

# HORIZON

A PUBLICATION OF HOSPICE OF THE PIEDMONT • WINTER 2012

*Living with loss*

## A Search for Hope in Winter

by Erin Webb, MSW, Bereavement Counselor/Coordinator

The winter season and its weather naturally bring with it some inconveniences, but for people experiencing the death of a loved one, the winter season can have additional meanings and hardships. The cold and dreary weather may confine us in the house with only our thoughts to keep us company. We can feel isolated from the outside world. Days are shorter and nights are longer. Those long nights are often difficult for grievers. In the winter it is harder to do what is good for us like exercise, eat well and spend time in nature, among other things. So how does one cope? Where do we find hope?

Candice Courtney writes of the ancient Celts' beliefs about life, death, grief and finding hope in unlikely places in her article "Incorporating Loss into Holiday Rituals," published in the professional newsletter, *The Forum*. She writes,

*"When the days got shorter and nights grew colder, the world all around began to speak of death. Trees and shrubs lost their leaves, turning into skeletons. Plants shriveled and turned brown before descending into the earth to decay. The earth became stark and barren. Yet there were certain trees and plants that held onto their green life when all else died. It was believed [by the Celts] that these held a special life force. [The magical trees and shrubs gave] them faith and hope that somehow life could survive the darkest of times. Unlike those ancient people, we trust that after the winter solstice the sun*

*will rise higher in the sky, but we may not fully trust that the light will return to our lives again. The cycles of the year are predictable, but it is sometimes hard to trust in the cycles of life. The sight and scent of the pine branches are a silent affirmation of faith and hope during the dark time . . . not only that we can survive, but that the cycles of life will indeed turn, and that some day, however*



*distant spring may seem, daffodils will push their way up out of the ground and into the strengthening light of the sun."*

Although winter can bring our mood down and the darker feelings may be more likely aroused, winter can also provide opportunities. Winter can be a time of preparation for what awaits you. It allows for life to slow down a bit, it allows for quiet time, time for introspection, time to reacquaint ourselves with what is important in our lives. And as we do this, we can be reminded by the "sight and scent of the pine branches" that although there is a winter in all of our lives, there too will be a spring.

The ground will thaw and the earth will come to life. Spring will emerge, bring-

ing with it promise, hope and potential. Just as we know spring will follow winter, we know that in time, grief almost always softens and moves from the forefront of lives to the background, making room for possibilities to come.

### Facing Grief with Commitment and Courage

Committing to the search for meaning in the face of adversity is an important step in adjusting to life without your loved one. Telling yourself that you can't survive or that life is pointless will reinforce hopelessness. Instead, search for ways to find strength and courage in each moment.

While it's important to acknowledge despair or hopelessness, it's also important to remind yourself that you can, and will, survive. Tell yourself, *This is really painful, but I'm determined to find direction and meaning in the midst of this challenge.* Begin to take pride in your ability to cope with the grief that is now yours.

This approach cultivates hope in the midst of turmoil. Your attitude is the key. If you consider your pain a negative burden you must escape from, you'll find yourself feeling anxious and depressed.

*Continued on page 3*

## Bereavement Services at Hospice of the Piedmont

**H**ospice of the Piedmont's Bereavement Services help the bereaved understand the grief process and provide support that encourages healthy adjustment to loss. Services are available, following the death of a loved one, to the community at large and to the family and friends of hospice patients free of charge.

Bereavement Services include:

- Mailings of educational and supportive material, reminders of upcoming bereavement events.
- Bereavement support groups where a small group of people gather to

learn about the grieving process and be with others who are grieving.

- Educational and experiential groups and workshops on grief-related issues.
- Individual short-term grief counseling provided by bereavement counselors.
- Youth services provided through the *Journeys* program, where children and teens (ages 4–18 years) and their families receive support and grief education using art and other tools for creative expression. Services include individual sessions, support groups and bereavement camps.

- Memorial services held to remember loved ones who have died and honor those who are living.
- Referrals to community resources
- Educational presentations to community groups and organizations.

Bereavement counselors are available to help you decide how Hospice of the Piedmont can best help you. For more information, to register for an event, or to get on our mailing list, please call the Hospice of the Piedmont office at: 434-817-6900 or 1-800-975-5501.



## Keeping Lines of Communication Open

**H**elping family members and friends understand what you need as you are grieving will assist you tremendously. To do so generally requires open communication, patience, and acknowledgement of your own needs. Here are some suggestions on how to keep the lines of communication open:

- Accept that each family member grieves in a unique way; no two people will feel exactly the same or need exactly the same things.
- Recognize that your family and friends are also experiencing loss, including the loss of your time, energy, or attention. When they can not or will not support you, remember you can call on other resources including friends, clergy, support groups, and professional counselors.
- Identify two or three things you need most from your family. For

example, you may need someone to listen to memories, someone else to help you go through your loved one's belongings, and someone else to teach you how to do your tax return.

