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Seasons of Life

A Bereavement Newsletter from the VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care Program

January / February 2012

Volume 5 | Issue 1

Creating a Legacy in 2012

The Rev. Vince Corso, M. Div., LCSW, Manager of Hospice Psychosocial Services

Standing on the threshold of 2012, many reading this newsletter may be feeling the depths and pain of grief. Perhaps you think about the unfairness of life while struggling to make sense and meaning during this past year when a loved one died. Perhaps you are asking yourself if you did all you could while caring for him or her. Perhaps everything in your world is topsy-turvy, making you feel like an unwilling ticketholder on an out-of-control roller-coaster ride. Perhaps you are trying to determine how or even if you will move forward at all.

In a house which becomes a home, one hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds. Love, like a carefully loaded ship, crosses the gulf between the generations. Therefore, we do not neglect the ceremonies of our passage: when we wed, when we die, and when we are blessed with a child. When we depart and when we return; When we plant and when we harvest... We live, not by things, but by the meanings of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords from generation to generation.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery



Simply ask:

"What was a single gift that your deceased loved one gave to you?... As you reflect on what you received from your loved one, you recreate the memories and feelings associated with that gift."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery's poem, *Generation to Generation*, quoted above speaks to the ever-present reminder that life is constantly in motion. Love, like a "loaded ship" constantly moves between the shores of life and the unknown. Your loved one, whether family member or friend, imparted to you lessons about love and life and living. These lessons move and flow as you move and flow through these days. The lessons are known to you alone, perhaps only in the privacy of your heart. Hopefully they are joyful lessons, perhaps some are painful, yet all are yours to be held and pondered and used as companions for the days ahead. I have been told by the grieving that to look at the entirety of a new year is overwhelming and filled with pitfalls. I believe that the same is true when trying to sift through all the life-lessons of our loved one. For many, it is a task too painful to begin, uncertain as to which lesson or memory is the most important or most relevant.

One question may be of help. Simply ask: "What was a single gift that your deceased loved one gave to you?" This simple question can help to ground your life in the raging torrent of grief. As you reflect on what you received from your loved one, you recreate



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the memories and feelings associated with that gift. You may recall the sound of your loved one's voice and laughter; you may recall the touch of their hand on yours. You may recall words shared and legacy offered. It is as if a bell is ringing that only you can hear. This remembering represents the give-and-take of life. Such a remembrance transcends the here-and-now. It offers the grieving person an opportunity to re-create and remember their loved one. It can become an opportunity to believe in life and beauty once again, with hope and expectation.

Legacies from our loved ones endure beyond our pain and can help transform our lives. As we move into 2012 with hope, fear and expectation, let's remember this anonymous quote: "If you can't go forward, don't go backward. Stand still. Be present to the moment and hold the legacy of your loved one in your fragile hands."

Sincerely,



The Rev. Vince Corso,
M. Div., LCSW,
Manager of Hospice
Psychosocial Services

**Coming on
February 16:**

Partner Loss Panel: "Can I Develop a Loving Relationship Again?"



This upcoming panel discussion is presented in an effort to support grieving partners / spouses who may have conflicting feelings when they contemplate the possibility of reinvesting themselves in another relationship. Questions may have to mind such as: "Will I always feel married even though my partner has died?" "No one could ever replace my loved one but is it okay to seek companionship?" "It's been along time since I wasn't a part of a couple and I feel awkward around other "singles." "Is it in the best interest of my children for me to consider having other relationships?" Even though we may know intellectually that love is boundless, it may be difficult to move forward. We recognize that grief can be an isolating experience however it's important to know that you are not alone with these conflicting feelings. Please join counselor Janet King and the panel of experts who have travelled this path. Janet can be reached at 212-609-1907.

Dear Friend-in-Grief,

It's difficult to know how to begin this letter. Over a year has passed since my husband Joe died, and, like many who lose a loved one, I was numb at first. I cried a lot. I cried and cried. Everywhere I looked—around the apartment, in the neighborhood I was reminded of him.

