

May/June 2020

Grief Matters

“Our spirituality connects us to something larger than ourselves; it enables us to find meaning and purpose for our lives.”

On The Journey

There are many ways of coping with grief. In this issue of Grief Matters you will read about how volunteers find meaning in their service to patients and families. Sometimes, because they have had their own experience of grief and loss, people may feel called to help others during this time. They find that volunteering is a way to help others as they continue to work through their own grief.

It may seem odd that something that can be difficult, such as working with dying patients and their families can be so rewarding. However, life is filled with contradictions. When we accept the tension that life is indeed contradictory and live into this knowledge, then we are able to live life more fully.

Living into the contradictions of life--facing the death and the pain that comes with loss--is the only way we can move through the pain in a healthy way and the only way we can work at putting our lives back together again.

We must not deny our experiences of loss. The loss of loved ones also means that there are many kinds of losses that accompany it; the loss of a relationship and companionship, the loss of family income, the loss of the contributions our loved one brought to the family unit, the loss of friendship, plus a myriad of other losses.

There may also be contradictions in how we handle our grief. This is okay. We may at times desire to be alone, not wanting to talk with anyone. At other times we may seek to be with others to share memories of our loved one.

There are contradictions from one day to the next; at some points along the journey of grief we feel at peace, and at other times anxiety may overwhelm us. At times all we may think about is our loss; what we miss about our loved one, how lonely we are, or how much we feel abandoned. At other times we are able to look to the future in hope, believing we will not always feel this way.

Naming and claiming our spirituality is important too as we live into the contradictions of life. We may not think of ourselves as spiritual beings as we go about our day-to-day lives. This occurs because we frequently associate spirituality with the practice of a religion; but whether we practice a faith or not, we are all spiritual beings.

Our spirituality connects us to something larger than ourselves; it enables us to find meaning and purpose for our lives.

It is especially important to recognize how important our spirituality is when we are grieving a loss; to connect with those things that give our life meaning and purpose helps to make it possible to have the strength to continue on.

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On The Journey *(continued from cover)*

Some might find meaning through family members or friends; important relationships with others that give us purpose. Some might find meaning in nature; a sense of connection to the majesty and mystery of our created world, while others find meaning and purpose through faith.

This is all part of the work of grieving. We must mourn our losses so that we might find joy again. In the midst of the pain of loss it is possible to find joy. I would like to share with you the following quote by author Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

To notice your joys instead of minimizing or discounting them is to become joyous. Notice joy, nourish joy, consciously take advantage of your opportunities to experience joy. Joy known over a long period of time takes you beyond yourself, deepening and expanding your mind beyond the boundaries of your disconnections.

Blessings on your journey,

Rev. Kris Abbey

Rev. Kris Abbey
Chaplain, Grief Counselor

How to Honor and Celebrate a Loved One

- Turn a signature (for example "love mom" from a card) or a thumbprint into a necklace. Most jewelry stores can accommodate this like: Sweet Jewelry in Old Town, 517.267.7600.
- Create jewelry from favorite items that belonged to your loved one. A great resource is Kathy at Absolute Gallery in Old Town Lansing, 517.482.8845.
- Create a memory garden or fairy garden to spend time in. Decorate rocks, stencil a poem on a rock and/or plant trees in their honor. Local nurseries and greenhouses can help with planting ideas. A few places are Van Atta's, Lansing Gardens, Cottage Gardens, or Christians Greenhouse.

Volunteers and Grief

When I tell people that I train volunteers to work with hospice patients, they tend to respond with a look of discomfort on their face.

What does a hospice volunteer actually do? What kind of person wants to volunteer in a hospice setting? ... and why?

It's true that most people hope to avoid the reality of this setting, whether they are the caregiver or the patient. But, if hospice care becomes a necessity for your loved one, most people are very relieved to find our caring, compassionate volunteers ready to meet their non-medical needs.

There are many reasons why someone would become a hospice volunteer. Often times, our volunteers have walked through the grieving process already, either personally or as an experienced volunteer. In a strange new environment, they know (and many have experienced) how comforting it is to have someone close by who understands and can provide a sense of peace, and practical support as they navigate this new territory. You will find that our volunteers consider it a privilege to walk with someone on this road.

At the risk of being uncomfortable, they are willing to enter into a difficult situation in order to lend a helping hand to the patient and their family members. Our volunteers are ready to listen, read, play music, perform light housekeeping tasks, or simply be present to hold the hand of a hospice patient. They also provide peace of mind to the caregiver who needs to run errands or take a break from the daily care-giving role. Volunteers also may provide relaxing hand touch/aroma therapy, vigiling services, or help record a patient's life story. Hospice of Lansing, Stoneleigh Residence and Ionia Area Hospice volunteers are willing to make themselves available as a companion to the patient or as an added support to the caregiver during the course of the grieving journey. The volunteer possibilities are as unique as our patients themselves.

