



# Brattleboro Area Hospice Newsletter

January/February  
2012

Brattleboro Area Hospice • 191 Canal Street • Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

## REGRETS OF THE DYING

by Bonnie Ware

Edited from [www.inspirationandchai.com](http://www.inspirationandchai.com)

For many years I worked in palliative care. My patients were those who had gone home to die. Some incredibly special times were shared. I was with them for the last three to twelve weeks of their lives.

People grow a lot when they are faced with their own mortality. I learnt never to underestimate someone's capacity for growth. Some changes were phenomenal. Each experienced a variety of emotions, as expected, denial, fear, anger, remorse, more denial and eventually acceptance. Every single patient found their peace before they departed though, every one of them.

When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again. Here are the most common five:



1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made.

It is very important to try and honor at least some of your dreams along the way. From the moment that you lose your health, it is too late. Health brings a freedom very few realize, until they no longer have it.

2. I wish I didn't work so hard.

This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret. But as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others...We cannot control the reactions of others. However, although people may initially react when you change the way you are by speaking honestly, in the end it raises the relationship to a whole new and healthier level. Either that or it releases the unhealthy relationship from your life. Either way, you win.

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## 2011: A YEAR OF RESILIENCE

From Susan Parris, Executive Director

While each year has its joys and its challenges, I will remember 2011 for two polar experiences: the joyous exuberance and creativity at **Wild Night on the Catwalk**, and the gut wrenching distress of watching the Whetstone Brook pour water and mud through Experienced Goods Thrift Store.

The devastation caused to our store by Hurricane Irene was considerable, and yet only several hours after the flood our managers, Karen Zamojski and Gemma Champoli were busy planning how to address the damage. Their incredible resilience, along with our Shop staff and hundreds of volunteers, allowed us to meet this significant challenge.

Alternatively, I can say without hyperbole that watching the runway show at **Wild Night on the Catwalk** was one of the most exhilarating moments in my 50 years on this planet! I expected a fabulous night, but I was unprepared for this level of extravaganza! Nothing this spectacular could be pulled off so exquisitely without considerable hard work and resilience, for no doubt there were a myriad of challenges that Team Décor had to overcome to create such a dazzling, and indeed, perfect, evening.

This year, my gratitude overflows as I think of all of you who gave both time and money during both our joys and our challenges in 2011. Whenever I become overwhelmed with the chaos and sadness in the wide world, I remind myself of the compassion and generosity of our Hospice community, and once again I know—right here and right now—hope and joy are alive and well in Southern Vermont.

### REGRETS OF THE DYING, *continued from page 1*

#### 4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

Often they would not truly realize the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying.

It is common for anyone in a busy lifestyle to let friendships slip. But when you are faced with your approaching death, the physical details of life fall away. People do want to get their financial affairs in order if possible. But it is not money or status that holds the true importance for them. They want to get things in order more for the benefit of those they love. Usually though, they are too ill and weary to ever manage this task. It is all comes down to love and relationships in the end. That is all that remains in the final weeks, love and relationships.

#### 5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content. When deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again.

When you are on your deathbed, what others think of you is a long way from your mind. How wonderful to be able to let go and smile again, long before you are dying.

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**“EDUCATION IS NOT PREPARATION FOR LIFE; EDUCATION IS LIFE ITSELF.”**

**~ John Dewey**

## **2012 In-service Offerings**

Over the next year, we will offer a variety of opportunities for you to learn as well as to strengthen your bonds with the people involved in carrying out the mission of BAH. We ask that you look over the list of offerings and then commit to attending at least one of the sessions, hopefully more! Generally they will run for ninety minutes to two hours. Watch the newsletter for specific days and times as well as for additional listings or changes. If you have questions, please call Bettina at 257-0775 x102.