At the time, even though I knew Joe was going to die, I was unprepared for the loss. Nothing, it seems, can prepare you for such a death. Friends and family assured me that one day I would feel better. Time heals, they said. I knew they meant well, but I was sure they could not possibly be right. I was sure that I would never feel better.

At the beginning, I struggled to get back to daily life. Because I had been eating in the hospital cafeteria for those last weeks, there was little food in the apartment and I had to go shopping. In the grocery store produce department I saw one of Joe's favorite fruits: soft, sweet Comice pears. For a fraction of a second, I said to myself, "I'll buy some pears for Joe." And then I remembered.

Some say the first year is the worst because there are so many "firsts." Holidays and birthdays and anniversaries, whether celebrated in the past or not, seemed very different because Joe was no longer here. (Fortunately for me, Joe's family made sure that I did not have to face a day like Thanksgiving alone.)

The experts say that grieving is "work" and I agree. And I have worked at it, both in bereavement groups and with one-on-one grief counseling. Much to my amazement, I can now say that those well-meaning folks were right. Time does heal.

Oh, from time to time I still cry. On TV a few nights ago, some familiar music came on, and I could hear Joe singing along with it. I had to turn off the TV—I just couldn't bear it. But that happens less often now.

It's taken time and effort, and at times I feel as if I have come back from being in exile, but I am making a new life for myself. Four days a week I go to a Y for a workout and a swim. I enjoy the monthly book discussion group at my local library. I have renewed the political activities that I had to give up in the past. I see friends and family as often as possible. My life will never be what it was while Joe was alive, but I no longer feel the way I did all those months ago right after he died. Despite my expectations, I do feel better. And I hope the same for you. Give yourself time—as much as you need. You will be able to do it.

My best wishes to you,
Margaret

“¿Porqué es que me siento tan culpable?”

Si usted se siente culpable, ayuda bastante admitírselo a sí y a otros que le escuchen y le quieran. Entienda que sentir culpa es una parte normal de la pena y desvanecerá con el transcurso del tiempo:

- Recuerde que usted es humano. Nadie es perfecto. Tanto fué lo que se trató de hacer. Éstas son cosas fuera de nuestro alcance poder cambiar. El aceptar nuestros límites nos ayuda tratar con nuestro sentido de culpa.
- Si usted se siente culpable, pregúntese qué son las cosas que le molestan en específico. Diálogoelo con un amigo confiado o con un profesional.
- Trate de entender que lo que ocurrió, ya pasó. No hay nada que se pueda hacer.
- Trate de entender que lo que ocurrió, ya pasó. No hay nada que se pueda hacer.
- Si el sentido de culpa previene su sanidad, consiga atención profesional. Trate de no sentirse temeroso ni abochornado de relatar sus sentimientos con aquellos quienes han sido entrenados para ayudarle
- Hágase recordar los tiempos especiales que vivió con su ser querido quien murió.
- Recuerde que no siempre hay respuesta a la pregunta “¿Porqué?” y que no hay necesidad de buscar a nadie (ni a sí mismo) que culpar.

Spanish Article Citation:

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Henry Ward Beecher once said:

**“What the heart has once owned
and had it shall never lose.”**

Saturday Matinee – Fifth Season

Movies often carry the most profound images and messages about coping with grief and loss. They can be a mirror to our own lives and help us get in touch with feelings and thoughts that we might not be able to access in the course of our daily routine.

Led by VNSNY Hospice Bereavement Counselors Debra Oryzysyn and Willis Partington, those attending the film series watch the movie, enjoy popcorn and other cinema treats and then talk about what the movie says to them

about coping in bereavement. “Using a movie breaks the ice,” said Ms. Oryzysyn, “making it easier for everyone to explore their own grief.”

The film series was designed to encourage those grieving to come together in a format outside of a traditional bereavement support group. Mr. Partington noted that providing a variety of grief-related themes allows the participants to

explore situations of loss that may parallel or differ greatly from their own. Limiting the workshop to ten people ensures that each person will have adequate opportunity to discuss the movie.

