

Bereavement Support

A community newsletter published by The Hospice of VNS Center for Loss & Hope

*"O death where is your sting
O grave where is your victory"*
— 1 Cor. 15:55

Grief: A Tangled Ball of Emotions... Grieving: A Process of Coping

by **Rochelle Sheppard**, MA, LPCC-S, GC-C, CT, Spiritual Care and Bereavement Services Coordinator



Recently, I conducted a workshop for a group of professionals. In the workshop I

asked the question, "Why is it so hard for us to say the word, 'death' or 'died?'" One of the participants replied, "Because death is final." Immediately, there were nods of agreement from around the room. You could almost feel the finality of the statement "death

is final" weighing down the atmosphere of the room. The word "death" has a way of causing the mood to sink like the Titanic whenever it is spoken. Death is final. We have little control over death's timing — when death will happen or its character — how death will take place. It is this out of control feeling — a sense of powerlessness

— that causes death to feel so ominous. And because of our inability to control death events, we are left feeling helpless, and in some sudden traumatic events, hopeless.

WE BECOME STUCK IN OUR GRIEF WHEN WE ALLOW THE FEELINGS OF GRIEF TO PARALYZE US, AND WE DO NOT CONTINUE IN THE PROCESS OF THE WORK OF GRIEVING.

Like death, we anticipate the process of grieving as something that happens to us without our input or desire. This outlook of grieving as something that happens to us is precisely what

See Grief on Page 2

Service of Remembering

We invite all families and friends to our interfaith memorial service for those who have lost loved ones in the past year. This meaningful supportive service will be held on **Sunday, May 18 at 4 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church of Christ** located at 263 E. Mill Street in Akron. Please call us at 330-668-4662

to receive an invitation. All are welcome.



Camp Promise: June 23-25

The third annual Camp Promise will be offered by the Hospice of VNS Center for Loss and Hope **June 23, 24 and 25** from 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. The camp's hours were expanded this year due to popular request. The **free** summer camp is for children **ages 6 - 11** who need help processing a significant loss (parent, grandparent, sibling...)

The children will learn to manage and understand their grief through creative activities such as drama, music, art and sandtray therapy. A staff of experienced

facilitators, including school counselors and bereavement professionals, will oversee the children as they go through the creative stations.

There is **no cost** for the program. A morning snack, boxed lunch and afternoon snack will be provided. Camp Promise will be held at the Hospice Care Center at 3358 Ridgewood Road in Fairlawn. For more information or to register a child, please contact Rochelle Sheppard at 330-668-4662 or 800-335-1455, Ext. 4662.

Grief / Continued From Page 1

keeps us stuck in our grief or avoiding feelings that are associated with grief. It is, "vital that we reject ideas of grieving as passive and embrace ideas of



it as active."¹ Grieving is active in the sense that we do the work of being ready and equipped participants in the

journey of grief. Grief is a conglomerate of mixed emotions: sadness, loss, hurt, anger, pain, loneliness, etc... These feelings are a natural and normal response to loss. Feelings are feelings, but it is not where the experience ends. We become stuck in our grief when we allow the feelings of grief to paralyze us, and we do not continue in the process of the work of grieving. In his book, "How We Grieve," Thomas Attig, writes:

"The specific emotion, grief, differs from the coping process, grieving. Grief holds a prominent place in our lives as survivors, but it is only a part of what we experience and do... The emotion comes over us and, in its extreme form, threatens to preoccupy us. Grieving, as coping requires that we respond actively, invest energy, and address tasks. Among other things, coping requires that we come to terms with our grief emotion."²

When we grieve actively we are neither hopeless, nor helpless.

We take control of the journey we are on and choose to become active participants in what the journey has to teach.

Grief is a passive and an active dynamic towards coping with loss. At the onset of grief we are inundated with multiple grief emotions. It seems all we can do is allow these feelings of grief to rush over us like a tidal wave. This is the passive process of coping with loss. The feelings just come whether we want them to or not. It is during this time that we can feel less in control and more at the mercy of an elusive web of feelings. However, we dare not stay on this emotional level of coping with loss. Emotional inertia is not the whole of bereavement.

Many times mourners, caregivers and even some professionals mistake grief's emotional reactions as the end all to the grieving journey. How wrong this is. The emotional response to loss will come. For some mourners it will be hardly noticeable by themselves or by others. For other mourners their grief reactions will be noticeable to



all. However, how we respond emotionally to loss is not

adjusting to the loss. We adjust to the reality of our loss when we are actively involved in reordering and reframing our world after the death of a loved one. The true finality of death occurs when we rely solely on the emotional content

that occurs with the death of a loved one and do not properly equip ourselves to embrace the journey of grief or the lessons that death has to offer.



In the next issue of *Bereavement Support* we will consider some passive and active models of grief support, as well as how to become and stay actively involved in the journey of grief as we move towards adjustment and healing after loss.

¹ Attig, Thomas. *How We Grieve*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. (32).

² *Ibid* 33.

Love Mixes With Everything

by **Marilyn Mihalic**, Hospice of VNS Chaplain

Alfalfa and benzene do not mix but love mixes with everything and can transform the ordinary with its alchemy.

Mary knew love's power and pull, and on occasion experienced love's transformation. Love kept showing, growing, flashing in her heart like thunder on a hot summer night. Love met her when she greeted the day; love arose with her from the night. Today was a day that love came in the meeting of strangers.

