



Brattleboro Area Hospice *Newsletter* July/August 2011

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

FROM HOSPICE FAMILY MEMBER JOHN DONALDSON

Many years ago, at Antioch College, I had a professor whose class I enjoyed a great deal. I remember much from it and used much of what I took from his class in my professional and personal life, but of all the things I remember most it was the words he spoke to our class, "It is far easier to give than to receive." I, being young and thinking of my Christmases and birthdays of the recent past, thought that he was playing the fool. How could this be true? Shopping is hard. Getting is easy. As it turned out, as usual, wisdom trumped youth and perhaps truer words were never spoken: It's in the giving that you receive the gift.

Five years ago I helped my mother, Priscilla Donaldson, move from Weston, Massachusetts, to Brattleboro, Vermont. Last July I noticed that her 83 year-old tiny frame was losing weight. The following November she was diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer and four months later she died in her bed, in her home, with family by her side.

When the diagnosis came, and knowing that she would be unable to care for herself, I knew I would have to be the one to take on the responsibility for her care. Priscilla was a fiercely independent woman. She had lived alone for almost half her life and placing her in a nursing home would have been, to say the least, difficult. Our family decided it would be best for me to move in with her and give her the gift of dying at home.

Yes, it was far better for Priscilla to die at home. It was better for everyone. Most likely it was best for the unknowing staff at the care facility that never had to take Priscilla in, but as I see it now, it was far better for me and my family than I had ever imagined. This is not to say that any step of the journey was easy. It was, without question the most difficult thing I've ever done. The notion of moving in with my mother as a single man with

all the connotation that it brings (should I live in the basement?), the fact that I usually only saw my mother for an hour or two at a time (will I kill her before the cancer does?), and the daunting personal hygiene issues (do I really have to see her naked?) all gave me great pause. There was the added difficulty that during the last weeks of her life she no longer knew who I was, or at times thought that I was her husband, or at others her jailer. The seemingly endless conversational loops, the trips to the toilet (and the day she passed out upon it), and the countless times she repeated words about the paintings on her wall all combined to create a private hell.

Through my giving I received in turn the gift of being part of an immensely humane event. The raw feelings, the smell of the room, the having to attend to the very moment, the sound of the rattle of the breath, the feeling of the hand's last grasp, the saying goodbye and the last I love you, were all intensely human and for all of the pain, for all of the effort, for all of the sadness, I can hold this gift today more happily than one I've ever received.

Taking my mother to death was like climbing a mountain for the first time. The mountain was covered in fog so I never knew how long it would take to get to the summit and it gave away just enough energy for each step to be followed by another. The path was cleared by family, the route planned by Visiting Nurse Association of Vermont and New Hampshire, and the pack carried by Brattleboro Area Hospice. The climb would not have been possible, not even undertaken, if it weren't for the kind offering of these sherpas and if it weren't for them I would not have been bestowed the honor to take the journey or to receive the gift that awaited me at its summit upon the clearing of the fog.

~ John Donaldson, 4/29/11

FROM ELIZABETH, WITH APPRECIATION

June fifth was a fine-weather day for our 14th Annual Memorial Planting Service at the Hospice Garden at Living Memorial Park. More than seventy-five people gathered for planting, singing, and remembrance of loved ones who have died. We are once again indebted to Lerna for accompanying the planting on hammered dulcimer and to Kathy Leo and each and all of the Hallowell singers, who treated us to new and familiar songs.

We are so grateful for all the volunteers who participated: without you the garden and garden service would not exist! In the weeks preceding the service, Hospice Gardener Hilary Farquar and gardening volunteers Karen Davis, Ruth Lane, Wesley Pittman and others prepared the garden. Ann Fielder contacted nurseries for plant donations that several volunteers transported to the garden. Jane Buckingham, Noel Dery, Kris McDermet, Jane Noyes, Mary Quinn, and others baked and brought a variety of delectable refreshments and drinks. Doris Stephens stitched the client-made Remembrance flags that brightly wave over the garden patio.



2011 Memorial Planting Service

On the day of the service, Jane Buckingham, Robin Flatley, Cindy Hutcheson, Lynn Martin, Jane Noyes, Wesley Pittman and Cheryl Wilfong helped before, during and after the service. Elizabeth Ungerleider and Shirley Squires took photographs and several volunteers accompanied clients to the service. I want also to thank Muriel Wolf, Bereavement Volunteer Coordinator, who was initiated into the many pre-, during and post-service details that make participants feel included and welcomed.

The now well-established garden awaits visitors, who come for enjoyment, reflection, picnics, and sharing throughout the growing season with friends and family. If you or a client would like to add a planting in memory of a loved one who has died, please contact Hilary at hmacf@sover.net or 257-1501 or call Elizabeth at 257-0775 x104 and we will help you with placement.

Join us for garden workdays on the first Tuesday of the summer months, July 5 & August 2, 8 am to noon. Weed, mulch and water alongside other volunteers. Bring hand tools and garden gloves. Refreshments provided.

On Saturday, September 10, the day before the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, artist, gallery owner, and hospice volunteer Mary Therese Wright will lead a special "Art Helps the Heart" Wishing Tree project at the garden. Details in the September/October issue.