*January 31: Movie - “Departures”* In this 2008 Academy Award winning film, freshly unemployed, young cellist Daigo (Masahiro Motoki) has an epiphany in which he realizes he's been heading down the wrong career path. Retreating to his hometown, he trains for a new professional role as a nakanshi, or one who prepares the dead for burial. The story revolves around scenes of the encoffination ceremony, described early on as "preparing the deceased for a peaceful departure." At first frightened by death, Daigo comes to see how his work helps the family and friends of the deceased access and express their grief. He brings dignity and beauty to these intimate moments. Tsutomu Yamazaki provides comic relief as Daigo's eccentric mentor in director Yojiro Takita's richly detailed—if unlikely—drama about finding your bliss. (Subtitled) BAH Upstairs meeting room from 6:30–9:00 PM. Please RSVP by January 30.

*Spring: In-service Training on Boundaries:* The all-encompassing, all-important aspect of relationship known as Boundaries will be the topic of this in-service. Join Muriel and guest presenter Manny Mansbach for this opportunity to consider how challenging boundary experiences are wonderfully ripe chances for personal growth and enhanced self-awareness.

*May 9: HFA Teleconference: End-of-Life Ethics:* The decisions that are made at the end of life affect not only the way that a person dies, but also the ways that survivors face the loss. This program uses a case study approach to examine ethical dilemmas that are likely to arise at the end-of-life, the principles of ethical decision-making and the effects of these decisions on staff and families. Marlboro College Graduate Center 1:30–5:00 PM. Doors open at 1:00 and light refreshments will be served. CEU credits are available.

*June 3 at 1:30 PM: Memorial Planting Service:* Held at the Memorial Garden at Living Memorial Park, this planting service is open to anyone who would like to commemorate the loss of a loved one. Plant something in the earth, decorate a stone to place in the garden and listen to the Hallowell Singers.

*June 7: Hospice and Palliative Care Council of Vermont's Conference:* The Hospice and Palliative Care Council of Vermont's Annual Conference at Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee. This day-long conference offers a number of interesting workshops to choose from. Carpooling from BAH is generally an option.

*June 26: From the Cradle to the Grave: The Parallel Paths of Hospice Volunteers and Doulas:* This evening from 7:00–9:00 you are invited to an in-service that will bring together hospice volunteers and doulas who work at BMH for discussion and exploration of the surprising similarities involved in supporting someone at two of life's most profound moments.

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*July: Art workshop: Visual Journaling with Susie Crowther.* Volunteer Susie Crowther will lead a fun and provocative workshop on Visual Journaling. Visual Journaling is an expressive arts tool for meditation, self-awareness, healing, and grieving. Come create and rejuvenate in the company of other volunteers! No art experience is needed. All materials are provided. Dress comfortably.

*September: Volunteer Appreciation Party: Details to be announced.*

*October: Let's Play – An Evening of Role Playing* (participate or observe): Tonight's in-service will safely set up scenarios to explore the issues that can come up in our volunteering. You are invited to attend this lively evening whether you choose to take on a role or learn by observing your reactions. Who knows... you might just have more fun than you anticipate.

*November: Topic to be announced*

*December: Endings and Rememberings*

Please join us to light a candle and perhaps share a story or a poem. You are welcome to acknowledge the life and death of a client or another loss you may have experienced during this year.

**Sometimes, I Am Startled Out of Myself**

By Barbara Crooker

like this morning, when the wild geese came squawking,  
flapping their rusty hinges, and something about their trek  
across the sky made me think about my life, the places  
of brokenness, the places of sorrow, the places where grief  
has strung me out to dry. And then the geese come calling,  
the leader falling back when tired, another taking her place.  
Hope is borne on wings. Look at the trees. They turn to gold  
for a brief while, then lose it all each November.  
Through the cold months, they stand, take the worst  
weather has to offer. And still, they put out shy green leaves  
come April, come May. The geese glide over the cornfields,  
land on the pond with its sedges and ree  
You do not have to be wise. Even a goose knows how to find  
shelter, where the corn still lies in the stubble and dried stalks.  
All we do is pass through here, the best way we can.  
They stitch up the sky, and it is whole again.

