



Comfort for the Grieving Heart

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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"What matters is not what life does to you but rather what you do with what life does to you."
~ Edgar Jackson

St. Luke's Hospice

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Everyone grieves alone. No one else has had the relationship to that special person we once did. When we began the relationship — be it a friend, spouse, child, sibling or someone else — we didn't know how long it would last, we couldn't see the laughter and tears, angry exchanges and moments of reconciliation. We shared the adventure of life with our loved one. How closely we experienced things together is almost beside the point, we had a shared experience, and when we no longer have this person in our life because they have died, we cannot recreate that unique joint experience with someone else. When we love, we love each person with a different chamber of the heart. When we lose someone, we have an empty space that is specifically shaped by just us two. We grieve alone because no one else had exactly what we had. They had something special unto themselves. We had something different.

As we mourn a loss individually and, during this pandemic, in much greater isolation, we have an opportunity to relearn ourselves. To re-imagine our relationship, view with fresh eyes our memories of moments together. The good, the bad and the ugly, from that place of separation, a distance due to an event beyond our control that we could not stop no matter how or what we tried.

We gain new perspective on not just the final days of life, but all the days before that. We revisit those times we had together and we retell those stories with a softer definition, a more amused point of view, cherishing the good moments, learning from the more difficult moments and reshaping ourselves based on recollection. How we re-envision ourselves through grief is not a one time event, it is a new path that has never been seen. You make it up as you go. You are going on this voyage of discovery by yourself. Do you want to journal, write poems, cry in the shower? Go ahead. Do you want to paint a room, lay on the couch in your PJs, watch all the sports shows on every channel? That's up to you. How do you want to grow? One day at a time, and some days, one minute at a time. What will we create with what life has done to us?

We have to relearn who we are. We were always the funny one with our special person, or the responsible one, or the second half of the whole. We have been given time to decide if we are in fact going to continue to be the funny one, the responsible one, the whole but with a chunk missing from our heart. How

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will we be doing this? Who do we want to be now? Or more likely, who do we want to be today? Maybe we like being on our own more than we thought we would. Don't judge it, let it be, that's new information. And it might not be what we think tomorrow anyway. Maybe we learn that we are more into the hobbies of our person than we were when they were with us, we find ourselves watching baseball, or weeding the flower bed because that's what the person who has died did. And we like it now because it reminds us of the person we lost. Our loved one changed us, influenced us and now we are different, forever.

Nannette Sell-Parry



How We Grieve: Relearning the World

What do we do when a friend, relative or a loved one dies? If we wish to understand the loss experience, we must learn details of survivors' stories. In *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, Thomas Attig tells real-life tales to illustrate the disruption of life that loss entails. He shows how the griever meets daunting challenges, makes critical choices and reshapes one's life. These examples of coping hold valuable lessons that address the needs of grieving people and those who hope to support them. The book promotes understanding of grief itself, encourages respect for individuality and shows how to deal with helplessness in the face of "choiceless" events.

Grieving is not a process of passively living through stages nor is it a clinical problem to be solved by others. This book demonstrates that grieving is an active process of relearning how to be and act in a world where loss transforms our life. We are challenged to relearn things and places; relationships with others, the deceased, God, and most of all ourselves.

Dirge Without Music

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.

So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:

Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely.
Crowned, with lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains, but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses.
Elegant and curled is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.

I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

~ Edna St. Vincent Millay



A Dozen Things to Do by Yourself

1. Take a walk. Get outside to experience the sights, sounds and smells of nature—the night sky, the fog and the shining sun.
2. Take a shower or a bath. Put on fresh clothes.
3. Deep clean your home. Clean out the refrigerator. Do the laundry. Keeping your spaces tidy and neat calms the mind and increases feelings of accomplishment.
4. Read poetry or stories about friendship or love. Listen to music or sing. Invite beauty to be with you.
5. Sort through your spiritual beliefs. Review the sacred texts and hymns to see them with fresh eyes.
6. Make a scrapbook, a photo album or a vacation memoir. Write about special times and get into the details as you recollect. Create in your own way. Build a bird house.
7. Consider a period of prayer or mediation. Make a spot to honor your loved one with special trinkets and symbolic things. Visit the grave.
8. Write a letter. Thank friends for their support. A few words of gratitude to those who reached out to you can remind you of your connections.
9. Light a candle
10. Make a schedule for yourself, stick to an eating and sleeping schedule. Plan nutritious meals to avoid the pitfalls of bingeing or eating junk food.
11. Give yourself a time each day to solve the issues and problems that have surfaced from the death of your loved one. This will help you not to ruminate all day long of what all you need to do.
12. Use technology you are comfortable with to connect with family and friends, especially those who lift your spirits. Let them know what you are doing to find your way.

Grief Support for You

24/7 Virtual Online Library: We offer online educational videos to help people learn more about grief and how to cope after the loss of a loved one. These short videos can be accessed at any time and include topics such as understanding different kinds of losses, getting through the holidays, caring for yourself when grieving, remembering loved ones and how to observe birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. Check out the dozen of different topics by clicking onto this link: www.slhn.org/griefsupport

Individual Support: Our three grief counselors are available for telephone, video, or in-person (following CDC guidelines of social distancing and masking) counseling sessions to provide support and information. Names and phone numbers of each counselor are listed in the front page of the newsletter.

Drop-In Groups: Drop-In Groups enable participants to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. We currently offer two groups, one group is virtual and the other is in-person. Each group is facilitated by a grief counselors.

Virtual Group: Held the second Tuesday of every month from 4:00-5:30 p.m. For information about connecting with this group, please contact Tara George or Ally Becker.

In-Person Group: The Brodheadsville Group meets in person at the Western Pocono Community Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322 on the third Tuesday of each month from 1:30-3:00 p.m. Participants must socially distance and wear masks. Please contact Ally Becker for more information.

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of the pandemic and physical distancing, many resources are being offered online. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of additional resources.

Adult Support Information

Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. For more information, visit their website at www.bradburysullivancenter.org or contact Reilly at reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support for parents, grandparents and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling. Visit their website at www.thecompassionatefriends.org. Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person nearest you.

Doylestown Hospital Hospice offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit their website at www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement or call 215-345-2079.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions is currently being offered virtually by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Visit her website at www.givinggriefavoices.com or contact her at 610-730-1992 to learn more. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. For more information, call 215-453-4210.

Grief Share is a faith-based grief support group program offered at many locations throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit their website at www.griefshare.org and enter your zip code to find the contact person nearest you.

Grief Support for Substance Related Losses: The Oasis Community Center in Bethlehem provides grief support for adults who have lost a loved one from substance-related losses. They hold both in-person and virtual groups that are led by therapists. Visit their website at www.oasisBethlehem.org for more information.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 610-402-7481 for more information.

Lehigh Valley Home Care & Hospice Pocono's bereavement support is for anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one. For current program offerings, contact Bryson.Boes at 272-762-3826 or via email at Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org.

Suicide Loss: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education and local services. Visit their web site at www.afsp.org and enter your zip code to find the chapter and contact person nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

Support Information for Children

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers support to children between the ages 6 through 17. For more information about program offerings, call 610-402-7481.

Support Information in New Jersey

Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice offers support to those who have experienced the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit their website at www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement