



# Brattleboro Area Hospice *Newsletter*

March 2010

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## ON GIVING AND RECEIVING

In my volunteer time with a Hospice client I'm often struck by how much I receive from my client, relative to how much I give to him or her. I sometimes reflect on this after specific visits, and it's now becoming a regular part of the Case Experience Summary review that I do after my time with the client ends.

The last person I volunteered with was a remarkable person in many ways. In our first few times together he gave me a portrait of a life that stretched in many directions despite his limited education as a young man. Talents he developed were in playing the keyboard, learning French, German and some Chinese, and cooking. In facing numerous challenges, he taught me what persistence and perseverance mean. He demonstrated the importance and richness of meaningful personal relationships, in his case with some family members and a few longtime friends. Perhaps most significant, he let me see how a crippling terminal disease can be accepted and lived with in positive and creative ways. He knew what he was able to do, and to the extent possible, he engaged with life in many ways.

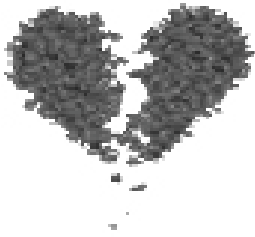
Reflecting on what I gave him, companionship and a listening ear first come to mind. Another

volunteer and I helped him go to some places he wanted to go. I gave him some tapes of music he liked and made copies for others of his keyboard music tape. I also gave him some favorite chocolate and grape juice, read to him from Stephen Levine's book *One Year to Live*, and at his request contacted some friends who no longer came to see him but whose relationship he valued. I wrote him a parting letter when it looked like he would be leaving the Brattleboro area to live with a family member in another community. In this letter I told him that I hoped "there would be wind behind his sails, a fresh breeze in his face, and openness to the life present for him now and beyond." With his death this hope is felt all the more keenly in the new "dimension" he told me he was going to.

Our relationship was very definitely reciprocal, with each of us giving to and receiving from the other. He enriched and deepened my life and I contributed what I could to his life in his last months and days. This for me is what Hospice care and caring are all about.

Bill Schmidt  
1/25/10

## ART EXHIBIT MY HEART BROKE OPEN *On the themes of death, loss and grief*



Opening on Gallery Walk April 2, 2010 5:30–8:30 pm  
*The Blue Moose, 29 High Street Brattleboro*  
Open to the public through the month of April

As long as we have been able to communicate, we have gathered—around fires and kitchen tables, on porches, in darkened theaters—sharing our joys and our sorrows with others. There is a healing power in revealing your experience, in being heard and witnessed. And there is in each of us an equally primeval need to be taken outside of our own skin and look through the eyes of another. This art exhibition is an opportunity for our community to share a hospice story or personal experience of grief and loss through visual art.

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## **LIVING WITH GRIEF: CANCER AND END-OF-LIFE CARE**

### ***Hospice Foundation of America's 17th Annual Bereavement Teleconference***

**Wednesday, March 24, 1:30–5:00 PM**  
***Marlboro College Graduate Center, 28 Vernon St. (Rte 142 South), Brattleboro***

HFA's 2010 Teleconference will address care options related to cancer diagnoses as well as loss and grief reactions for patients, families and professional care-givers. The teleconference, will also examine psychosocial aspects of cancer, pain management, and ethical issues related to the disease.

Doors will open at 1:00 and light refreshments will be served. The live telecast runs from 1:30pm until 4pm. Following the teleconference, participants will have the chance to ask questions and engage in conversation with a panel of local

professionals who have experience in the community working with cancer patients and their families.

This program is free and open to the public. The Graduate Center is located on the second floor of the Technology Center next to the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center. As seating is limited, call Brattleboro Area Hospice at 257-0775 to register for this event.

**Co-sponsored by Brattleboro Area Hospice and Marlboro College Graduate Center**

## **BEREAVEMENT PROGRAM TRANSITIONS**

*Melissa writes:*

In June I will have been at Brattleboro Area Hospice for 6 years, I will turn 62, and the time is right for making a change. I will be finishing my work here and moving on to... who knows what?! My time here and my relationships with the volunteers and clients have been an important part of my life, and I will leave with many memories and lessons. In the April newsletter I will elaborate on some ideas I'll be exploring "post-BAH". I'll also say a little about some projects I'd like to complete here before I leave, some of which could involve some volunteer help.

