



Brattleboro Area Hospice *Newsletter* September 2007

Brattleboro Area Hospice • 191 Canal Street • Brattleboro, Vermont 05301
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The Night Companion

by Tom Spencer

Tending the flowers
at my brother's grave:
the wiry strands of grass
snap
as I rip them from the soil.
Scraping against the earth
dulled fingers scavenge for roots
like blind snakes
anxious to slip their skins.
With the last blade dispatched
I stand, panting, ready to go,
but it is too late.
My hands were my heart's distraction-
released from their task,
they return to his shoulder,
his brow,
brushing past the tangle of tubes
and wires that hang beside the bed.

*Would you like some water?
Should I get the nurse?*

A crow caws- its throat a vortex
that drains the color from the sky.
I freeze,
a trembling memorial
between the stones.

It's me; I'm right here beside you.

Humming with hair-trigger machines,
that last sleepless night
reappears-
a glaring apparition
projected through time.

I'm right here...

An avalanche of images
crackles down my spine.
In a panic,
the rhythm of my retreat
pounds against the cemetery drive.
But then,
from the tall grass beside the road,
an explosion-
as a deer rises up and leaps into the woods.



When my breath returns,
new images gently eclipse the old:
the deer's silhouette on a cloudless night-
a solitary trail through the dew,
watchful eyes, fine-tuned ears,
and delicate legs
tucked
beneath velvet flanks
nestled by my brother's grave.

*"It's me; I'm right here beside you.
I'm right here."*

From Beth...

At the beginning of August, I resigned as Hospice Care Coordinator here at BAH. There are many reasons for this, but none speak to the joy it has been to meet and work with each of you. Whether we only ever met by phone or in person, in meetings or gatherings, you all have been so incredibly generous and kind; and such beautiful teachers! Your spirit, thoughtfulness, attention and compassion have been truly inspiring, and will continue to inform my journey.

With gratitude and joy for the incredible fortune I feel I have had these last 20 months,



I want to thank each of you for being part of my experience and our area's care. I will deeply miss being part of this community, and the work you do. I hope that in some way, I will hold that connection through my own work, through knowing each of you, and through the gifts you will continue to provide.

May the quality of our attention in all we do, keep us all connected and in service to one another.

Thank you for everything.

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror up to where you're bravely working. Expecting the worst, you look, and instead, here's the joyful face you've been waiting to see. Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes. It if were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, the two beautifully balanced and coordinated as bird wings. ~Rumi

There is a Practice for Connecting with Suffering—

ours and others. "It is a method for overcoming fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our heart" writes Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun. "Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is intrinsic in all of us. It is very simple.

This is the core of it: breathing in other's pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open, and breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness. You may notice this isn't as easy as it sounds. Then, as you notice this, you change the focus to yourself, and do this practice for what you

are feeling and for millions of others just like you who at that very moment of time are feeling exactly the same. Just contact what you are feeling and breathe in, take it in— for all of us, and send out relief to all of us.

We begin to feel love both for ourselves and others and also we begin to take care of ourselves and others. It awakens our compassion and it also introduces us to a far larger view of reality. Breathe in for all of us and breathe out for all of us. Use what lies within you as the path to compassion for all beings."

Good Grief Program for Children and Teens

BAH sponsors 8-week groups 2-4 times a year for various age groups in different Windham County settings. Recently, groups for 8-10 year olds and for teens have been held at the hospice office, at Leland and Gray in Townshend and at Insight Photography. Using a range of activities—drawing, sculpture, collage, photography, writing, movement and music—participants find safe, creative ways to understand and express their feelings of grief while meeting

others their age that have had a similar experience. Elizabeth Ungerleider facilitates these free-of-charge sessions. Call Elizabeth Pittman 257-0775 x104 or Melissa x108 if you or someone you know would like to be in a group or wants further information.

!!New Teen SEASONS!! Call to request a copy or stop by the office or Experienced Goods and pick one up.

From Gratefulness.org...

“Can you help me understand how to be grateful for and enjoy that which is so “right” in life, when those I love are suffering? My family / friends have serious health problems (end-of-life, cancer, liver damage), and I find feel guilty about having a nice meal, walking or driving somewhere, being free from physical pain when these loved ones are confined to a hospital bed or stuck in an apartment with no way to get out. Yet sometimes they refuse my offers to take them for an outing. What can I do? What is appropriate to honor them and love my life? — Mary C., Kentucky

Dear Mary,

All your resources are being called upon daily. To refuel from time to time so that you can love your life is nowhere near selfish...it's essential!

