



Brattleboro Area Hospice Newsletter

March 2009

Brattleboro Area Hospice • 191 Canal Street • Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
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From Bettina, Hospice Volunteer & Education Coordinator...

Before I became his volunteer, I knew who he was. Often sitting outside of his room in a chair fitted to his small frame, he stared vacantly, open mouthed, and I wondered what he was seeing. Sometimes he would reach out in a gesture that seemed beyond his control, and sometimes a trickle of saliva would hang from his stubbled chin. I learned to keep tissues in my pocket so that when I passed by I was able to wipe away at least that one indignity. If he reached out, I took his hand and said hello. Sometimes he held on and sometimes he pushed away. Once in awhile he would pull me in as if into a thankful embrace. At least that is what I told myself, because in the face of what I learned was end-stage Alzheimer's disease, it was impossible to really know what was going on inside of this elderly man's gray-haired head. After I became his volunteer, my interactions with him changed little. I spent more time but it seemed unfairly sure that only one of us knew that.

This was not the type of dementia I was familiar with where I could patiently answer the same question repeatedly in a short time or listen to a story over and over, fairly confident that even if the teller did not remember me from visit to visit, she was nevertheless pleased for some companionship.

If you have ever sat vigil with someone near the end of their life, you may have some insight into what is like to attend to someone with end stage Alzheimer's. In a vigil situation, we trust that our presence is making a difference for the dying person. We are there, we are attentive and we help to hold a place so that someone is not alone. As I sat just a few times with my client, I came to realize that those same things were what I could offer him; just my presence and my attention.

There is a poem by Patrick Overton in a folder in my file cabinet which reads:

*When you have come to the edge of all the light you know
And are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown
Faith is knowing that one of two things will happen -
There will be something solid to stand on or you will be taught how to fly.*

When we sit vigil or enter into any new situation with a client, remembering that it is okay not to have answers, remembering that we need to have faith in ourselves and in our clients and in whatever relationship develops or doesn't can be the most important thing we do.



"To every thing turn, turn, turn, there is a season turn, turn, turn, and a time for every purpose"

After great deliberation and meditation, it has become clear to me that it is time for me to turn over the garden coordinator position and the Hospice office groundskeeping to someone else. I have been absolutely delighted working at the garden with volunteers Joan Benneyan, garden liaison to the board, Lee Ha, Cheryl Wilfong, Ann and Doug Switzer, Chris Pratt, Lerna and Mary Rivers. Certainly the Board of Directors' support for a well drained, accessible, attractive memorial space is to be commended.

Since the renovation in June 2007 there have been other significant accomplishments at the garden as well. We have developed a garden committee to address needs such as obtaining supplies:

our own mower now allows us to spruce up the area whenever it is needed. Hospice Garden Vision and Mission statements now offer guidance in discussing the use of the garden. We have a compost system, a mailbox with Hospice literature and a journal for reflections on site. New landscaping rounded out the garden and writings in the newsletter brought the garden into many hands and hearts even if they didn't actually pull weeds or visit the garden.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to have worked throughout the seasons and with many volunteers, weeds, bugs, and plants.

Dig away,

Frances

Your Long Journey

Written by A.D. Watson and Rosa Lee Watson
Sung by Alison Krauss and Robert Plant

God's given us years of happiness here
Now we must part
And as the angels come and call for you
The pains of grief tug at my heart
Oh my darling
My darling
My heart breaks as you take your long journey
Oh the days will be empty
The nights so long without you my love
And when God calls for you I'm left alone
But we will meet in heaven above
Oh my darling
My darling
My heart breaks as you take your long journey
Fond memories I'll keep of happy ways
That on earth we trod
And when I come we will walk hand in hand
As one in heaven in the family of God
Oh my darling
My darling
My heart breaks as you take your long journey

From Elizabeth, Bereavement Care Coordinator...