Some of the movies previously viewed by this group include: *God Said Ha*, *Away from Her*, *The Lion King*, *Up*, *Reign on Me*, *My Dog Skip* and *Against the Current*.

The schedule for the 2012 film series is:

1/7–*Get Low*; 1/28–*The Boys are Back*; 2/11–*Rabbit Hole*; 2/25–*Bridge to Terabithia*.

All films are shown at 1:30 PM, on these Saturdays. For more information or to register, call Debra Oryzysyn (212 609-1929) or email Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org, call Willis Partington (718 888-6965), or email e.willis.partington@vnsny.org

To learn more about VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care, go to: <http://www.vnsny.org/hospice>

A Cold Winter's Grief

(Rev.) Paul Metzler, D.Min., VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care, Director of Community Education;
Spiritual Care and Bereavement Care Counselor, Haven

The bereaved often find winter to be strangely satisfying. The cold, the dark, the lifelessness of winter seem to fit. These signs of icy winter reflect the inner emotional reality. The bleakness echoes the deep darkness that often characterizes grief.

A grieving mother once told me she dreaded the return of spring. She did not want plants to grow again or warmth to return to the earth, especially not upon her daughter's grave. She would have been relieved if the snow and ice stayed indefinitely. Winter perfectly suited her inner sense of the darkness of death and the despair of grief.

Emily Dickinson captured this mood when she wrote:

There's a certain slant of light

There's a certain slant of light
On winter afternoons
That oppresses, like the
weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But eternal difference
Where the meanings are.

—Emily Dickinson

While each grief experience is unique, deep "winter-like" emotions are common, understandable, and probably necessary for grief to be fully experienced and expressed.

In his book *Attachment and Loss*, John Bowlby noted that the sadness and depression of loss includes four phases:

1. Numbing
2. Yearning and searching for the lost figure
3. Disorganization and despair
4. Reorganization.

Before reorganization can occur following a loss, it is typical for the griever to go through intense feelings of bleakness and despair. This includes experiencing the numbness which shock creates, the deep feelings of longing for the lost loved one, and the difficulty of re-ordering a life that has been turned upside down by a death.

What can you do to help yourself when you are in deep grief? It is often a combination of times of solitude and times of communication with others that helps. The combination makes it possible to enter into but also to pass through such "numbing" feelings.

You will need the private time of solitude to think your thoughts and feel your feelings. But you also need the time of talking with others to express your feelings and ideas. Grief is less likely to be resolved if the emotions are totally avoided or only partially experienced or expressed. You may find that shared grief is grief relieved.

The "winter-like" emotions might stay beyond their season. Then it may be time to seek consultation with a grief counselor or other professional to help you toward healthful healing. VNSNY Hospice Care bereavement program offers many resources to support you in your grief. Do not hesitate to call upon us.

"deep 'winter-like' emotions are common, understandable, and probably necessary for grief to be fully experienced and expressed."



Visiting Nurse Service of New York Hospice Care Bereavement Services Calendar January-February 2012

All groups and education programs are held at our Manhattan Hospice Office, 1250 Broadway
@32nd, unless noted differently. All are free; registration is required

Bereavement Groups

Men Coping with Death • Manhattan

Mondays • January 9 and February 6, 2012
6:00—7:30 pm.
Willis Partington • 718-888-6965

General Drop-In Bereavement Group • Manhattan

Second and Fourth Tuesdays
January 10, 24 and February 7, 21
6:00—7:30 pm.
John Anderson • 212-760-3146

Grief Recovery Support Group • Staten Island

Tuesday Mornings • January 17, 31 and February 14, 28
10:45 a.m.—12:15 p.m.
1150 South Ave, Suite 303 • Staten Island
Novella Lawrence • 718-370-4305

Saturday Mornings • January 14, 28 and February 11, 25
10:45 a.m.—12:15 p.m.