Letting go doesn't mean we don't care. Letting go doesn't mean we shut down.

Letting go means we stop trying to force outcomes and make people behave.

It means we give up resistance to the way things are, for the moment.

It means we stop trying to do the impossible—controlling that which we cannot—and instead, focus on what is possible—which usually means taking care of ourselves. And we do this in gentleness, kindness, and love, as much as possible.

~Melody Beattie

EGGPLANT

Living as we do, in a place and at a time where the push for farmers' markets and locally produced, organic food and products is at an all-time high, I get a bit of a chuckle in thinking back to my childhood when frozen vegetables were all the rage. While not an important fact in general, for the purposes of this telling, it might help to know that I grew up in Central Ohio in the 60's and 70's. Despite being a fairly agricultural state, the part of Ohio that I called home was small town, suburban. Despite being female, the woman I called my mother was busy, not housebound. The combination was a perfect storm for the ad men of Madison Avenue and the Jolly Green Giant of Minnesota.

While I grew up loving spinach, green beans and squash, I did not know them as anything but frozen blocks in the freezer compartment of the Frigidaire. Their counterparts, peaches, pears and pineapple could be found in brightly colored cans on the bottom shelf of the lazy Susan in the corner of the kitchen. I did know about lettuce. It was called Iceberg and came in a tight, round, crunchy head that got chopped up into bits and was delicious with Kraft oil and vinegar dressing.

My friend Janet and her family vacationed in Canada in the summer and Janet often spoke of asparagus as something that she relished during their time there. I wondered what it was and how it tasted. I was fairly sure I wouldn't like it—you had to pick it, for heaven's sake. Another friend Lila sang the praises of artichokes, a vegetable the likes of which I had never seen when I visited her family in Boston. I begged off by saying that I didn't care for them rather than admit my

ignorance of how I would even begin to eat the spiny thing before me. When asked once to collect some watercress from a walk-in refrigerator, I stood and looked around taking stock of the things I didn't recognize and returned to the kitchen with an eggplant.

So how does any of this connect to doing the work of hospice? To me, it is a reminder that we bring what we know to any given situation. It is easier to be tolerant of my missteps when I remember that my upbringing, my opportunities or lack of them, my culture and my beliefs all influence how I approach and understand a situation. It is a reminder that after eleven weeks of training and several years of volunteering, I cannot know what another person's dying is to them. What I can bring now is curiosity (what does asparagus taste like?) and a willingness to ask for help and clarification (oh, you pick off the leaves of that thing?) in order to try to understand what someone may be saying to me. It is a reminder that I need to be forgiving of myself for not being knowledgeable about everything (so, I've heard of watercress, but I'm going to need a little bit more description here.) It is also a reminder that I may be able to offer another something that has been unknown to them because of their life's path. By listening carefully, I hope to know whether it is eggplant or watercress that is being asked for.

So, summer appears to be here, and soon the local markets and farm stands will be rife with produce for our consumption. I plan to partake fully.
~ Bettina

HOSPICE NEWSLETTER CHANGES

Starting this month, the Hospice Newsletter will be published on a bimonthly basis; this current issue is for the months July/August and continuing on in 2011 there will be September/October and November/December issues.

We encourage readers to share stories, poems, book reviews and quotations through the newsletter. Please email your submissions to info@brattleborohospice.org with "newsletter submission" in the subject line.

THE GARDENS OF EXPERIENCED GOODS...

by Shop Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Rice

It is summertime in Vermont and our gardens are reaching full swing. The lettuce has been producing full tilt, the spinach has already bolted, the carrot tops are getting big, and the zucchini is flowering! With such a short growing period, we have to make the best of the time we get each year. I started some of my seeds inside as early as February. In March some of the cold weather plants went out and I started to get antsy to get everything in and keep digging in the dirt. Over the Memorial Day weekend I made sure everything was in the ground that had to be, which included planting new seeds where others hadn't germinated. I spend every moment I can in the garden, whether weeding, giving a tomato plant better support, sowing succession seeds, or encouraging a pea or bean vine to pole on the intended corn stalk instead of the fencing. Soon I'll be focusing more of my garden time on harvesting.

Much like the garden and Vermont's short summer season, the shop also goes through a brief period of heavy sowing and cultivating. The beginning is in late spring when we are overloaded with donations. The staff sometimes has to turn away donations during this time

to keep the sorting room from reaching its limits! In the summer the staff and volunteers bury themselves in the piles of clothing and housewares, sorting and pricing and at the same time staying aware of seasonal and holiday items that get packed away for their appropriate debut. This allows for the abundance of spring and summer to keep reaping its rewards throughout autumn and winter.

If you visit the shop now you will see how full it is with a large selection of donations from the community. This is when the shop inventory is at full peak. The staff and volunteers are busy bees buzzing around the shop floor tidying, displaying and helping the customers harvest. I happened upon a customer just the other day who said she does most of her holiday and birthday shopping at thrift shops this time of year and packs it away for when it is needed because this is when she finds the most variety. Come fall at the shop we'll be revisiting our own seasonal boxes and bringing them out one by one like jars of last summer's strawberry jam, cans of stewed garden tomatoes and pickled beans.