Throughout the ages wise, caring people like you have noticed how mysterious and poignant and beautiful the weaving together of ease and suffering is in our lives. Even those in the worst pain have moments when a surprising wave of gentleness lightens their burden, while those who seem to have everything one could desire have been pierced by a feeling that this couldn't be all there is to life. Comfort and pain are more like a single, circular brush stroke than like polarities. It is your relative comfort that allows you to support the people you love, while it is their suffering that reminds you of your own mortality and of the gifts of the present moment. Beyond either of these two states – comfort or suffering – is an awareness that allows room for each of them, without judging that one is preferable.

When you orient yourself in that awareness, you can clearly see that it's not unkind to others to go for a walk or enjoy a meal or have the marvelous mobility of driving. These acts are simply a way of living your life fully. There's no way around it: What awaits you is the need to live your own life,

which is at once distinct from the lives of those around you and yet which has countless aspects in common with others. What other life than your own, after all, can you live?

And yet, it's as if a tightly closed fist needs to open in order to let go of the guilt of having a life full of grace. That's the opening to gratefulness. You can see in your own life this grace: all the freedom to enjoy and – even more importantly – to be. When you live out of that great fullness, it communicates directly to those around you as blessing. No need to explain, to yourself or to them, why you are walking and they are in bed, why you feel well and they are dying. These “whys” have no answers. If the tables turn and you find yourself in bed, you can still walk that path of open acceptance. Even when you are suffering you can discover what's worth learning from your present circumstances and how grace inhabits even the roughest terrain.

The very nature of your question shows that you're already giving depths of love and care to those around you. When you need to drive somewhere and a loved one does not want to or cannot come with you, you use your best judgment about how to balance these two different needs. Sometimes you will see that you need to stay with them after all; sometimes you will know that getting fresh air and a different view will make you all the stronger and kinder for being with them again later. The better you take care of yourself and consider your own needs as no more and no less important than those of anyone around you, the more you will be able to clearly see what response a given situation calls for. Take one step back as if you are viewing the whole scene with yourself in it, and you will be able to see more easily how this mysterious whole, ease and suffering alike, flows together.

With deep regard,
Patricia Campbell Carlson



SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE
Hospice Memorial Garden
Living Memorial Park, Brattleboro
A non-sectarian service including:
♥Bulb & Flower Planting ♥Music ♥Dove Release
Sunday, September 9th, 1:30 pm

Brattleboro Area Hospice

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Calendar

September 4. Volunteer Report Forms due.

September 4, Tuesday, 8-10 am. Garden Work Day. Help us get the Hospice Memorial Garden in shape for the Annual Service of Remembrance.

- (Please note this is a change from the Sept. 5th date that was announced in the August Volunteer Newsletter.)

September 10, 17 & 24, Monday, 6:30-8 pm. Loss Writing Support Group. Facilitated by Muriel Winter Wolf.

September 4, 11, 18, 25, Tuesdays, 12:15-12:45 pm. Quiet sitting at Hospice Office. Information: 257-0775.

September 13 & 27, Thursday, 6:30-8 pm. Bereaved Parents Support Group. Facilitated by Ami Maglin.

September 9, Saturday, 1:30 pm. Annual Service of Remembrance, Hospice Memorial Garden at Living Memorial Park.

September 12 & 26, Wednesday, 4-5:30 pm. Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group. Facilitated by Cheryl Richards. •Please note this group may switch to Thursdays, so call if you're coming for the first time.

September 17, Monday, 5:30 pm. Board of Directors Meeting, Hospice Office.

September 24, Monday, 11 am-12:30 pm. "Long Lunch Break" Support Group. Facilitated by Helen Schepartz. A NEW eight-week support group beginning, if there is sufficient interest.

Coming in October!

- Saturday, October 6th, 7:30 pm: Marta Gomez Quintet brings Latin rhythms back to Brattleboro! A fundraiser for Brattleboro Area Hospice at the New England Youth Theater.
- Beginning in October, Safe Place—a confidential and anonymous support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. Facilitated by trained volunteers from Samaritans, an organization that addresses suicide issues. Call 357-5510 for more information or to pre-register for group meetings.
- October 15, Monday, 7-9 pm. Video Showing and Discussion, Brew Barry Conference Center, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital. Elizabeth Pittman will show "The Pitch of Grief" and facilitate the after-video discussion, sharing information about variations in grieving and about available bereavement support services. Call Jennifer to register.

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Brattleboro, VT 05301
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