

GRIEF NOTES

BY M. BERNADINE PARKS, MS, PCC-S

DIRECTOR, PATHWAYS OF HOPE



The first signs of earth's reawakening after winter's deep slumber raise our spirits and give us hope that the cold and grey days will not be with us forever. Part

of the pleasure of a spring garden is found in close observation of the daily changes that will slowly transform the garden's bare earth and naked branches into a lush and colorful paradise by early summer. We are taken by surprise when the first white snow drops burrow up through the seemingly barren earth and proceed to bloom despite cold and snow. Color slowly begins returning to the landscape with the appearance of the yellow aconite, soon followed by the blue crocus and golden forsythia. The garden slowly becomes greener, with daffodils poking up through fallen leaves toward the sun. Grasses begin shedding winter's brown for spring green. Buds on branches begin to swell. Blossoms burst open and tender leaves prepare to emerge. With each noticed change, our observational skills sharpen, as we anticipate the blooms that will

soon follow. Anxious to speed spring's arrival, we fill our empty pots and window boxes with cold-hardy pansies. Slowly, but surely, the garden frees itself from winter's seemingly endless grip.

Emerging from the pain of grief is, like spring, a process that begins with slow signs that may be easy to overlook. Pain, whether physical or emotional, can monopolize our attention and energy, blinding us to signs of progress. We may realize that we slept through the night, enjoyed the taste of food, or allowed ourselves the distraction of a favorite television show. Like the earliest signs of spring, these are easy-to-overlook indicators that we are beginning to find our way out of the pain of acute grief. We tentatively venture out into our neighborhoods, faith communities and workplaces.

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We are comforted by unexpected kindnesses and unexpectedly hurt or angered by misdirected clichés and uninformed advice. We are surprised when the mention our loved one's name doesn't send us searching for a tissue to dry our tears. We recognize that we are becoming more adept at riding the unexpected waves of grief that seem to appear out of nowhere. We begin to welcome opportunities to talk about our loved one and share memories, perhaps even searching out a grief support group. We may even choose to "take a break" from grief by planning a special outing or a short trip. We recognize we are becoming more confident in our ability to manage the daily challenges inherent in adjusting and adapting to a life forever changed by loss. Like the processes governing nature's annual renewal, the grieving process slowly, but surely, gives us hope that the darkest days of grief will not last forever. The small signs that we are emerging from grief's powerful grip are in front of us, if we only know what to look for.

THE PHYSICAL TOLL OF GRIEF

DEBBIE HOLT, MS, PCC-S

When one thinks of grief, the first thing that probably comes to mind are the difficult emotions: sadness, loneliness, longing, anxiety, perhaps guilt and/or anger. But the griever quickly discovers grief can be a very physical experience as well. Heaviness in the chest, exhaustion, sleeplessness, dry mouth, feeling jittery, loss of appetite, headaches, difficulty concentrating and muscle tension can also be very common manifestations of grief. Stress and grief can depress the immune system, leading to frequent colds, flu or other common ailments. A visit to your family doctor is crucial to rule out other causes of these physical difficulties. But after

ruling out other underlying conditions, normalizing such symptoms and educating those closest to you, as well as decreasing expectations of yourself during this period of mourning can be very helpful. Taking good care of yourself can be a challenge, but will be well worth the effort. Trying some gentle exercise and eating small and nutritious meals can be helpful. Engaging in relaxing endeavors such as meditation or massage will benefit both mind and body. Caffeine can contribute to feelings of nervousness and should be limited, as well as the excessive use of alcohol and other depressants.

SO ... WHAT NOW? LIFE AFTER CAREGIVING

BONNIE ORLINS, MSW, LISW

Grief quickly teaches us that the death of a loved one permanently changes many aspects of our day to day lives. For those survivors who have been responsible for the care of their loved ones, the cessation of care giving responsibilities results in unexpected challenges that other grieving family members may not face.

