family decides that something has to be done to try and help the young bears. Papa Rabbit finally decides to bring Doctor Leo Lion home to see them. After examining the little bears, he says to them, "Congratulations, my young friends." Mother Rabbit and the bear cubs look at him totally perplexed. He smiles lovingly and explains everything.

"Yes my friends, you heard correctly. I said congratulations because you are not doing as badly as some of the other animals in the forest. I know you are trying to do the best you can under these terrible circumstances. You want to recover without becoming a burden to others. You haven't figured out quite how to do this yet."

Timmy asks, "If I am not that bad, how is it that I feel this terrible pain all over my body?" The rest of his family nod their heads in agreement.

Once again Dr. Lion smiles and explains, "Have you ever had too much fruit to eat during the day and in the evening you have a terrible tummy ache?"

The young bears answer that they have and Dr. Lion continues: "What happens if the discomfort and stomach pain persists even after you have taken some medicine?"

Theresa responds, "Something very unpleasant . . . we throw up."

"How do you feel afterwards?" asked Dr. Lion.

"Kind of strange," says Timmy, "I do feel much better."

"That's right!" says Dr. Lion. "Throwing up is very unpleasant. But, we feel so much better afterwards. It's your body's way of getting rid of everything that's making your tummy ache. Once we relieve the source of the indigestion, our body feels much better and we can start to recover."

"I understand about throwing up, says Tanya, but I don't understand what it has to do with what's happening to us right now."

Dr. Lion explains, "You have suffered a terrible tragedy. In many ways it's like having a bad tummy ache. You have swallowed a lot of pain, fear, sadness, and anger. Your mind and body need to get rid

of everything you've been keeping inside. If you don't allow it to come out then you'll get really sick. That is what's happening to Timmy with his headaches and body hurting all over, with no desire to get up in the mornings, or to Tammy who is always nervous and has no desire to live. Theresa always feels very sad and cries all day long. Tommy just gets into fights with everyone and is always in a bad mood. And finally, Tanya just prefers to hide from everything and everybody and do nothing. Each one is dealing with the pain in a different way. What's important is to talk about it with someone you can trust. Express and share how you feel, and what you are thinking. This will help you feel so much better!"

"Oh, now I understand!" says Tammy, "What we have is a kind of indigestion and we need to throw up in order to recover."

"Very good, Tammy!" says Dr. Lion. "You are so smart. When we go through a tragedy like this one, everyone reacts differently. The five of you did, with your 'indigestion.' I have seen so many who can't recover because they won't let themselves 'throw up.' It's uncomfortable for some to open up and share their thoughts and feelings. It might seem like an easy way out to keep it all in but in the long run it's much worse. It becomes harder and harder to talk about it, and they feel even worse. People in these circumstances often need special help."

"Fortunately, in your case you are all going to get well. Mother and Father Rabbit care very much about you. We are all going to work towards your recovery. With each passing day you will feel better and better. You might still feel some sadness just like your stomach is sensitive for a few days after your indigestion has gone

away. It's like the day of the tragedy. When you came out of that cave everything was so dark. But, now there is light again!"

The bear cubs met with Dr. Lion several times afterwards during the meetings of their recovery group. They talked about their feelings and thoughts regarding this tragic experience. Dr. Lion finally said goodbye and reminded them that they could always call on him if they should ever need him.

Our dear little friends are recovering well. They get better and stronger with each passing day. The flooding waters have gone down now and the Manzanero valley has once again begun to show all its beauty. The bear cubs are building a big new cave for a home and have started to enjoy their adventures in the forest once again. They still have many memories of the way it use to be and feel very sad at times. But that, too, is normal. The key is to keep the faith and move forward!



**DR. GILBERT BRENSON LAZAN**  
**DR. MARÍA MERCEDES SARMIENTO DÍAZ**

Dr. Gilbert Brenson-Lazan, a North American living in Colombia since 1972, is Founder and Executive President of Amauta International, LLC, dedicated to the training and mentoring of facilitators of social and organizational change. He is a social psychologist, organizational consultant, educator and author of 28 books. He has been recognized internationally for his pioneering work in Latin America in the field of facilitation, organizational development, brief systemic therapy, crisis intervention, and stress management.

In 1986, as a result of his work with the victims of the tragedy in Armero, Colombia, Dr. Brenson and his then colleague-wife, Dr. María Mercedes Sarmiento Díaz (1947-2003), became interested in the field of psychosocial reconstruction after natural and social disasters. That was the beginning of a twenty-year journey to many parts of the world, developing the model and materials as well as training facilitators in disaster intervention processes focusing on the psychological and social reconstruction of individuals and their communities.

Dr. Brenson was International Vice-Chair of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), a founding Board member of Global Facilitator Service Corps and past president, as well as an active member of several other professional groups and organizations. He is currently the GFSC Mentored Pathways™ Coordinator.

Dr. Sarmiento was a clinical psychologist and educator, with post-graduate studies in facilitation, brief systemic therapy, education and theology. She was Co-Founder of Amauta International, a teaching member of Eirene International, co-founder of the IAF Community Outreach Task Force, a founding Board member of Global Facilitator Service Corps, and a pioneer in Latin America in the field of virtual education and mentoring.

Gil is an avid outdoor photographer, enjoys classical music, training his Rottweilers, playing Colombian folk music, and studying social theology. He has five sons, three grandchildren and is married to Parcia Sansary Gómez.

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