By the time you get this, it will be sugaring season in Vermont. Though the nights remain cold, the days are warm enough for the sap to flow. At the height of the season, keeping up with emptying the buckets and related chores is an ongoing challenge. It takes thirty-two to forty gallons of collected and boiled down sap to make one gallon of syrup; clearly, a lot of steam has to be released for that to happen!

Sometimes when we're grieving the death of an important person in our lives, we may go through periods of feeling shut down or "frozen" followed by an emotional "thawing" which increases the flow of feelings, of tears, and of memories. Physical labor and activity can be good ways to "let off steam". Grieving on top of keeping up with the basic chores of life feels overwhelming at times. And yet, in working through this process, we may arrive at sweet memories, insights, and understandings.

But just how long does this take? As Molly Fumia in her book *Safe Passage* puts it,

"Grieving takes longer than we want it to. Days, months, even years go by and we discover that the shock waves still reverberate in our scarred spirits, that our grieving is still hesitant, still halting, still sparse of those occasions that are healing. But grief runs by its own clock, and as surely as we sometimes mourn with agonizing slowness, we will leap through other days, making astonishing strides toward recovery."

May this Winter-into-Springtime passage be accompanied by the gentle patience needed from yourself and others to weather emotional as well as atmospheric storms.

Warmly,
Elizabeth

Bereavement can force you to look at your life directly, compelling you to find a purpose in it where there may not have been one before. When suddenly you find yourself alone after the death of someone you love, it can feel as if you are being given a new life and are being asked: "What will you do with this life? And why do you wish to continue living?"

My heartfelt advice to those in the depths of grief and despair after losing someone they dearly loved is to pray for help and strength and grace. Pray that you will survive and discover the richest possible meaning to the new life you now find yourself in. Be vulnerable and receptive, be courageous and patient. Above all, look into your life to find ways of sharing your love more deeply with others now.

~Sogyal Rinpoche

This quote was submitted by volunteer Cheryl Wilfong

For Death

From the moment you were born,
Your death has walked beside you.
Though it seldom shows its face,
You still feel its empty touch
When fear invades your life,
Or what you love is lost
Or inner damage is incurred.

Yet when destiny draws you
Into these spaces of poverty,
And your heart stays generous
Until some door opens into the light,
You are quietly befriending your death;
So that you will have no need to fear
When your time comes to turn and leave.

That the silent presence of your death
Would call your life to attention,
Wake you up to how scarce your time is
And to the urgency to become free
And equal to the call of your destiny.

That you would gather yourself
And decide carefully
How you now can live
The life you would love
To look back on
From your deathbed.

~ John O'Donohue
From *To Bless the Space Between Us*

Brattleboro Area Hospice

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Calendar

March 2, 6:00-8:00 pm. Reiki Circle for practice and questions, for hospice volunteers. Downstairs kitchen, Hospice Office. Contact Rebecca Rueter 254-6232 for questions or more information.

March 5. Volunteer Report Forms due.

March 10 & 24, 5:10-6:00 pm. Silent Sitting, with reading and discussion.

March 11, 12-1:30 pm. Volunteer Gathering to meet Ryan and Muriel, refreshments provided. RSVP: Jennifer at 257-0775.

March 11 & 25, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 4:30-6:00 pm. Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

March 12 & 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays, 6:30-8 pm. Bereaved Parents Support Group. Facilitated by Lynn Martin. Upstairs meeting room. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

March 14, Saturday, 10 am-12 noon. "Second Saturdays" Bereavement Art Program. Facilitated by Elizabeth Pittman and Elizabeth Ungerleider. Drop-ins welcome.

March 17- May 5, Tuesdays, 5:30-7 pm. Eight-Week Support Group especially for those whose parent, sibling or friend has died. Facilitated by Elizabeth Pittman. For 5-8 adults if there is sufficient interest. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

March 25, 5:30-7:00 pm. Volunteer Gathering to meet Ryan and Muriel, refreshments provided. RSVP: Jennifer at 257-0775.

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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