You might have assumed the role of caregiver by virtue of your relationship as a spouse, child, family member or friend. You may have chosen to be a loved one's Caregiver or you could have been "delegated" to the role. Your caregiving could have evolved

slowly over a period of time or suddenly, as in the case of unexpected illness or accident. You could have been providing round-the-clock direct care or instead been coordinating others who provided direct care. Whatever the circumstances, you were responsible to some degree for another person's wellbeing.

It is likely that Caregiving was a consuming role. You might have performed activities such as shopping, lifting, bathing, dressing, feeding, managing incontinence, managing financial and legal affairs,

supervising medications, coordinating healthcare, providing social activity, communicating with family, and providing emotional support.

You were probably often physically or emotionally exhausted. You may become isolated from others due to the demands of caregiving. You might have been dealing with daily losses of the way things used to be with your Care Recipient. You may have grappled with the reality that some previously made future plans and dreams might never come to fruition. You could have postponed goals and plans because of your Caregiving responsibilities.

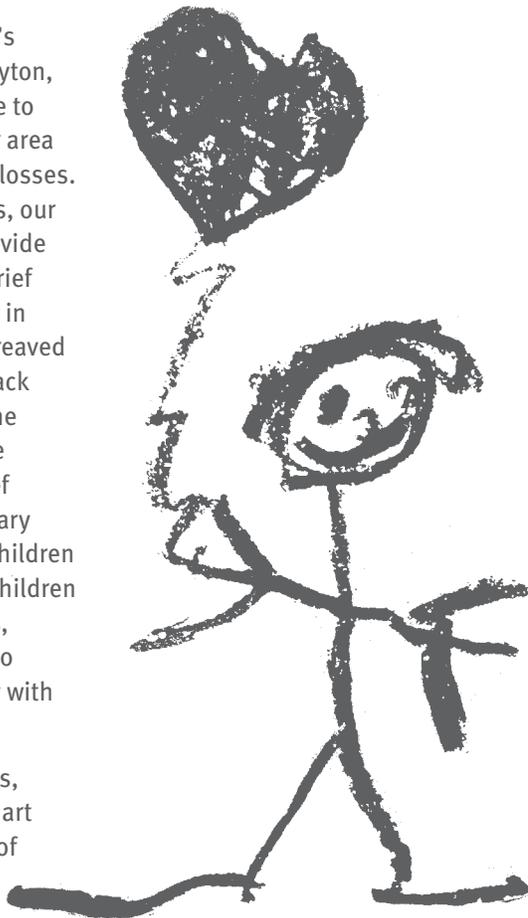
The emotional, physical, and spiritual demands of caregiving may have changed your sense of individuality

HONORING MEMORIES THROUGH ART TO SHOWCASE CHILDREN'S ARTWORK

NANCY GARDNER-MESSER, MSW, LISW

Through the Dayton community's strong support of Hospice of Dayton, Pathways of Hope has been able to develop beneficial programs for area children who have experienced losses. In partnership with area schools, our Healing Pathways programs provide grief support, counseling and grief education to children and teens in the school setting, reaching bereaved children who might otherwise lack access to these services. For the past 10 years, Pathways of Hope Bereavement Staff has held grief support groups in area elementary and high schools, for grieving children and teens. These groups help children learn what to expect after a loss, identify strategies to cope and to experience the comfort of being with other grievers of their age.

In conjunction with these groups, Pathways of Hope is holding an art show to showcase the art work of



some of this year's school support group participants. The opening reception for Honoring Memories Through Art will be held Tuesday, April 24, 2012, from 6:30-7:30 PM in the Hospice of Dayton dining room. Awards will be presented at 7:00 PM along with comments by the art show judge, Jonathan Haag, Art Therapist for Pathways of Hope. Awards will be given for Best in Show and two Honorable Mention works. Refreshments will be provided. All works will continue to be exhibited through the end of May.