- Make a list of family members and friends, divided into two columns:

*Column 1:* Those who are good at listening (who you could call when you need a shoulder to cry on).

*Column 2:* Those who are good at practical action and problem-solving (who you could call for a ride to the store or help with paperwork).

Some people may appear on both lists. Place each person's phone number or e-mail address next to his or her name. Then, when you have a need, refer to your list and choose the most appropriate person for the situation.

- Share your needs openly with family and friends. State them simply, specifically, and clearly: *I need someone to help me sort through my mother's clothes and thought you would be a good person to help me. Would you be available next week?*
- When others are not meeting your needs, try to communicate directly without blaming: Instead of saying *You are making me feel worse*, say *I am feeling sad today and I need you to listen.*
- Do not expect others to read your mind. Communicate when your feelings and needs change: *These days I have more hope and energy, and I'd like to go to a funny movie. Are there any you recommend?*

*Excerpted from San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care's Living With Loss Series*

## What Can a Bereavement Counselor Do for Me?

Just about anyone grieving the death of a loved one can benefit from the bereavement services offered by Hospice of the Piedmont. Many people believe that as they grieve, the best way to survive is to “stay strong,” or “hold it together.” But we know that, although grief is often a painful process, there are opportunities to do more than just survive. And a bereavement counselor can help you get there in a group setting or an individual session.

### A bereavement counselor can help you:

- Understand that what you are going through is normal.
- Find your own unique path on the journey called grief.
- Accept in your heart as well as your mind that the death is real and final.
- Tell your unique story of grief and loss.
- Develop tools within yourself to cope.
- Find alternative ways to grieve in addition to talking, crying, and sharing feelings.
- Remember your loved one, both the good and the bad.
- Explore what your loved one meant to you.
- Feel and express the feelings of grief, because prolonged avoidance of grief can be detrimental.
- Learn to live a full and happy life, while remaining connected with your loved one in a way that feels comfortable to you.
- Determine if you need professional support as you cope with your feelings of loss.

***You don't have to do it alone. Just pick up the phone and make the call. 434.817.6900 or 800.975.5501***

## Is a Support Group for You?

Understandably, some people shy away from the idea of joining a bereavement support group. For some, the idea of discussing their very personal pain and problems with “outsiders” is too uncomfortable. They feel much more comfortable in one-to-one situations. Still others are so preoccupied and overwhelmed by their own problems that they are unable to listen to or respond to the grief of others. However, for many other people, a support group has been of tremendous help in dealing with the death of a close family member or friend.



Support groups provide a setting for people to tell their stories, admit their fears, vent their anger and discuss their frustrations. Many group members are coping with terrible loneliness, and worry about being a burden to friends and family members. It can be a solace to be in the presence of others who have suffered loss and discover that your feelings are shared by others.

What a relief to hear others say, “Me, too!” when you’ve thought your feelings were abnormal or bizarre — feeling anger toward the person who has died, being certain you can hear that person coming in the door each night or being convinced that you’ll never recover from the pain and emptiness you. Typically, the members of support groups are extremely helpful to each other—offering practical suggestions, reassurance, and insights.

Is a support group for you? Only you can answer that. However, whether it be a formal support group or a grouping of family and friends, we all need to find meaningful support following the death of someone we love. For it is true that, when people feel supported, they are more likely to take better care of themselves. The Hospice of the Piedmont Bereavement Department has a variety of opportunities to gain support in a group setting. Please see the Calendar of Events insert and call to register for any of our upcoming opportunities.

## Facing Grief with Commitment and Courage

*Continued from page 1*

If you view grief as the cost of the investment you freely made when you chose to care, then grief turns into a healing process that you can own for yourself. The price of love is the possibility of loss. You don't need to regret the time you chose to love, however brief it was.

Because grief involves coming to terms with the past, it gives you the opportunity to reflect on where you've been in your life. Those who have died shaped you into the person you are; they also left behind a part of themselves. The grieving process allows

you to reflect on memories and gifts your loved one has given you, and to consider how to use them in the future.

In order to make constructive changes, you must first accept reality. New meaning evolves gradually through the affirmation of your beliefs and through the expansion of your perspective. Although the future is always uncertain, you can take a courageous first step by facing your future with hope instead of fear.

*Excerpted from San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care's Living With Loss Series*

# HORIZON

*Living with loss*

*A publication dedicated  
to grief education, support,  
and the offer of hope.*

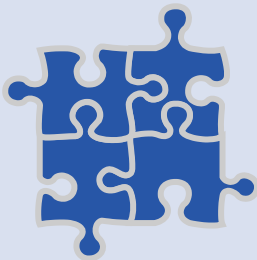
## **Myth**

It takes one year to grieve  
the loss of a loved one.



