

November
December
2010

Seasons

Brattleboro Area Hospice
Bereavement Newsletter



Handling the Everyday and the Holidays

Managing the everyday *and* handling the holidays can be challenging after the death of a loved one. Because holidays are often family times, this time of year can particularly underscore your loved one's absence. Recognize that what you decide for this year can be changed next year; you can move on to something new or back to the old way. Decide what is right for you and your family *now*. Ask yourself and your loved ones what is important for you to make your holidays meaningful and bearable. Then, through compromise and negotiation, see if everyone can get some of what he or she wants and needs. Give-and-take is important here.

Discuss the everyday and holiday tasks and responsibilities that need attention: preparing meals, shopping, decorating the house. Consider whether they should be continued, reassigned, shared, or eliminated. Break down your goals into small, manageable pieces that can be accomplished one at a time. Don't be forced into doing things you don't want to do or don't feel up to solely to keep others happy. Look at your plans and ask what they indicate. Are you doing what you want or are you placating others? Are you isolating yourself from support or are you tapping into your resources?

Recognize that the holidays are filled with unrealistic expectations for intimacy, closeness, relaxation, and joy for all people—not just for the bereaved. Be aware that pressures, demands, depression, increased alcohol intake, and fatigue can come with the holidays. As a bereaved person, your resources for dealing with these challenges are limited. So, especially during this time, remember to care for yourself with kindness.

Think about including rituals that symbolize your memory of your loved one. A candle burning at Thanksgiving dinner or on New Year's Day may help you, your family, and friends commemorate your deceased loved one in a meaningful way at special gatherings. You may also find yourself reminiscing about other holidays you shared with this person you're missing. This is normal. Let the memories come. Talk about them. Facing family holidays in your loved one's absence are normal mourning experiences and part of the healing process.

Let your tears and sadness come and go throughout the day if necessary. Unexpressed tears and emotions can be destructive to you. [Conversely] having some fun at the holidays does not mean you don't miss your loved one. It is not a betrayal. You must give yourself permission to have joy when you can just like you must give yourself permission to mourn when you have the need.

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Facing Challenges in the Holiday Season

To face the first holidays after a death is to face your pain, [but] sometimes there is healing power in the holiday itself, for the predominant religious holidays of Western culture are about hope. Passover celebrates liberation from bondage and compassion for all who are oppressed. Easter affirms life that comes through death. The Jewish High Holy Days invite confession, purification, reconciliation, and atonement in the context of community. Thanksgiving is just that—a day set aside to give thanks. While it does not belong to any religious tradition, it honors the sacred. In the words of an ancient sage, Philo Judaeus, “The grateful soul of the wise person is the true altar of God.” Gratitude heals a wounded soul. The lights of Hanukkah illuminate the dimmed recesses of the human spirit with miracles wrought by faith and love. Christmas, beneath its tinsel trimmings and commercial overlay, invites us to be present to one another and to receive the humble gift of a child of peace and love. As grief renders the holidays more painful, the holidays can render grief less potent.

~From *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death* by Sarah York

Ten Tips for Getting through the Holidays when You're Grieving a Loss

1. Eat well. Drink plenty of water. Cut back on sweets, alcohol, and caffeine.
2. Exercise. It reduces stress and reduced stress generates a feeling of control.
3. If you accept invitations to parties and dinners, ask permission to be tentative. You're grieving and some days are better than others.
4. Either observe holiday traditions or ignore them. The choice is yours. If you observe them, realize they will be different this year. If you ignore them, realize it's not forever.
5. Give gifts or don't give gifts. Good friends and loving relatives will understand. If you do give gifts, make it easy on yourself: use mail-order, buy gift certificates, or give food.
6. Decorate or skip it this year. It's one less chore in January.
7. Accept help. Tell people you could use some help writing cards, buying gifts, or cooking.
8. Memorialize your loved one. Light a candle, make a decoration, hang a special ornament, bring a wreath to the cemetery.
9. Help others. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or visit the lonely.
10. Plan a January celebration. Reward yourself for getting through the holidays. Buy tickets to a play, plan a trip, or visit a friend. It will give you something to look forward to.

Hospice Lending Library



The Library at our 191 Canal Street office has a collection of over 650 books, CDs, DVDs, and audio or videotapes for all ages. Browse and borrow during office hours Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm. Books quoted in this issue are available for checkout.

Two books recently added to our library, one for children and another for adults, are: *Good Grief: It's Sky Blue Pink: A Musical Book about Loss, Grief, and Memories* by Toni Griffith and *let's take the long way home: a memoir of friendship* by Gail Caldwell.