We encourage you to attend this special art show to support the hard work of the students and to be part of this community's valued support for Pathways of Hope.

and purpose. The responsibilities of caregiving may have diminished and transformed your personal identity to one in which "Caregiver" is primary. For some, boundaries became unclear between themselves and their Care Recipient as the Caregiver took on their loved one's pain.

When a Care Recipient dies, the time spent as a Caregiver cannot simply be erased. Former caregivers may be left with an unclear image of who they have become and how their life will play out. The certainty is that things have changed...but where do they go from here?

Coupled with the exhaustion that is a symptom of grieving, there is often an overwhelming state of

exhaustion from the activities of caregiving. You may experience any of a myriad of feelings...numbness, sadness, emptiness, anger, remorse, relief, uncertainty, guilt, etc. Former caregivers may be grieving not only for their loved one but also for the loss of the Caregiver identity that they have developed. Caregivers need to find a way to reconnect with their own sense of self and accompanying sense of purpose. They need to eventually discover new roles in which to partake and new avenues for finding purpose and meaning.

It is important for Caregivers to recognize, accept, and honor their feelings. If a Caregiver is uncomfortable verbally expressing feelings, the possibility of writing

or journaling can be another helpful outlet. Even when a death has been contemplated, there is often still a shock and sense of numbness when the Care Recipient actually dies. Others may not realize that it may take a while for a Caregiver to work through a variety of feelings, wrongly assuming that the Caregiver only feels a sense of relief upon release from the demands of caregiving. Others may not understand that the Caregiver may also feel an overwhelming sadness, emptiness, numbness, anger, guilt, etc. It is helpful for a Caregiver to connect with a trusted individual whether it be a friend, family member, or counselor to offer support and to help sort through these feelings.

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SO WHAT NOW?

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After a care recipient's death, there may initially be necessary details to attend to such as funeral arrangements, settling of the estate, possible changes in living arrangements, and financial concerns. If a caregiver can connect with a trusted individual at this time, it is helpful to request assistance to protect interests and set appropriate boundaries. If possible, it is advisable to refrain from making big decisions at this time until the Caregiver has taken some personal time and done some work to reconnect with his or her own identity.

After the death of a care recipient, a caregiver, in time, can begin to acknowledge that life is still worth living. Contrary to the belief of many other people, there is no timeline or one correct way for individual grieving. With gentle care to oneself in patiently accepting and dealing with feelings and concerns, and adopting a proactive attitude, a caregiver can learn to draw upon inner strength, again connect with his or her own identity and realize a unique sense of purpose. Caregivers often come to recognize that they have developed an enhanced

sense of compassion, insight, and patience-- precious gifts that they take away from their caregiving experience. As caregivers progress on their journey of healing and personal renewal, they can draw upon the enhanced strengths they have identified and embraced as a result of their Caregiving experience. Just as Caregivers are all unique and special, the relationships they share with others are theirs alone. Each caregiving relationship has been personal and meaningful in its own right.

Following is a list of strategies that have helped former caregivers after the death of their care recipients. It may be helpful to look over this list and pick and choose those strategies that feel comfortable for you. Don't be surprised if you discover that you are already employing some of these strategies!

- **Get enough sleep**
 - Establish a regular bedtime
 - Allow for short naps
- **Eat nutritious meals**
 - Consider home delivered meals if you do not wish to cook
- **Exercise if your health allows; check with your doctor**

- **Recognize and honor your feelings**
 - Talk with another trusted individual
 - Talk with a professional
 - Journal
- **Prioritize**
 - Separate those demands that are self-imposed from those that are necessities
- **Ask others for help**
- **Accept help from others**
- **Allow laughter in your life**
 - Watch a funny television show
 - Talk with a friend who makes you laugh
- **Visit with a friend in person or over the phone**
- **Buy yourself some fresh flowers**
- **Read a book**
- **Realize your limitations and express them clearly to others**
- **Follow through with your own health appointments**
- **Meditate**
- **Get fresh air**
- **Take a trip**
- **Relax**
- **TAKE THE TIME YOU NEED**

Pathways of Hope offers individual and group counseling to accompany you on your journey of healing.