EXPERIENCED GOODS HOME FURNISHINGS NEW STAFF MEMBER

Another familiar face who has recently joined our team at the Elliot Street Store is Dar Tavernier-Singer, who has been a regular customer at both shops for over a decade now. You may recognize Dar from one of the caricatures featured in our recent advertising campaign, as well as an interview she did with Hannah Curtin that was featured in our July 2008 newsletter. Dar is very excited that her background in art, graphic design, social networking and marketing will be put to good use assisting Gemma & Liza with store displays and merchandising, increasing the shops' online presence with Facebook pages, handling advertising and promotions for both stores, as well as helping to increase and organize furniture donations and pick-ups.

Dar holds Hospice in great esteem from personal experience: the Petaluma, California program helped her and her husband's family through the passing of her mother-in-law, an experience made both manageable and meaningful thanks to hospice's great care and guiding principles, for which she is very grateful. When Dar is not at the shop, she can be found painting and drawing in her home studio, making delicate scrimshaw jewelry pieces for her online shop, or dabbling in the delicious art of chocolate making.

EMBRACING THE MYSTERY OF UNCERTAINTY

A Zen parable captures the mysterious connection between attending to our own consciousness and the external events that enfold us. A respected teacher was asked by members of a village if he could come and bring rain to their dry fields. They had tried many different approaches, including soliciting the help of a number of rain-makers, but still no rain came.

When the teacher agreed to come, he asked only that he be given a small house and a garden he could tend. Day in, day out, he tended his small garden, neither performing incantations nor asking anything further of the villagers. After a while, rain began to fall on the parched earth. When asked how he could achieve such a miracle, he answered humbly that when he came to the village, he sensed disharmony within himself. Each day by tending his garden, he returned a little more to himself. As to the rain falling, he could not say.

The garden is a wonderful metaphor because it suggests that if there is a safe place for something to grow, then harmony may be restored elsewhere. To

care for the soul suggests a return to the self, but a self that interacts with the world around us. Every day we enter situations that are inherently uncertain but still marked by underlying patterns. These patterns may be emotional fields, dry because there is little nourishment or turbulent because of unresolved feelings of anger, disappointment or frenzy. When we come in contact with each other, some aspect of the underlying field affects us. Like the teacher in the story, we can come to recognize the disharmony in ourselves and begin to make a place where the particulars can be tended. Yet to embrace the idea that our own consciousness is influenced by and influences what is around us, we must honor the overlap of self and other. We must look for unity of what happens and how it happens as inseparable from each other, without forcing a causal link to explain the occurrence.

~Alan Briskin

Half on the Earth, half in the heart,
the remedies for all the things
which grieve us wait for those who
know
the words to use to find them.

Penobscott people used to make
a medicine for cancer from Mayapple
and South American people knew
the quinine cure for malaria
a thousand years ago.

But it is not just in the roots,
the stems, the leaves,
the thousand flowers
that healing lies.

Half of it lives within the words
the healer speaks.

And when the final time has come
for one to leave this Earth
there are no cures,
for Death is only
part of Life, not a disease.

Half on the Earth, half in the heart,
the remedies for all our pains
wait for the songs of healing.

~ Joseph Bruchac

Brattleboro Area Hospice

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Experienced Goods Thrift Shops

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Karen Zamojski, *Store Manager*

Sarah Rice

Shop Volunteer Coordinator

Ellen Graham

Assistant Store Manager (on leave)

Store Assistants Flat Street

Christopher Gabriel

Christopher John

Jen Reichman

Store Assistants Eliot Street

Karen Abel

Tom Harris

Liza King

Dar Tavernier-Singer

Calendar

July 4. Office closed for holiday.

July 5. Volunteer Report Forms due.

July 5 & August 2, *Tuesday, 8am–12 noon*. Hospice Memorial Garden Work Bee. The First Tuesday of each month. Bring gloves and hand tools. Work with Hospice Gardener, Hilary Farquar and alongside other garden volunteers. Refreshments provided.

July 6 & 20; August 3 & 17, *Wednesday, 5:30 to 7 pm*. Suicide Loss Support Group meets the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Facilitated by Andrea Edwards. This group is co-sponsored by The Samaritans, Inc. www.samaritansnh.org

July 11 & 25; August 8 & 22, *Monday, 6:30–8 pm*. Bereaved Parents Support Group meets the second and fourth Monday of each month. Facilitated by Lynn Martin. Call Elizabeth to register.

July 13 & 27; August 10 & 24, *Wednesday, 5:00–6:30 pm*. Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group meets the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. Call Elizabeth to register.

July 18 & August 15, *Monday, 5:30pm*. Board of Directors meeting.

Also see summer issue of SEASONS for other Bereavement Support activities.

Save the date: Annual Volunteer Appreciation Party: Thursday September 1 from 6:30–8 at the Kiwanis Shelter, Living Memorial Park, Brattleboro.

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!

Return Service Requested

Brattleboro, VT 05301

191 Canal Street

Brattleboro Area Hospice

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