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a volunteer for Hospice of Lansing, Stoneleigh Residence, or Ionia Area Hospice please call me at 517-882-4500 ext. 2027. I would be more than happy to answer any of your questions and help you experience the privilege of helping others in need.

Tracie Yurkinas
Volunteer Coordinator

The Pain of Loss

"Watching him suffer was hard. I'm glad he isn't in that place anymore."

"I had no idea I'd be in so much pain now that she's gone. Everything, everywhere, is a reminder of her."

"People ask me how I'm doing, but they don't want to hear the truth. I can't tell them how miserable and lonely I am. They can't fix what I want anyway."

"How can I keep going?"

Sound familiar? Even though each person's grief is unique, there are similarities. Loss puts you on a trajectory to unknown territory. Loss brings on pain- gripping pain. In fact, grief is defined as deep, mental anguish. This anguish can, at times, feel so powerful it can lead to helplessness, uncertainty for what's next, uncertainty for the next day. You might wonder where did my spark for living go? Why do I keep going? These passive thoughts of not wanting to go on with tomorrow are natural. What is not natural is actively wanting to or making plans to take your own life. If this happens to you, call out for help to a professional helper, a friend, a pastor or 911. There is no shame in this.

Rabbi David Wolpe says, "When we experience a loss, a hole opens up inside of us. It is almost as if the loss itself plows rights through us, leaving us gasping for air." When you are engulfed in that degree of pain, no wonder you don't want to feel like that and want to escape. Being comfortable with pain is not something we're accustomed to. Our inclination is to get rid of it, to numb it. This is quite understandable. But doing so inappropriately or haphazardly will only delay a hurt that eventually needs to be dealt with. (Exceptions do occur where a physician deems medication as necessary.)

Ironically, the key to healing is dealing with that pain. After companioning thousands of people over the years, Alan Wolfelt has learned "you cannot go around the pain of your grief. Instead you must open to the pain. ..You must gently embrace the pain. You must honor the pain." He calls this "sitting in your wound." This doesn't mean taking in all your pain all at once. Your body seems to know the dosage you need. While difficult at this time in your life, trust your body to give you what you need. It is a dark time, full of sadness. You naturally slow down to this sadness, turning inward to contemplate the collapse of your world.

You can't have back what you once had. This is scary, but by withdrawing, pushing pause, you are forced to consider who you are and where you are going so you can more fully live again. Know hope waits to be recovered.

This does not mean you heal alone. The grieving process involves mourning - expressing your grief outwardly. Of course you don't want to spill out vital details to everyone who asks, "How are you?" Some people aren't ready to hear about your life, others can't be trusted. But answering, "I could be better," or "It's tough" is acceptable and appropriate. Find people you do feel safe with and share your story. Letting some of the inside be visible releases pain. An untold story increases our agony. When we are heard, we feel validated. When we are understood, we feel encouraged. This helps with seeking the light while going through the darkness-going through the process of grief.

"You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes, you heal because of what you do with the time."

~ Carol Crandall

Joey L.
Bereavement Volunteer

Drop-in Grief Support

Hospice of Lansing/Stoneleigh Residence and Ionia Area Hospice offer free bereavement counseling to community members as well as to families who have used our hospice service.

At this time, we do not have drop-in dates available, but please call the numbers below to schedule bereavement support over the phone.

HOSPICE OF LANSING/STONELEIGH RESIDENCE

3186 Pine Tree Rd., Ste. 1, Lansing, MI
877.882.4500 or 517.882.4500.

IONIA AREA HOSPICE

877.882.4500 or 616.527.0681



Hospice of Lansing
Ionia Area Hospice
Stoneleigh Residence

3186 Pine Tree Rd., Ste. 1
Lansing, MI 48911

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U.S. Postage
PAID
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Permit #575

HOSPICE OF LANSING

3186 Pine Tree Rd., Ste. 1
Lansing, MI 48911
Phone: (517) 882-4500
Fax: (517) 882-3010
www.hospiceoflansing.org

IONIA AREA HOSPICE

PO Box 124
Ionia, MI 48846
Phone: (616) 527-0681
Fax: (517) 882-3010
www.ioniaareahospice.org

STONELEIGH RESIDENCE

3411 Stoneleigh Drive
Lansing, MI 48910
Phone: (517) 882-4500
www.hospiceoflansing.org

Grief Services Online

For information on upcoming grief support meetings and events, visit us online at www.hospiceoflansing.org or www.ioniaareahospice.org.

Mailing List

Please call 517.882.4500 or 616.527.0681 or e-mail kabbey@hospiceoflansing.org if you wish to be removed from this mailing list or if you want to receive this newsletter electronically. Please be assured we do not sell or share our list with other organizations or businesses.

Online Donations

We have made donating to Hospice of Lansing, Stoneleigh Residence and Ionia Area Hospice even easier!

Save yourself the time it takes to write a check and attach a stamp by visiting us at www.hospiceoflansing.org or www.ioniaareahospice.org to make a donation. Please visit our website and make a secured donation today!