

THE NEXT STEP

A Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Publication

Volume 1, Issue 7

December 2014

The Hope within Grief and Mourning

Rickey Spencer, Chaplain (Pilot Mountain, NC)

In the Old Testament, there is a book called Ecclesiastes. We don't know exactly who wrote Ecclesiastes, but tradition tells us that the writer was King Solomon, the son of David. Perhaps the best-known section of the book reflects on the variety of life and how different emotions and events occur throughout our lives, over which we have little or no control. The writer states:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under

heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak." (Eccles. 3:1-7 RSV)

In today's world, we are all joined together in the common bond of grief to remember those for whom it was their time to leave this world. In many ways, the hardest part of grief is remembering those who are



no longer with us. None of us are alone. This statement may bring particular comfort to any who may be reading this today. Although we grieve for different people, our grief is shared. A

Honduran proverb says, "Grief shared is half grief."

The time of grief and mourning can be an uncertain time, both in terms of its longevity and also in knowing how we or others will react. After the death of his wife, C.S. Lewis observed that he was resentful if people asked him how he was, as he often wanted to be alone in his thoughts. He didn't even know how to begin to answer the question. He was just as resentful when people

Continued on page 2

All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth

Ben Webb, Kids Path Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Recently I sat across from a little girl whose mother was dying. I asked her what she wanted most for Christmas. Her response was surprising: "All I want for Christmas is my family to be normal again! Well, that and an Easy-Bake Oven."

I have found that the opening words of one Christmas song have the amazing ability to make me laugh while causing me to think seriously about what children who have suffered loss really want during the holidays:

*Everybody pauses and stares at me,
These two teeth are gone,
as you can see.*

I don't know just who to blame for this catastrophe!

But my one wish on Christmas Eve is as plain as it can be!

All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.

Kids have the unique ability of describing what they want for Christmas in a way that convinces everyone



around that it really is a legitimate need. At the top of every child's list of things they can't live without is that one toy that supersedes all others. Every Christmas, without fail, we watch Ralphie ask for an official Red Ryder, carbine action, two-hundred shot range model air rifle. In his dreams, it has the ability to make him a hero. He's not afraid of shooting his eye out! His only fear is not getting that BB gun this year. All children have a list of items they expect to receive. Whether it's written down or not, grieving children all want

basically the same thing. Like a little girl missing two front teeth, they all want something returned that has been lost. They may not know whom to blame for the catastrophe, but their one wish on Christmas Eve is as plain as can be! All they want for Christmas is a return to the way it used to be.

It is not uncommon for small children to ask for their loved one to come home this Christmas. Older children and teens understand that the special person won't be home for Christmas this year. Still, there's something they

Continued on page 3

Grief and Mourning cont.

didn't ask him, observing that "No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear."

Grief is, in one way, a costly consequence of love. The writer Hilary Stanton Zunin observed, "The risk of love is loss, and the price of loss is grief." We grieve because we feel the pain of loss. We also grieve because of the strength of our love for the person that we remember today. Our love continues and grief does not diminish our love. Often in the early

months after death, we feel that love even stronger. The only way we can avoid the pain of grief is by avoiding the joy of love. German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm noted, "To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at a price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness." And so, each one of us at some time has experienced grief because of love – love for the person who has died and

love that carries on in spite of death. With love, there is always hope. The greatest love is the love of God for each of us - a love that never diminishes and never dies because it is a love of the Creator.



GriefShare.org offers daily emails to help one through the grieving process.

Ask the Staff: "Hope for the Holidays"

Sandra Yates, Bereavement Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Q: "How do I cope with the holidays when I have experienced a loss?"

A: For many people, the holiday season is a special time marked by celebrations and gatherings with family and friends. However, for those of us who have experienced a loss, it can be the most difficult part of the year.

It is important to come to terms with the reality that you may not feel like doing the normal festive activities: decorating the house, putting up the Christmas tree, traditional holiday baking, shopping for gifts, or any other activities that come with the season. However, it is also important to recognize and participate in activities that will bring you peace and comfort. For instance, pick two activities that you will enjoy and commit yourself to those activities and no more.

With everything in life, there must be a balance. Even in our grief, there must be a



balance. There must be a time for interaction with people and also a time for reflection about your loved one and the things that they would enjoy during the season.

Typically, the Christmas season is too encumbered with all of the exterior meanings of the season, which means we become unable to allow the true meaning of Christmas to immerse in our hearts.

Is healing possible during the most festive season of the year? Yes, healing is always possible and even more so during this season, as there are times for lightheartedness and for

things that bring us back to our sentimental roots of love and loss.

What I often suggest for those who have lost a loved one during the year is to fix a Christmas stocking with your loved one's name on it, just like you would do for any other member of the family. The day before you open presents, allow each member of the family to write on a small slip of paper a couple of words that would jog their minds about a favorite memory of your loved one who has died. When Christmas morning arrives, open your loved one's stocking and allow each member of the family to share those memories. There will be tears and laughter during that time – and tears and laughter are both healing. In those tears and laughter, you will find yourself honoring their memory and absorbing the healing that is most needed during this time.