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**Speak Up: Advocating for Your & Your Family's Health Care Quality**  
**Presenter: Gary Hilliard, Case Management Supervisor, Senior Solutions**  
**Monday, February 13, 2012, 6:00–8:00 pm**  
**Location: Brew Barry Conference Center, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital**

Advocating for yourself or a loved one within our health care system can be a challenge. Gary Hilliard, an experienced advocate for seniors in our community, will present an informative session giving tips on how to communicate with doctors and other providers, how to ask for what you need, and the do's and don'ts of advocating for oneself and others. To register for this free session, call 802-257-8877.

## **Grief in a Carton**

By Bettina Berg, Hospice Volunteer & Education Coordinator

The work of Hospice is based on caring for the dying by being attuned not just to physical needs, but also to emotional, social and spiritual needs. Of course these vary from person to person. As someone who might be in the role of supporting someone facing death, we can be most helpful by having considered for ourselves what our fears, apprehensions and expectations are about death. Knowing our own allows us to let another know theirs. A little theory can help. And some humor doesn't hurt.

The Swedish psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler Ross is credited with identifying five stages that we experience when we are dying. They are shock, denial, bargaining, anger and acceptance. Through her research during the 1960's and 70's Kubler Ross found these to be common, even predictable emotions in response to seeing our impending death, though admittedly not everyone experiences each one in this particular order or even at all. We may encounter more than one at a time or return to one that we have felt before (and maybe thought we were done with). It is a process and while acceptance may seem like an attractive place to get to, it is not the goal and cannot be forced. We may experience these same emotions when faced with any big life change; the death of a loved one, a divorce, the loss of a job or home. I would like to suggest that this array of feelings can occur in even the most mundane circumstances.

Because I am the only one in our house who likes orange juice in the morning, I have acquired the habit of drinking it right from the

carton. It saves a glass having to be washed and I think of it as a "green" gesture rather than a sign of laziness. One recent dark morning, in a rather sleepy state, I took my morning swig and ever so slowly realized that what I was consuming was not orange juice but rather the half and half for my coffee. Now, I like half and half. It one of the main reasons that I drink coffee, but in this slow motion realization that what should be citrus was actually dairy, I was fairly disgusted. Perhaps you can see it: this isn't orange juice (shock), sure it is (denial), please let it be and I'll use a glass from now on (bargaining), it's definitely not my juice and I wanted damn juice (anger), okay, that's half and half (acceptance). In this instance acceptance was achieved, and fairly quickly, and I wonder if perhaps we travel these steps more often than we realize.

As for end of life, when we are in the position of companioning someone who is dying or someone dealing with a significant loss, it can help to remember that they may be experiencing one or more of those feelings in relation to their situation and that all we can do is listen and affirm what they are telling us. As much as we would like to think otherwise, we cannot know what another's dying or grief means to them. I suspect that we cannot even fully know our own until it is our time, and as we arrive there, I am betting that none of us wants to be told by another how we should react.

## Brattleboro Area Hospice

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Tom Harris  
Liza King  
Dar Tavernier-Singer

## Calendar

*January 5 & February 6.* Volunteer Report Forms due.

*January 11 & 25; February 8 & 22, Wednesday, 5 to 6:30 pm.* Spouse / Partner Loss Support Group meets the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. Call Elizabeth to register.

*January 9 & 23; February 13 & 27, Monday, 6:30 to 8 pm.* Bereaved Parents Support Group meets the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month. Facilitated by Lynn Martin. Call Elizabeth to register.

*January 17–February 7 & February 21, Tuesdays, 5 to 6:30pm* if there is sufficient interest. A writing and discussion Grief Support Group for adults whose parent, sibling, friend or other cared-for person has died. Facilitated by Elizabeth Pittman. Call Elizabeth to register.

*January 31, Tuesday, 6:30–9:00 PM.* Volunteer Inservice Film & Discussion. More info in this newsletter. Please RSVP by January 30.

*February 2–23, Thursday evenings, 4:00–6:30 PM.* Death and Dying for Beginners class at the Hospice Office. Contact Bettina at 257-0775, x 102.

See the Jan-Feb SEASONS for suggestions about caring for self and others while grieving.

### All of our services are free because of you!

We rely on donations from the community to keep our services free of charge. Help support our work by sending a donation to: Brattleboro Area Hospice, 191 Canal Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301. Thank you!

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