

COMFORT FOR THE GRIEVING HEART

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

September 2015

Grieving as an Act of Courage

St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Team

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If you would like to be added to or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at (610) 997-7125.

"Courage is the resolve to face and then deal with any uncertainty or pain or grief that lies before you. It is the inner strength you call forth as you prepare to do something that alarms or frightens you. It makes sense, then, that an experience of significant loss would require of you a measure of courage – perhaps a large measure."

~James E. Miller, from *Grieving is Often an Act of Courage*

As I reflected on the topic for this month's article, I was struck by the idea of courage. In my work with family members and friends who have lost loved ones, I am privileged to witness again and again the small and large acts of courage that are involved with the journey of grief. Even the simple act of getting out of bed requires a willingness to face the unknown of an unfamiliar world.

The wide array of emotions that accompany grief can be overwhelming and unwanted. For many, just being able to cry the tears of a broken heart takes tremendous courage in light of cultural messages that encourage us to "be strong" or "get over it." Experiencing the emotionality of grief can feel like a raw, vulnerable place, a place we might want to avoid or distract ourselves from. Courage gives us the strength to reach for another tissue to honor all that we are feeling.

After our loss, there is a sense of starting over, of beginning a new life. It might mean learning new things and asking for help. Facing change is difficult in the best of circumstances; within the darkness of loss it can feel like too much. Courage pushes us to take that next step, even when we are unsure of exactly where our foot will land.

Whether spoken in a quiet whisper or a loud shout, giving voice to grief requires a certain boldness. Our grief is deeply personal and the courage to share the experience with others is powerful. Shared stories can inspire others to hold on to the hope that one day, life will not feel as lonely or frustrating as it does right now. In the words of Mary Anne Radmacher, "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow."

On behalf of the bereavement team at St. Luke's Hospice, I would like to thank you for sharing your journey with us. We continue to be honored to walk beside you and hear your stories, share in your memories, and witness your courage as you take another step along the way.

With warmest regards,
Christine

Upcoming Events

Sponsored by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

Grief and Loss Support Groups

Six Week Groups

These groups are for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. They offer a space to come together with others to share stories, offer and receive support, and find hope and healing. A group can offer both peer support and education and information about the grief journey. It is important that participants are able to attend all six weeks. Please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for more information or to register for the following groups:

Lehigh Valley Area:

September 21—October 26, 2015 (Mondays)
3-4:30pm at St. Luke's Hospice House
2455 Black River Road, Bethlehem, PA.

Lehigh Area:

September 23—October 28, 2015 (Wednesdays)
2 - 3:30pm, Dinky Memorial Lutheran Church
1742 Dinkey Rd., Ashfield, PA.

Open Support Group

Perhaps you've thought about attending a group but weren't sure if it was for you. Maybe you've already participated in a group and are looking to reconnect to people who understand.

Please join us for an open, ongoing support group. We will meet on the **first Friday of each month** from 10-11am at St. Luke's Hospice House (2455 Black River Road, Bethlehem.) Our first meeting will be **September 4th**.

No registration is required, but you can contact Christine with any questions.

Chronicling the Lives of Those We've Lost: Memoir Writing Workshop

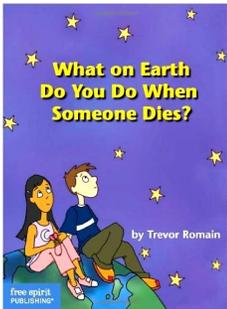
"Our job when we mourn someone is to remember them so fully and so completely that they are not really lost to us." Those words, often shared with the bereaved by the Rev. Anne Huey, provide comfort. How, then, to capture the memories following loss? Writing a memoir about a loved one—whether it is about a spouse, parent, a friend or beloved aunt—takes the memories that live in our brains, where details over time may be forgotten, and commits them to paper.

People sometimes think a special skill is needed to write a memoir. They equate writing with school and books. They think it must be formal—a publishable document. That is not the goal. In this case, for those of us who want to chronicle the lives of those we've lost, being a writer means something else. In the words of the late author William Zinsser, "writers are the custodians of memory and that's what you must become if you want to leave some kind of record of your life and of the family you were born into." The important thing is to begin to put the stories and memories down on paper.

Sound interesting? Plan to join us for a 6-week workshop in the fall, starting October 8th and running through November 12th (Thursdays) from 6:30-8pm. The group will meet at St. Luke's Bethlehem Education Center in room 104. Because of the nature of this workshop, we ask that participants be at least six months beyond the date of their loss.

For more information or to register, contact Christine at (610) 997-7132.

Resources and Reflections



What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

Trevor Romain

A Meditation on Grief

Your body is away from me
But there is a window open
from my heart to yours.
From this window, like the moon
I keep sending news secretly.