HOSPICE OF DAYTON'S MEMORY WALKWAY HONORS LOVED ONES

Hospice of Dayton is the only non-profit hospice in our area to offer a 'Memory Walkway' that encircles our beautiful scenic grounds. This Walkway features bricks purchased in memory of loved ones or as gifts to honor someone still living. The bricks

are engraved and are installed at dedication ceremonies held twice a year for family and friends. Several options are available. For more information on Hospice of Dayton bricks and memorials, please contact Marsha Bernard at (937) 258-5537 or mbernard@hospiceofdayton.org.



PREPARATION FOR 2012 CAMP PATHWAYS

JONATHAN HAAG, LISW-S, ATR-BC

Every year about this time, I mentally and emotionally gear up preparing for Camp Pathways, our annual camp weekend designed for children and teens who have experienced the death of a loved one. Although there is a host of tasks and details, the thing I most enjoy about preparing for camp is telling families, children and teens that have never gone before all about it. I say something like, "Camp Pathways is a wonderful and life changing event that cannot be duplicated in any other way. It is the one weekend of this year where you can have both big fun and the opportunity to pay attention to your grief in meaningful ways. And as good as that is, perhaps the most priceless aspect of camp is the opportunity to hear the stories from other kids your own age and know that you are not the only one going through these difficult experiences and painful feelings. All of this is orchestrated by a group of compassionate adult volunteers and staff that give the hopeful message that healing from grief does happen." It really is a wonderful part of my work to invite children and teens to an event that I know makes a positive, healing impact and does not disappoint them.

Camp Pathways offers over 50 young

campers summer-camp fun along with opportunities to explore, share, and gain understanding of their grief experiences. Pre-registration



for camp is now underway and is open to children between the ages of 7 and 17 who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or other loved ones. Please contact Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991 for information and registration materials. The cost is minimal-\$20 for one child, \$30 for two children and \$40 for three or more children. Scholarships are available in cases of financial hardship.

As has been the case for several years, Camp Pathways will be held



at the beautiful Joy Outdoor Education Center in Warren County. Transportation is provided to the camp from Hospice of Dayton's Wilmington Avenue campus on Friday morning; parents or guardians pick up their children at Camp Joy when camp ends on Sunday afternoon. This year's camp is scheduled to begin on Friday morning, June 22 and will end on Sunday afternoon, June 24. Supervised outdoor group activities such as swimming, fishing, canoeing, a climbing wall and ropes courses provide fun and healthy distractions. Grief group support activities, evening campfires, art, music, and a memorial service provide opportunities to pay attention to and express grief.

Professionally licensed bereavement staff from Pathways of Hope, a Hospice of Dayton nurse, Chaplain and Music Therapists, and trained volunteers lead activities with age specific groups. While we have been blessed with a large, committed group of outstanding volunteers who return year after year, we continue to look for new volunteers, especially Adult Buddies for our campers. Interested in how you can help?

Please contact Pathways of Hope at (937) 258-4991 for information about opportunities to be part of this life changing experience.

ON GRIEF AND MOURNING QUOTES WORTH CONSIDERING

"Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose."

— The Wonder Years (TV Show)

"Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve."

— Earl Grollman

NOTES ON MUSIC: THE RHYTHM OF SPRING

CAITLIN NICHOLAS, MT-BC,
MUSIC THERAPIST



Spring has arrived! Even in the mildest of winters like we have had this year, it can seem as though spring will never come. The days are short and the nights are long. It is dark before we get home and we feel isolated from even our closest neighbors. Winter drags and days are sometimes hard to get through, so the best we can do is to take it one step at a time and look toward brighter days ahead. Then you wake up one morning and the trees are budding! The flowers are blooming and the grass is green. The world has transformed overnight.