115 Windsor Road (Near Slosson Ave) • Staten Island
Novella Lawrence • 718-370-4305

Coping with the Death of a Spouse/Partner for Older Adults • Queens

3rd, Wednesday each month • January 18 and February 15
11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 718-888-6965

Coping with the Death of a Spouse/Partner for Older Adults • Manhattan

Tuesdays • February 7, 14, 21, 28 and March 6, 13, 20, 27
11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Debra Oryzsyn • 212-609-1929

General Drop-In Bereavement Group • Manhattan

Fridays • January 6, 13, 20, 27 and February 3, 10, 17, 24
11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m.
Diane Brennan • 212-609-4115

Spanish Bereavement Group • Manhattan

Bi-Weekly Thursdays • January 12, 26, and February 9, 23
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.
Liz Santana • 917-608-7220

Young Adult Loss of a Parent • Manhattan

Wednesdays • January 4 and February 1
6:00—7:30 pm.
Christine Gallagher • 718-536-3187

Teens Healing Together • Manhattan

Tuesdays • January 17, 24, 31 and February 7, 14, 21, 28
4:30 p.m.—6:00 p.m.
Michelle Hamilton • Michelle.Hamilton@vnsny.org

Grief Journaling • Manhattan

Tuesdays • January 17, 24, 31 and February 7
6:00—7:30 pm.
Debra Oryzsyn • 212-609-1929

"Coffee Bunch" Coping with Death • Brooklyn

Last Friday of the month • January 27 and February 24
2:00—3:00 p.m.
Dianna Sandiford • 718-787-3155

Adult Loss of a Sibling Group • Manhattan

Mondays, January 23 and February 27
6:00—7:30 pm.
Christine Gallagher • 718-536-3187

Spousal/Partner Loss Group • Manhattan

Mondays • January 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 27, March 5, 12, 19
6:00—7:30 pm.
Janet King • 212-609-1907

Coping with the Death a Parent • Manhattan

Wednesdays • January 25, and February 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
6:00—7:30 pm.
Pamela Yew Schwartz • 347-831-1811

Loss after Caregiving Support Group • Manhattan

Thursdays • January 19, February 2, 16 and March 1, 15, 29
6:00—7:30 pm.
Diane Brennan • 212-609-4115

Pelkey Grief Education Series

New Year, New Beginnings: Using Art to Imagine the Future

Thursday, January 19
6:00—8:00 p.m.
Janet King • 212-609-1907

Using Music to Work through Grief

Thursday • February 23
6:00—7:30 pm.
Michelle Hamilton • Michelle.Hamilton@vnsny.org

Saturday Matinee

Saturdays • January 7, 28 and February 11, 25
1:30—4:00 p.m.
Debra Oryzsyn • 212-609-1929

Mourning the Death of an Adult Child

Thursday • January 26
6:00—7:30 pm.
Christine Gallagher • 718-536-3187

Grief at Work

Thursday • February 9
6:00—7:30 pm.
Diane Brennan • 212-609-4115

Partner Loss Panel:

Can I develop a loving relationship again?

Thursday • February 16
6:00—7:30 pm.
Janet King • 212-609-1907



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LOOK INSIDE FOR:
JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2012
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

HELPFUL RESOURCES: Recommended Reading



Earl Grollman and Joy Johnson
A Complete Book About Death For Kids
Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation,
2006

The booklet offers parents useful
information and interesting

photographs to help adults and children talk truthfully about death. It is organized in three sections: "Death and Feelings," "Funerals and Cemeteries," and "Cremation." The booklet offer parents or other adults a way to have conversations with children who are dealing with death for the first time or when they are still struggling to understand their responses to a death that may have taken place a while ago.



Phyllis Kosminsky
Getting Back to Life When Grief Won't Heal
New York: McGraw Hill, 2007

This thoughtful book offers hope and encouragement to mourners coping with complicated grief responses. Kosminsky provides stories and insights into the many factors that can block a healthy grief journey. Her compassionate book is very helpful and will give those who are in mourning the confidence that their grief will have a good outcome.



Seasons of Life

1250 Broadway, 7th floor, NY, NY 10001
Editor: The Rev. Vince Corso, M. Div., LCSW,
Manager of Hospice Psychosocial Services
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For more information, please contact
via email: vince.corso@vnsny.org or
call him at 212.609.1905