~ Rumi

“When Trevor Romain’s father died, Trevor didn’t know what to feel, say, or do. Shocked, saddened, and confused, all he could say was . . . wow. As he started understanding what had happened, he began writing about his experiences and feelings. His book—simple, insightful, and straight from the heart—is for any child who has lost a loved one or other special person.

Trevor talks directly to kids about what death means and how to cope. He asks the kinds of questions kids have about death—Why? How? What next? Is it my fault? What’s a funeral?—in basic, straightforward terms. He describes and discusses the overwhelming emotions involved in grieving—sadness, fear, anger, guilt—and offers practical strategies for dealing with them. He also suggests meaningful ways to remember and honor the person who has died.” (*Amazon.com*)

Thoughts from Mindy

A lot of my friends and family have asked why I wanted to work in the Hospice field, to which there is a long and complicated answer. I try to explain how I want to feel a connection to my work, and that my own personal experiences with Hospice led me to applying for the position in the Bereavement program. I try to talk about how loss has impacted my life not only through death of loved ones, but through life changes and significant events. I try to say that working in the Hospice field, in my opinion, is one of the most beautiful ways to give to others who are experiencing the illness of a loved one. Often-times, I am met with blank stares or reactions of “I could never do that.”

But, when I dig deeper, the reason I wanted to work in Hospice care is because even though grief is universal to us all, it is still very much an enigma. It is complicated and simple. It is individual to each of us, yet there are some similarities in how we all grieve. It is tricky, yet straightforward. Twenty years ago my grief played out in listening to angst ridden and sad songs. Right now, prayer and sharing memories with my children bring comfort. If I’m afforded 20 more years on earth, I’m sure my grief will play out in a very different way. This is why I wanted to work in bereavement; to try and unravel the mystery, understand how we are all touched by our grief, and to honor the ones we are mourning.

The act of grieving leads us on an unknown journey, where the hope for peace and calm wait for us at the end. I look forward to learning from you, growing with you, and walking the path that grief leads us on to our journey to healing.

Mindy Watson has joined the St. Luke’s Bereavement Team as a bereavement coordinator and counselor.

Honoring the Journey

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

This is a listing of free bereavement resources in the area. If you have a need for something and don't see it on this list, please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for referrals to other services.

Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley with St. Luke's offers the Hope and Healing Series, a series of creative classes at St. Luke's Cancer Center-Anderson Campus, primarily in the Hope and Healing Room. Any person or loved one affected by cancer can register for this series. Programs offered include T'ai Chi, Drumming, Art of Healing Dance, Labyrinth, Jewelry Making, Journaling, Men's Group, Heart Rhythm Meditation, Yoga, and Creative Expression. Classes are open to anyone affected by cancer. Programs are free, but registration is required. Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org to register or for more information about classes, dates and times.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

TCF of Lehigh Valley meets at Sacred Heart Hospital, 2nd floor, 421 Chew Street in Allentown. The group meets the 2nd Monday each month at 7pm. For more information, call 484-597-0240.

TCF of Quakertown meets at St. Luke's Hospital, ground floor, 1021 Park Ave in Quakertown in Taylor Conference Rooms A&B. This group is held the 2nd Tuesday each month from 7:30 – 9pm. For more information, call 215-536-0173.

TCF of Easton meets the 2nd Thursday each month from 7-9pm at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 2115 Washington Blvd. in Easton. For more information call 610-866-5468.

TCF of Carbon County meets the 1st Wednesday each month from 6:30 – 8:30pm in the Palmerton Community Ambulance Association, 501 Delaware Ave in Palmerton. Please call 610-826-2938 for more information.

Family Answers holds a Survivors of Suicide support group at 402 North Fulton Street in Allentown, PA. This group is held the first and third Monday each month from 7-8pm. Call 610-435-9651 for more info.

Free Spirits is a group of more than 2 dozen older widows who go out to lunch once a month to keep active and offer support to each other--and to newer widows. Most are members of Church of the Manger UCC, Bethlehem. Call 610-866-8223 for more information.

Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress, and Life Transitions offered by Wendy Littner Thomson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. First session offered for free to caregivers whose loved one recently received hospice services from St Luke's Hospice. For location, times, or more information, please call 610-730-1992.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

GriefShare Groups are a faith-based, evangelical approach to grief and loss. GriefShare groups are provided at several locations in the Lehigh Valley. To find a location near you, please visit www.griefshare.org.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers grief support services in the form of counseling, support groups, and workshops for adults and children, as well as a lunch club for women. For more information, please call 610-969-0330.

VNA/Hospice of Monroe County offers a support group the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at noon. Call 570-421-5390 for more information.