Have you ever noticed that spring sounds different than winter? The rhythm changes. A co-worker shared with me how much she enjoys feeding the birds in the morning and that she can tell the difference in the songs of different types of birds. “It is music to my ears,” she told me. “It’s like they are waking up the world again.”

Invigorating... Refreshing... Healing...

These are all words she used to describe the sounds of spring. Music comes to us in many forms. Often we think of “music” as what we listen to on the radio, what we play on the piano, what we hear when we go to see the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. The truth is – music can be so many things! Even after a hard day, it is refreshing to get home and see

people enjoying a walk with a friend. I can’t help but smile when I see people out with their dogs or hear the sounds of children laughing.

Research tells us that listening to peaceful, relaxing music reduces anxiety, calms the mind, and boosts our immune systems. Music of ANY kind that helps you relax – whether it is a recording or sounds of nature – can have a profound impact on the healing process.

So get out there – Listen to the sounds of spring and find your new rhythm!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON GRIEF

Q: *SINCE MY LOVED ONE DIED I FIND MYSELF HAVING A HARD TIME CONCENTRATING AND REMEMBERING THINGS. I’M WORRIED THAT I AM BECOMING MORE FORGETFUL. IS THIS NORMAL?*

A: Complaints about concentration and memory difficulties are common among grieving people, especially in the early weeks and months following the death of a loved one. Some of this is related to the general stress and physical exhaustion that is common in the grief experience. The lack of energy that comes with being physically tired and poorly rested dulls not only our physical abilities, but our mental acuity as well. Stress, whatever its source, impacts our ability to process and retain information; grief certainly qualifies as a stressful experience. Active grief also consumes a lot of our attention, making it more difficult to focus our attention elsewhere. Pain, whether physical or emotional, can distract us from focusing on other important matters. As a result, it is very likely that we will find ourselves “forgetting” information that under other circumstances would have been easily recalled. If memory difficulties persist or seem to be worsening, it is important to talk to your physician, as memory loss may have causes other than grief.

Q: *I’M THINKING IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO TALK TO A GRIEF COUNSELOR, BUT I’VE NEVER BEEN TO SEE A COUNSELOR BEFORE. WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?*

A: Upon making the first appointment, you will be asked to complete some routine paperwork prior to meeting with your counselor. We ask that you complete the paperwork in advance to minimize the time spent in the first session gathering basic information and attending to routine

administrative tasks. We may either mail you the required forms or ask that you come a bit early to complete them prior to your appointment time. Your bereavement counselor will spend a few minutes reviewing the information with you and the rest of the time will be spent exploring your concerns and working with you to identify your goals for counseling. You and your counselor will develop a plan of action designed specifically around your needs. This plan may involve a few more sessions, education about what to expect in the grieving process, guidance regarding helpful grief resources, suggestions related to coping strategies, “homework” assignments or possibly referrals to specialized community services. You can expect most sessions with your counselor to last about an hour.

Q: ARE YOU STAFFED BY VOLUNTEERS?

A: All of our counseling services are provided by our paid, professional staff. Our counseling staff is either professionally trained and licensed Social Workers and/or Counselors, with additional training and expertise related to grief and loss. On average, our professional staff has over twenty years of post-master’s counseling experience. We do utilize trained volunteers in other roles within Pathways of Hope, but all counseling services are provided by our professionally trained and licensed staff.

Q: HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE FOR YOUR GRIEF COUNSELING SERVICES AT PATHWAYS OF HOPE?

A: Pathways of Hope grief counseling services are offered without charge. The costs of our services are supported through the generosity of community donors. While not expected, donations are always gratefully accepted to offset the costs of materials and services.

Q: I’M NERVOUS ABOUT ATTENDING A SUPPORT GROUP. MAY I BRING A FRIEND ALONG TO THE GROUP FOR MORAL SUPPORT, AT LEAST AT FIRST?

A: It is not unusual for people to feel a bit apprehensive about attending a support group for the first time. Friends or family are welcome to attend with you, and are often surprised to find that they have benefited from the experience as well.