The Good Grief Program for Children 9-12 years old

meets monthly on the third Wednesday, 4-5 pm, November 17 & December 15, 2010

Using a range of activities- drawing, sculpture, collage, photography, writing, movement and music- participants find safe, creative ways to explore questions, thoughts and feelings while meeting others their age that have experienced the death of a significant person. Elizabeth Ungerleider facilitates these free-of-charge sessions held at our 191 Canal Street office. Note: Groups can be offered in a school setting, if four or more children from the same school are interested. **To register** or for further information, call Elizabeth Ungerleider at 258-0763 or Elizabeth Pittman at 257-0775 x104.

Bereavement Support Activities

Bereavement Support Groups offer a safe, mutually supportive environment for sharing experiences, feelings, insight and encouragement through discussion, handouts, and suggestions for writing. Groups are free of charge and meet at our 191 Canal Street office. Please call Elizabeth, Shirley, or Winnie at 257-0775 to make a pre-group meeting appointment, to register, or for further information.

Coming in the New Year: A 6-8 week Grief Support Group for Adults. Look for details in the January-February issue of SEASONS.

****The following groups meet year-round though dates shown are for current 2 month periods****

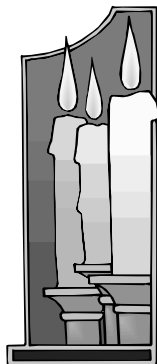
Bereaved Parents Support Group meets 6:30-8 pm, every other Monday, November 8 & 22 and December 6 & 20, facilitated by Lynn Martin.

Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group meets from 5-6:30 pm, the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month, November 10 & 24 and December 8 & 22, facilitated by Cheryl Richards.

Suicide Loss Support Group meets from 5-6:30 pm, the 1st & 3rd Wednesday of each month, November 3 & 17 and December 1 & 15, facilitated by Andrea Edwards. This group is co-sponsored by The Samaritans, Inc. www.samaritansnh.org

12th Annual National Survivors of Suicide Day is always the Saturday before Thanksgiving. A 90-minute broadcast is available as a free live webcast from 1-2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Nov. 20, 2010, with a live online chat immediately following. More information at www.AFSP.org

POEM FOR THE SOLSTICE *by Margaret Dale Barrand*



You must not permit the distraction of sorrow
to blind your heart to gratitude,
Nor lose your way in the maze of grief
with barriers of despair at every turn,
Nor listen to the question, "Why?",
the insidious serpent who attends your thoughts.

You must allow that slim, golden thread of hope
to lead you from tangled darkness into light.
Bathe yourself in that light of hope.
That will open your heart once more
to a celebration of being, of greeting, of praise.

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Consider doing something for someone else. Although you may feel deprived because of the loss of your loved one, reaching out to another can bring some measure of fulfillment. Give a donation in your loved one's name; invite a guest to share your festivities; give food to a needy family.

Recognize that your loved one's absence will cause pain no matter what you do. This is only natural and right. After all, you are mourning because you love and miss this person. Try to mix this with your love for those you still have and your positive memories of the past. "Bittersweet" is a good word to describe this. You can feel the sweetness of the holiday but also the bitterness of your loved one's absence. Together they can give you a feeling marked with love for those present and for those gone that you will never forget.

Edited excerpt from *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Therese A. Rando, PhD

Brattleboro Area Hospice
Bereavement Program
191 Canal Street
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

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Return Services Requested

Look Inside for a listing of November - December
Community Events of Remembrance

**Art Helps the Heart For All Ages, 10:30 am to 12 noon, December 11, 2010
at the Hospice office, 191 Canal Street**

The Art Helps the Heart program provides an opportunity to socialize over an art activity with other individuals and families who have experienced the death of a loved one. You, your friends and family members of all ages are invited to join us for these informal gatherings. Drawing, collage and other materials are provided; **RSVP** so we'll have enough on hand. There is always an option to read or write in our library during this time.

Drop-ins are welcomed. Refreshments will be served..



December 11. 10:30am -noon. Making Ornaments. A range of materials are provided but you may bring small copies of your loved one's picture or handwriting to add to your creation. Elizabeth Ungerleider will facilitate. For further information or to register, call Elizabeth Pittman, 257-0775, x104.

Elizabeth Evans Pittman, Bereavement Care Coordinator
Winnie Ganshaw, Bereavement Volunteer Coordinator
Elizabeth Ungerleider, Youth Program Coordinator
Brattleboro Area Hospice 191 Canal Street, Brattleboro, Vermont 05301 (802) 257-0775
www.brattleborohospice.org brattleborohospice@myfairpoint.net

Community Events of Remembrance

The Eighth Annual Dia de los Muertos Celebration

Sponsored by Brattleboro Area Hospice

Friday November 5, 2010, 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Experienced Goods Home Furnishings

51 Elliot Street, Brattleboro



*Young girl at altar,
Dia de Los Muertos Celebration , 2009*

Dia de los Muertos, Day of the Dead, is an important holiday in Latin America when families gather to honor their loved ones who have died. On November 5th, Gallery Walk Friday, we invite you to Day of the Dead festivities at our Home Furnishings shop on Elliot Street.