## **Reality**

The length of one's grieving varies from person to person. The amount of time needed is based on a myriad of factors that combined creates a unique experience for each individual. Some of the factors include: the type of relationship with the person who died, the griever's personality, the circumstances surrounding the death and what kind of support system exists for the griever.



## *Self-Care Tip*

Explore ways to create balance in life and grief. We encourage you not to avoid your grief, but to face it head on. There is no way over, under or around it. One must go straight through it. But we also encourage you to take breaks from grief. Grieving is hard work and it can take a lot out of you physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Opportunities to distract yourself from your grief and refuel, if only for a few minutes, will make it possible to continue on with the often draining work of grieving.



# Bereavement Support for Children, Teens and their Families Through the *Journeys* Program

## Why Should I Consider Having My Child/Teen Involved in the Journeys Program?

Laurie Haan Bayma, MS, BSN, RN  
Bereavement Coordinator/Counselor

Following the death of a loved one or friend, many children and teens have feelings, worries and even regrets that are difficult to share. For many children this may have been the first death of someone close to them. They may not have had the experience of dealing with strong feelings that are difficult to talk about. Many of our Journeys children



benefits them. Sometimes parents have to say, “We are doing this as a family, because we need this. We are doing it together.” While committing to attend a six-week group will require planning and may mean missing a few weeks of another activity, the tools that children, teens and adults learn are very valuable to them as they grow older, and

and teens have shared with us that they did not want to bring up their own feelings and fears

*“When I looked around and saw the other children and teens that had lost someone, I felt . . . relieved . . . that I wasn’t alone.”*

the shared experience often brings family members closer. As one parent said,

with family members who were already sad or upset. They have also shared with us that being with other children and teens was really helpful.

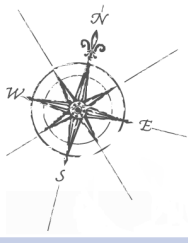
As one child shared, “When I looked around and saw the other children and teens that had lost someone, I felt sad for them, but also relieved...that I wasn’t alone.”

“Death is part of life...and I know my kids and I will use what we have learned again.”



It is often difficult for both youth and adults to come to a group, especially the first couple of times, but they come because they realize it really





# Bereavement Calendar of Events



Advance registration required for all events.

## Beginning Your Grief Journeys — First Wednesday of Every Month!

Join us for a time of education and sharing for the newly bereaved. We will introduce basic grief concepts and provide time to begin to share the story of your loss in a group setting.

- **January 4:** 1:00 - 3:00pm
- **February 1:** 6:00 - 8:00pm
- **March 7:** 1:00 - 3:00pm
- **April 4:** 6:00 - 8:00pm

### Men's Breakfast Club

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at 8:30am

Location: the English Inn  
of Charlottesville,  
2000 Morton Drive

(behind Emmett Street Bodo's Bagels)

Be part of a social gathering for men. Gain support through conversation and connection with other men experiencing the ups and downs of grief. (Breakfast buffet available, payable by attendee at front desk.)

### Remembering Our Children

The 1<sup>st</sup> Monday  
of the month  
5:30 - 7:00pm

If you are a parent or family member who has experienced the death of a child, we invite you to join us for education about grief and loss, support, and healing.

### Bereavement Support Group for Adults

- Mondays, January 16 - March 5  
11:00am - 12:30pm
- Week of March 19 (day and time to be determined)

Meet for eight consecutive weeks to learn about the grieving process and be with others who are grieving. These groups are for adults who have experienced the death of a loved one and three months have passed since the death.

**CALL ASAP TO REGISTER!**

### Drop-In Support Sessions

Open bereavement support groups for any adult who has been affected by the death of a friend or family member. This is an opportunity to discuss grief topics and receive support from others going through the grief process.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month, 5:30 - 7:00pm, Hospice of the Piedmont offices
- 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays of the month, 3:00 - 4:30pm, Senior Center, 1180 Pepsi Place, Charlottesville



### Support Group for Children, Teens and Parents

Thursdays, 5:30 - 7:00pm



Our 6-week groups create a safe space for families to find healing after a death. After dinner donated by a local restaurant, adults meet with a bereavement counselor while children/teens meet with an art therapist and use art to express their feelings. Activities and discussions are aimed at covering specific weekly topics and are designed to draw out memories, reflect on loss, and learn coping skills.



Journeys registration forms are available at our website [www.hopva.org](http://www.hopva.org) for you to print out and mail.

All bereavement services are offered at no charge due to the generosity of community contributors. Please contact us (434.817.6900) for more information or to register.