COMMON GRIEF MYTHS

DEBORAH HOLT, MS, PCC-S

Myths surrounding the grief process often lead to increased feelings of guilt and pain for the grieving. The following are a few of the more common misconceptions, along with corrected thoughts.

“It only takes a few months to get over your grief.” While it is true most people find the heaviness of intense grief subsiding over time, the grieving process is much lengthier than most people expect. Everyone is different, but the formation of a “new normal” in life can easily take several years. Be careful of your own and others expectations of a quick resolution of grief symptoms.

“All bereaved people grieve in the same way.” While it is true most grieving people experience common grief symptoms such as sadness, longing, and fatigue, there is not one universal grief experience. Some grieverers will find comfort from visiting the cemetery; others will find the cemetery to be a painful place. Some grieverers will find comfort in holding on to loved ones clothes or possessions for a long period of time while others will find it helpful to sort through possessions immediately. Some grieverers will be very private in their grief expressions while others will want to share their pain publicly. Expecting yourself to grieve in a specifically prescribed pattern will bring added stress to your grief process.

“When grief is resolved, it never comes up again.” Grieving is a process, not an event. Finding your

longing and sadness for you loved one triggered after years is not uncommon. Anniversaries, life events, illnesses, among other things, can produce the pain of grief once again. Normalizing such recurrences of grief is the best course of action.

“Because you feel crazy, you are going crazy.” Intense grieving often involves thoughts, feelings and behaviors we have never before experienced. We can feel like strangers to ourselves. We can feel out of control. If you or your loved ones are concerned about what you are experiencing is normal, seeking out the counsel available through Pathways of Hope may be helpful.

Being gentle with yourself during the grieving process and having realistic, healthy expectations can be a great gift. Becoming aware of the normal grief process is the best prevention.

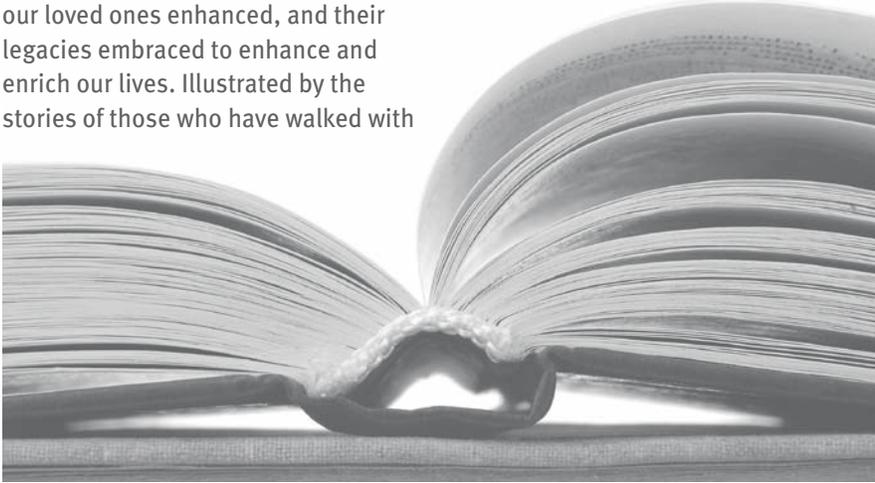
THE GRIEVER'S BOOKSHELF

THE HEART OF GRIEF by Thomas Attig. Oxford University Press. (2000).

The grief associated with the physical absence of a deceased loved one is often compounded by the belief that we must “let go” of those we love. In this compassionate and inspiring book, Thomas Attig explores ways in which our memories can be sustained, our understanding of our loved ones enhanced, and their legacies embraced to enhance and enrich our lives. Illustrated by the stories of those who have walked with

grief, Attig suggests that we can learn to love “in separation”, cherishing our memories and carrying our loved ones in our hearts throughout our lives.

Featured books may be purchased or ordered through your local bookseller or may be available at your public library.



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