- ◆ 5:30 *Ofrenda* (a large community altar) Bring an item to lay on the altar in honor of your loved one —please use photocopied pictures and objects of no great concern since items cannot be returned.
- ◆ Art activities for children, teens, and the kid in you
- ◆ 6:30 Hallowell, the Hospice Singing Group, will sing at the altar
- ◆ Light refreshments will be served

Dia De Los Muertos is one of Mexico's traditional holidays reuniting and honoring beloved ancestors, family and friends. The historical roots of this celebration date back more than 3,000 years to the pre-Hispanic cultures of indigenous people native to Mexico and Meso-America. Life was seen as a dream. It was believed that only in dying was a human being truly awake and the soul set free. Death seems to hold no terror and is always with the people in their art, their legends, and their religion. Death was not a mysterious and fearful presence but a realistic recognizable character as much a part of life as life itself.

Dia De Los Muertos is important for the family to maintain good relationships with the dead for it is they who intercede and bring good fortune to the living. It is a time to come to terms with our mortality and become aware of the cycle of life and death. It is a day for honoring our beloved ones.

Traditionally, it is a time when family members share stories remembering their lives together. A special altar is made and adorned with pictures of the deceased to remind the younger generation of their family roots. They picnic with their loved ones offering food and drink to strengthen spirits enough to return to their other world. The skeleton figures and pictures displayed during this fiesta represent the spirit still living after leaving its flesh on this earth.

Preparation for the celebration of the Dia De Los Muertos begins well in advance. The gravesites are cleaned, painted, and adorned with marigolds, baby's breath and cockscomb. Marigold petals are scattered on the grave with the belief that this helps the souls of the deceased find their way back.

A candlelight procession to the cemetery is held on the eve of the celebration. Offerings brought to the graves include the favorite foods, beverages, toys, and personal belongings of the departed relatives. Family members spend the night at the cemetery and share memories of their dearly deceased. The celebration is not a mournful one, but rather a time to share with family members and visit with the souls of the departed.

The altar is the focal point to observing the Dia De Los Muertos. It is constructed in the home and/or at the gravesite or business establishment. Entire families construct altars as an annual commitment. Beginning in mid-October, children and adults prepare to welcome the souls of their dead relatives and loved ones, who return home at this time each year to make sure all is well and that they have not been forgotten. *From <http://www.olvera-street.com/>*

Common Misconceptions About the *Day of the Dead Celebrations* excerpted from May Herz



The Day of the Dead honors our relatives who have died, not death per se. We welcome the opportunity to reflect upon our lives, our heritage, our ancestors and the meaning and purpose of our own existence. Altars or *ofrendas* are not for worshipping but for offering our love and remembering departed family members.



Mexicans have celebrated the Day of the Dead since 1800 B.C., so this is not the Mexican version of Halloween. It is a family time and is not scary or morbid.

It is generally not a sad ritual, but a day of introspective happiness as we remember our loved ones. Because it's unfamiliar it may seem a "strange" ritual, yet it's very similar to visiting a grave and leaving flowers or stuffed animals, or lighting a candle to remember our deceased loved ones.

Community Services of Remembrance

Atamaniuk Funeral Home will sponsor their fourteenth annual Memorial Service at the VFW Hall on Black Mountain Road in early December. The date for the service will be announced in area newspapers. Call Michael Atamaniuk at 254-8183 to make reservations.

Covey and Allen Funeral Services are offering an ecumenical memorial service at the Mt. Anthony Union High School in Bennington on December 12, 5:00 PM. For more information, please call Mark Shea, 464-3782.



Celebration of Lights is a holiday event sponsored by the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital Auxiliary to honor and commemorate loved ones. For a \$5.00 donation to the Auxiliary, a light on the outdoor tree will be lit in the name of the person being remembered. Monday afternoon, Dec. 6 with a Reception at 4:00 in the Coffee Shop and treelighting at 5:00. Please call Christin Fagan at 257-8238 to obtain a form and more information.

Remembrance of a Child, Thursday, December 2 at 7:00 pm, at St. Michael's R.C. Church in Brattleboro. Anyone who has lost a child through death, adoption, miscarriage, or abortion is invited to join us as we remember our children at this special Mass celebrated by the Rev. Rich O'Donnell. You are welcome to bring any pictures, memorabilia, or letters that we will place on the altar before Mass. For details, call Shirley Squires at 254-2696 or Betty F. at 387-4214.

Sponsored by Compassionate Friends, a national organization supporting bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents, **the 14th Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting** in memory of any child of any age who has died from any cause will be held on Sunday, Dec 12 at 7:00 PM. Individuals may join with families from around the world in lighting candles with others or in their homes. http://www.compassionatefriends.org/News_Events/Worldwide_Candle_Lighting.aspx.