*Elizabeth adds:*

Melissa will be missed! She has kindly given such generous notice that, for now, if you are interested in applying for this position, call Shirley on or after March 22 for the job description. The Bereavement Volunteer Coordinator position will then be advertised in the Reformer on or after March 27. Further appreciations and reflections on her tenure here will be in upcoming newsletters.

## **HOW CAN I HELP WHEN A LOVED ONE IS DYING?**

**Monday, March 8, 6:00 pm–8:00 pm**

**Brew Barry Conference Center, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital**

***Presented by Dan Caloras, MD, Family Physician and Medical Director for VNA & Hospice of VT/NH; along with Heidi Smith, RN, Community and Facility Liaison of VNA and Hospice of VT and NH, Ryan Murphy and Muriel Wolf of Brattleboro Area Hospice***

**A**t some time in our life we may be at the bedside of a family member or friend who is actively dying, whether at home, in a nursing home or in a hospital. This session is for those of us interested in learning what is happening in the final days, and how we can be most helpful to the person who is dying. It may be particularly helpful for caregivers, family members and friends of people

who are ill and may be nearing the end of their lives, but anyone who wants to prepare for this possibility will find the information helpful. Dr. Caloras will show a video clip and lead a discussion on caring for and supporting individuals in the last days of life. Register for this free session by calling 802-257-8877.

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## HALLOWELL NEWS

After seven years of singing for the Brattleboro community, sharing our songs at many bedsides among loving and welcoming families, we are producing our second CD, *Love Call Me Home*. Our first CD, *Angels Hovering Round*, has found its place in many neighboring homes and throughout the country. The stories that come back to us about how our music has held, soothed, quieted and comforted many families in their time of grief or how it was the last thing a dying mother heard as she took her last peaceful breaths surrounded by loved ones, are too numerous to write. The CD arrives when we cannot. It stays with the families after the singers have visited, anointed and departed to keep offering the soothing sounds of Hallowell's songs and spirit. Often, we gift our families with a CD after we sing. Sales of our CDs also keep us funded just enough so we are able to pay for rehearsal space, copies, travel expenses, etc.

There have been many requests for another recording as our repertoire has grown over the years. The timing feels right for *Love Call Me Home* to follow *Angels Hovering Round* as another

gift we can share with hospice patients and their families. We continue to be a volunteer not-for-profit, organization. Although we are supported in many ways by Brattleboro Area Hospice and the community we serve, we would appreciate financial help to fund this next CD project. If anyone is looking to donate to a local project, we would be grateful for any help.

If you are so moved to help us out with this project, please send your donation to Brattleboro Area Hospice, 191 Canal Street Brattleboro, VT. 05301. Attach a note saying that your donation is specifically for Hallowell. Thank you for any donations or any ideas about how we might raise some funds for our project. And be sure to call on us for songs and spirit any time we might bring some joy or comfort to you or your loved ones.

My personal contact is:

Kathy Leo 802-463-4563. kleo@sover.net.

Our website is: [www.hallowell-singers.org](http://www.hallowell-singers.org)  
With many blessings and gratitude to all.

Kathy Leo  
Coordinator of Hallowell

## APRIL IN-SERVICE: BOUNDARIES AND THE VOLUNTEER'S ROLE

Wednesday April 7, 2010, 5:00 – 6:30 PM

BAH Upstairs Meeting Room

Have you ever found yourself in a situation in which you were witness to someone going over a boundary limit and wondering how to help rein it all back in? Or perhaps you have wondered if what you want to say or offer to a client or their

family is appropriate. Our role in helping families to maintain healthy boundaries is a rich area for discussion and discovery. We hope that you will join us. To RSVP please call the office at 257-0775.

## BEREAVEMENT VOLUNTEER PEER SUPPORT MEETING

Friday, March 19, 11:00 am -12:30 pm

BAH Upstairs Meeting Room

In January, four Bereavement Volunteers got together with Melissa for a brown bag lunch and an hour or so of mutual support. Volunteers had an opportunity to describe their assignments, ask for suggestions for particular situations, and share some "success stories". We agreed that the

time together was productive, and the volunteers felt that such a meeting every other month would be helpful. If you would like to attend the next gathering, please call Melissa at x108 to let her know.