Special Handling Please

Mary J. Pinkava

I was handed a package
the other day.
It was wrapped securely
to be mailed away.
Attached to the outside,
as plain as could be,
Was a simple note for all to see:

"Please rush through the
holiday season;
Too painful to open for
any reason.
Contained within,
find one broken heart—
Fragile, broken, falling apart.

Tried to go shopping
the other day;
The hype of the season
blew me away.

Sat down to write cards—
That was insane.
Couldn't find the list
Or think of my name.

People say,
'Come over, be of good cheer!
Celebrate the holidays!
Prepare a New Year!'

But my grief overwhelms me
Like waves in the sea.
Can they cope with my crying,
an unsettled me?

No holiday cheer
For a big family meal.
I can't do it this year.
Don't you know how I feel?

Guilty and frustrated—
I let everyone down.
Our holiday celebrations
used to be the best in town.

So, ship me away.
Address unknown.
When my grief has changed,
Then I'll return home."



Bereavement Staff and Support Groups

Mount Airy, NC
336-789-2922
 Sandra Yates, M.Div. NCBF
 Josh Armstrong, BS
 Sarah Tweed, BSW
 Ben Webb, BA
 Fonda Younger, BS

Pilot Mountain, NC
336-368-1260
 Josh Armstrong, BS

Yadkinville, NC
336-679-2466
 Sarah Tweed, BSW

Elkin, NC
336-526-2650
 Lisa VanHorn, BS

Hillsville, VA
276-728-1030
 Bruce Thomas, M. Ed

Stuart, VA
276-694-4416
 Patricia Morris, BS, TRS

Mount Airy
 2nd Tuesday of every month
 9:00 a.m. Good Mourning with Fonda
 Prime Sirloin

4th Tuesday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Fonda's Lunch Bunch
 Golden Corral

Elkin
 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month
 10:00 a.m. "Living with Grief"
 Matty's Restaurant

1st Monday of every month
 7:00 p.m. "Transitioning to the New"
 Fairfield Inn

4th Monday of every month
 7:00 p.m. Prime Time with Lisa
 (Loss of spouse in one's 30s, 40s, and 50s)
 Fairfield Inn

Stuart
 3rd Wednesday of every month
 1:30 p.m. Support with Patricia
 Stuart United Methodist Church

Wilkesboro
 1st and 3rd Monday of every month
 2:00 p.m. Listening with Lisa
 Rose Glen Village

Yadkinville
 1st Thursday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Sharing with Sarah
 Ace's Restaurant

Hillsville
 3rd Thursday of every month
 11:30 a.m. Moments with Bruce
 Hillsville Office

All I Want for Christmas cont.

want more than a new game or gadget. They want things to be the way they were before the sickness, before the accident, before the funeral, back before the holidays were just sad days in a constant stream of bad days.

The greatest gift you can give your grieving child is not a present, but rather your presence. Even in their pain, kids need moments to just be kids and be held. They need to see the Christmas tree replace the hospital bed. They still want to enjoy opening gifts and gathering with family even if someone they love is missing.

Though the holidays are a magical time, we are still very aware that they don't make pain disappear. Have you ever wondered, "How can I give my children 'normal' when everything is changing?"

If there's one thing children know, it's what they want for Christmas. Ask your children what they want. Let them express how they feel about the approaching holidays and what they would like to do differently or what traditions they want to keep. Allow room for change. Give a

child room to imagine and you may be pleasantly surprised at the ideas they come up with. Your loss has been a family loss, so let the decisions on how to handle that loss be family decisions. This may be a wonderful opportunity for mutual healing and for building new, meaningful family traditions.

Adults want to give their child a perfect, memorable Christmas. Don't stress over imperfection! Often after a death, unexpected expenses arise and it becomes difficult to do what you once did. The first Christmas was celebrated in a

stable. It's okay for yours to be simple as well. Realistically there are no perfect holidays, so don't feel pressured to create one. Both tears and smiles will likely be mingled with the wrapping paper, and that's okay. Enjoy your good moments and bear your bad ones together.

You may not be able to replace your child's two front teeth, but you do have the unique privilege of waiting with them while new ones grow. Dr. Seuss said it best: "Christmas will always be, as long as we stand heart to heart and hand in hand."

Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Bereavement Services

Following a patient's death, Mountain Valley provides specialized grief support services to help loved ones cope with their loss. These services are provided as part of hospice care for 13 months, at no cost to the recipient, and include:

- Grief counseling and education
- Face-to-face/phone sessions
- Monthly support groups
- Monthly newsletter

For questions and comments, contact Mountain Valley Hospice at 336-789-2922 or 888-789-2922, or mtnvalleyhospice.org.

Now available at the
Grief Resources section of the **Mount Airy Public Library**:



Books and videos may be borrowed at any of the
Northwestern Regional libraries in Alleghany, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin counties.

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Mount Airy/NC
Permit No. 59


Mountain Valley
Hospice & PALLIATIVE CARE
401 Technology Lane #200
Mount Airy, NC 27030