"Where did you get that hat?," she asked as we stood side-by-side gazing into the powder room mirror. "Why, my mother gave it to me — it was one of her favorites," I answered. Again, she asked, "Where did you get

that hat?" She did not hear me, mom's hat held her spellbound. The hat was one of mother's many treasures that now were passed on to me. "Would you like to try it on?," I offered. She solemnly nodded. I removed first the pearl hat pin, then the hat. I offered mom's hat and watched as she cradled it with waiting hands. Spinning around now, facing the mirror, she placed the hat on her waiting head. Giving a loud gasp I heard her exclaim, "The French do not have oil, but they have ideas about how to awaken a woman." As I looked into the mirror I now saw another woman before me. It was then that I heard her exclaim, "Mama, it is you!"

In chance encounters, in daily activities, we meet our loss. We encounter the other, the subject of our grief in reminders of our relationship with them. For the woman in the story it was a stranger's hat that reconnected her to her mother. In a stranger's presence she acknowledged her loss and welcomed her mother's lingering presence. Our experience of grief in the ordinary can be extraordinary. Dulled senses silenced by death reawaken under grief's touch. We live now with a different sensibility, a new found vulnerability to commonplace situations and circumstances. Their presence is not diminished in us.

Bereavement Support Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service

Bereavement Support is a community newsletter published by the Communications Department of Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service, #1 Home Care Place, Akron, OH 44320, 330-745-1601, 800-362-0031, www.vnsa.com

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As a nonprofit organization, Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service relies on the community to support the development of new patient care programs and the delivery of hospice care to those who are unable to pay for their care. Gifts to Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service can be made in a number of ways. For more information, contact the Development Office at 800-335-1455.

For more information about our bereavement support services, or about hospice care, call your local Hospice and Palliative Care of VNS office:

Summit	330-665-1455
Medina	330-948-5588
Portage	330-677-4666
Stark	330-834-3484

Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service is a nonprofit, Medicare-certified agency, and is a member of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and the Ohio Hospice Organization.

You have the right to request that we not send you any future fund raising materials, and we will use our best efforts to honor such request. You may make the request by sending your name and address to Hospice of Visiting Nurse Service, Attn: Development Office, at 3358 Ridgewood Road, Akron, OH 44333, together with your request to be removed from our fund raising mailing and contact lists.

Can You Help?

Yes, I would like to help make bereavement services available for grieving adults and children in our community.

My Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Accept my tax-deductible gift of:

\$25 \$50 \$100

\$250 \$500 \$_____

Please return this coupon with your check to:

Hospice of Visiting Nurse Service
3358 Ridgewood Road
Akron, Ohio 44333

Thank you!

Calendar of Grief Support

Hospice & Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service provides bereavement support programs in group settings for those in our community who have experienced a loss. There is no cost for these programs. If you would prefer to talk with someone individually, please call for an appointment. Evening appointments are possible.

All sessions meet at the Hospice of Visiting Nurse Service Justin T. Rogers Care Center, 3358 Ridgewood Road, Akron, unless otherwise noted. Some support groups/programs require registration. For more information, to register, or to schedule an individual appointment, please call 330-668-4662 or 800-335-1455, Ext. 4662.

TRUSTED SHARING SUPPORT GROUP SERIES

An eight-week series for adults who wish to learn what they might experience during the grieving process. Group members share their stories, emotions, victories and hopes. Group members can expect to receive loving support from group leaders, information on the grieving process, and tools for handling the normal grief response. *Two more series will be held in 2008, all on Thursday's, beginning May 1 and September 4 from 2 - 4 p.m. or 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.*

HEALING JOURNEY SUPPORT GROUP

A six-week series focusing on rebuilding life and incorporating hope after the death of a loved one. Group members will help normalize the grief experience through camaraderie

On a regular basis we update our mailing list. Each month we take off persons who have been on the mailing list for two years. If you have been receiving the Hospice and Palliative Care of Visiting Nurse Service Center for Loss & Hope mailings since December 2005, you will be taken off this year.

with each other, the sharing of feelings/stories, support and providing an incentive to make new friends and develop new interests as soon as they are able. *Two series will be held in 2008, all on Tuesday's, beginning March 18 and July 8 from 2 - 4 p.m. or 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.*

MOVING ON SUPPORT GROUP

This once a month series focuses on supporting those who are moving along the journey of grief and are now beginning to incorporate new behaviors in their lives as they attempt to create their "new normal." *Group meets the second Wednesday of each month at 2 - 3:30 p.m. or 6 - 7:30 p.m.*

MOVING ON FAMILY SUPPORT SERIES

A six-week program for adults with children under 18 years of age. The focus of this support series is to address communication challenges, family identity, and to help focus on the actual loss for each family member. A certified sandtray therapist works with the children to help them express memories and feelings tied to the loss. *Call for dates of the next series.*

INDIVIDUAL GRIEF COUNSELING

One-on-one grief counseling is an option for individuals who either need more privacy in expressing their reaction to loss or who are unable to attend group meetings. *Call for more information.*

If you wish to continue to receive these mailings, please call and let us know. We will be glad to keep you on the list. Please notify us at 330-665-1455 or 1-800-335-1455.

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