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## THE SLOW TIME

By Ellen Graham, Experienced Goods Assistant Manager

Ah, midwinter. The hustle of the holidays is past, the New Year has come and most minds have turned to thoughts of future gardens and warm vacation destinations. The pace of life seems to slow this time of year, as the cold and dark encourage us to stay in, cozy up and relax. Hibernation seems tempting.

At the shop, we have reached what we call “the slow time”, the midwinter lull. Recent visitors to the shop may have noted that the space is looking especially clean and spare, in contrast to our usual controlled chaos. “Where’s all the stuff?” a customer asked me today. The answer, simply, is that it is waiting to be donated.

The slow time is when our mountains of donated goods shrink to mere foothills. This is not to imply that the flow ever really stops, rather that the nature of donations changes. Our regular shoppers bring a bag or two when they stop by to browse, people move and downsize or bring in that box of stuff that has been riding around in the car since November. But the supersized donations, the carloads and housefuls that we are blessed with the rest of the year are less common. I know that when faced with the choice of cleaning out my basement or enjoying the limited daylight by

taking my dog for a long hike in the lovely winter woods, fresh air and fun are going to win every time. Maybe this weekend will be different, but I doubt it. At this time of year, I believe it is important to keep ourselves energized as best we can. So we ski, snowshoe, swim in the indoor pool, plan trips near and far, enjoy the company of family and friends and generally fend off the dreaded winter doldrums.

At the shop, we take advantage of the decreased amount of donations by tackling projects, cleaning and organizing our retail, work and storage areas. Many of these tasks would be difficult or impossible at any other time of the year. It is with satisfaction that I sweep areas that are usually buried under heaps of donated goods. We enjoy having the breathing room to explore and play with the store, having the leisure to take a critical eye to what works and what could stand improvement.

And we wait, knowing that soon enough, like crocuses poking through the snow, the donations will return. The days will get longer and lighter, encouraging donors to throw open the window, air out the house, and get down to some serious spring cleaning. We’ll see you then!

"A great religious tradition does not deny the pain of loss. In the words of the Kotzker Rebbe, 'The only whole heart is a broken one.' No awake spirit can move through this world without enduring a broken heart. There is nothing real that makes life painless. Accepting the pain of living, knowing one's heart will—and should—be broken, is the beginning of wisdom."

~David Wolpe in *'Making Loss Matter: Creating Meaning in Difficult Times'*

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## **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.

## Brattleboro Area Hospice

### Board of Directors

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### Experienced Goods

#### Thrift Shop

Gemma Champoli, *Store Manager*  
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*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

*March 3,10,17,24, Wednesdays, 4–5:15 pm.* Good Grief Group for 8-10 year-olds. Facilitated by Elizabeth Ungerleider.

*March 5.* Volunteer Report Forms due.

*March 8, Monday, 6:00–8:00 pm.* How can I help when a loved one is dying? Free presentation about what happens in the final days before death by Dan Caloras, MD, Family Physician and Medical Director for VNA & Hospice of VT/NH. More info in this newsletter.

*March 8 & 22, Monday, 6:30–8 pm.* Bereaved Parents Support Group. This group meets the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Facilitated by Lynn Martin. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

*March 10 & 24, Wednesday, 4:30–6:00 pm.* Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group meets the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. Call Melissa or Elizabeth to register.

*March 19, Friday, 11 am–12:30 pm.* Bereavement Volunteer Peer Support Meeting.

*March 22, Monday, 5:30–7:30 pm.* Board of Directors meeting, at the Hospice Office.

*March 24, Wednesday, 1:30–5 pm.* HFA Teleconference: Cancer and End-of Life Care. More info in this newsletter.

*April 2, Friday, 5:30–8:30 pm.* My Heart Broke Open Art Show opening at Blue Moose, 29 High Street during April Gallery Walk. More info in this newsletter.

*April 7, Wednesday, 5:00–6:30 pm.* In-service: Boundaries and the Volunteer's Role. More info in this newsletter.

### 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

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