



Brattleboro Area Hospice Newsletter

February 2010

Brattleboro Area Hospice • 191 Canal Street • Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
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My vow is *to be of service*. It serves as touchstone as I live each day. Whenever a choice or dilemma rises, it guides me: pretty straightforward most of the time. Ever so often, especially in my work at hospice, I get thrown off the path. I feel helpless and frustrated that I can't "do more" to make things better. This reaction may be borne of good intentions, but it is problematic. It assumes that I have some kind of power of your situation, that my advice or action can somehow make your troubles go away.

So what am I to do in the face of another person's suffering?

How can I best live my vow? The thing I'm called to practice is "deep listening." To put aside my own concerns about "what to do" and instead give my full attention to what's in front of me. And to listen within, to notice how my own suffering gets aroused by hearing the other's story. That is what's meant by mindfulness: to witness what arises inside and outside of ourselves from moment to moment, in thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

To "just listen" may seem a lame response to suffering, but if my own experience is any indication, it can be a welcome gift. When my heart hurts, when I'm confused or life simply overwhelms me, I seek out a friend or co-worker who I know will listen to me: without judging or advising. Sooner or later, things will become clearer as I hear my own words bouncing in the sound chamber of the other's attentive listening. *From the blog of a Zen hospice worker: "there is no path, paths are made by walking" found at <http://kissing.wordpress.com/>*

IN-SERVICE: THE SIMPLE GIFT OF PERSONAL CARE

Thursday February 11, 2010, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Thompson House on Maple Street in Brattleboro

Light refreshments will be available

Caring for a hospice client can take many forms from listening to light touch to the more intimate work we have come to call personal care. When assisting someone with personal care, which can involve such things as transfers, positioning and simple toileting, it is important to know how to care for another while also taking care of ourselves both emotionally and practically. This in-service, led by Kris McDermet who is an O.T. with over twenty years of experience, will provide a chance to learn and review skills that you may be asked to

use at some point. Even if you are not planning to offer personal care as a volunteer, it is good to remember that unexpected things do occur in life and that having a point of reference can be helpful for you and by extension, for others. We hope you will join us for this lively and valuable class. We will meet in the classroom on the lower level of Thompson House. Enter through the front door and take the stairs or the elevator down. Please RSVP to the office: 257-0775.

FILM RECOMMENDATION

***Departures*, winner of the 2008 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.**

An abridged review from the website www.spirituality & practice.com

Daigo has been playing the cello since childhood and has a job with a symphony orchestra in Tokyo. He is shattered when it is disbanded. He reluctantly admits to his wife, Mika that he has gone deep in debt to purchase his cello. With no other position in sight, he sells the instrument and moves back to his hometown to live in the house his recently deceased mother left to him.

Looking for a new career, Daigo answers an ad to work in “Departures,” thinking it is part of the travel industry. But when he arrives at the office he learns that the ad has a misprint; it should have said working with “the departed.” The company owner, Sasaki, a no-nonsense man of few words, is a master artist of “encoffination”—the ceremonial washing, dressing, and placing of the deceased into a coffin in the presence of the bereaved.

Japanese director Yojiro Takita has created a cinematic masterpiece that is both funny and sad and all the emotions in between. It touches the heart as it depicts the slow process through which a young man comes to terms with his destiny and the abandonment by his father that he still feels. 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. Every gesture in the ritual washing, dressing, grooming, and putting on of make-up is performed with the kind of presence and attention we would associate with the Japanese tea ceremony.

“TIME IS THE MOST VALUABLE GIFT”

by Sarah Rice, Shop Volunteer Coordinator

What is Volunteerism? It’s the act of selflessly giving one’s own time for the benefit of others. It’s lending a hand to someone who needs help. It’s making a difference in the world. It’s making life a little less difficult. It’s culture and education, it’s fearless and heroic.

Being the Volunteer Coordinator here at Experienced Goods gives me many opportunities to meet all sorts of people that have Volunteerism in their hearts. These are your everyday true humanitarians. They come to me in hope of improving the quality of life for those around them in their own community. Volunteering has many benefits: not only does it give you the feeling of self-worth, but it gives you an opportunity to connect with people you may not have a chance to know otherwise. Every little act of volunteering helps. Here at the shop that may range from picking

up donated furniture to sweeping the floor. It all helps make Experienced Goods successful in benefiting Brattleboro Area Hospice. As we enter a new year we reflect on the past years and what volunteerism has meant to us and our community. Let’s take that knowledge forward with us into the years to come as we continue to strive for a better world.

“Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly. It does more than help people beat the odds; it changes the odds.” – President Bill Clinton

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” – Aesop

“Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

Bonnie's Bridge

by Paul Bennett from *Loving Grief*

I came often to Bonnie's bridge, several times a week when I was at my saddest. Being at the bridge still allows me to sink into Bonnie. It's a place where, in the best of circumstances, everything else goes away; I found myself coming to the bridge for the release. I could stand on the bridge and get the sense of being completely with her, a feeling I treasured then and still do. In the best visits, I could come here and just be completely present to what I was holding of Bonnie, how I was holding her, how I was missing her. There was an energy, an alertness in my presence, an openness to everything that was here. Every bird coming along the creek was part of that experience of being here with Bonnie. I had an urge to know this place intimately, season by season. I could stare at the water pouring down through the chute between the two boulders and be completely bound to this place. I was being also, somehow, completely with Bonnie, because this was the place we had dedicated as her place.

So the place embodies the ritual, doesn't it? It's the physical place where I can pay attention to her, and either because Bonnie had the power to arrange it that way, or because I was paying such intense attention to this place, wonderful things happened here. Maybe the gift of rituals is the gift of simple presence.

One day there were tiger swallowtail butterflies that swooped around me and then followed me a half mile along the creek back toward the car. There was the great blue heron that flew over my head one day and on another day stood in the water watching for fish. There was the hawk that flew low over my head one summer afternoon. There is a healing power in the kind of attention

I was paying, in being intensely present to Bonnie's place. There was a healing power in laying everything else down and being with all my feelings, all of my anguish. And being with my fear, if I couldn't lay that down. But fear is really about the future. So if you are really here, right now, really present, you can lay the fear down also.

One Sunday in early September, walking down the road to the bridge, I was practicing seeing things with complete presence, and I was practicing breathing with my hand on my heart, a friend's suggestion for calming myself when my heart is full. As I walked up the road, every tree stood out with its own personality, and I would stop before a tree, riveted, as if I were staring at a gorgeous woman or an ancient magical face. Whole hillsides on either side of the valley seemed vibrantly alive, and I was so present to them that it astounded me. On this magical day I wept for Bonnie, and the people who passed by were practically invisible to me. In this place that we chose to be Bonnie's, life was vibrating around me.

So is creating a dedicated time and space truly all you need from a ritual? Maybe it is. Maybe the gift of rituals is the gift of simple presence: A ritual makes you completely and honestly here, right now. That can bring deep relief from all the stirring around and talking and wrestling that we do with our emotions. If you give yourself the right ritual—something simple like standing on a bridge with water running under you, or sitting in front of a candle with a picture of that beloved person you are never going to see again—it is so simple. There is absolutely nothing for you to do but to be there. And that is a tremendous gift.

This Winter of your life will pass, as all seasons do.
Stay in your season of Winterness as long as need be,
for everything you feel is appropriate.
There is no right way to grieve.
There is just your way.

It will take as long as it takes.

~Rusty Berkus, from *To Heal Again*

Brattleboro Area Hospice

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Experienced Goods

Thrift Shop

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Sarah Rice
Shop Volunteer Coordinator
Hannah Curtin
Ellen Graham
Assistant Store Managers
Christopher John
Jen Reichman
Brandi Lyn Younger
Store Assistants

Experienced Goods

Home Furnishings

Karen Zamojski, *Store Manager*
Karen Abel
Emily Freeman
Tom Harris
Store Assistants

Calendar

February 4, Thursdays, 5:30–7:00 pm. This is the second meeting of a 6-week Writing and Discussion Grief Support Group for Adults; group closes after this week. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

February 5. Volunteer Report Forms due.

February 6, Saturday, 10am–1pm. Altars: Honoring a Loved One, led by Beth Newman. Snowdate: Feb. 13, Saturday, 10am–1pm. RSVP to Shirley at 257-0775.

February 8 & 22, 2nd & 4th Mondays, 6:30–8 pm. Bereaved Parents Support Group. This group meets the second and fourth Mondays. Facilitated by Lynn Martin. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

February 10 & 24, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 4:30–6:00 pm. Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

February 11, 6:30–8:30 pm. In-service: *The Simple Gift of Personal Care*, at Thompson House. More information in this newsletter.

February 15. Hospice office closed for holiday.

February 22. Board of Directors meeting, at the Hospice Office.

SAVE THE DATE: March 24, 2010

HFA Teleconference: Cancer and End-of Life Care at the Marlboro College Graduate Center; 1:30–4 PM with a local panel discussion until 5 PM. CEU's available.

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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