

# Journey

Winter 2021

A grief community publication  
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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## Facing the New Year — Learning to Pause

*By Andrew J. Vitale, CT  
Bereavement Coordinator*

Happy New Year?!

Wow. What a year it has been. If you are like me, you've experienced a rather large amount of feelings and emotions... and that's not even including coping with any personal deaths we've experienced. The happenings of this past year, into the beginnings of the present year, have offered us a full roller coaster of ups and downs. These can be quite overwhelming if we don't keep them in check.

We can partially accomplish this by not getting bogged down with the news — too much can over-activate our senses and complicate our grief. I find myself, at times, glued to the television watching the same things over and over, waiting for updates, etc., only to find myself wired up and unable to wind down. Here's my

personal key to taking me off-line: Pause.

As I write this, I find myself smiling as I recall the many times the commercial comes on television with rain sounds and the circle begins... do nothing for 15 (or 30 seconds). The company who created "Calm" knows what we're going through on a daily basis. It paid good money to put those commercials on so we can slow down, and "Pause."

By taking pauses throughout our day, we become more aware and mindful. We step out of the ongoing chaos and mind-numbing, into a moment of NOW. This moment. Breathe for those 15, or 30, seconds. Yes, I realize we are always breathing, but we do it without thinking; it's how we're built. But for those few seconds, stop and become aware of the Now. Really focus on your breathing. By doing so, we

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First in *caring* for life's final months

# From the Bereavement Coordinator



Well, here we are. It's a New Year.

Where does one begin after a year like 2020? Maybe with a pause... and a moment of gratitude.

Although these past months have been strange and difficult, we as a people have shown great resilience. Resilience is something I've shared before. It's an important part of the grief journey. Our ability to 'bounce-back' after difficult situations. Yet we need to learn how to temper the good with the not so good. If we get inundated with negativity, it takes longer to bounce back. We temper with memories of our loved ones, laughter, joy. We are not ignoring the 'not so good' memories, but rather trying to learn from them. Even the bad moments have something to teach each of us.

On our Facebook grief page, The Grief Café, I posted an idea to begin the year with an empty jar, saying that each week add a note with a good thing that happened that week. The ending, on New Year's Eve, empty the jar and read aloud the amazing year you had. Too often it's the little things we get caught up with, stuck on the woulda, coulda, shoulda's – the things that make us doubt ourselves, our thoughts and actions of the past. We need to heal the past, and in doing so, move forward with our lives, loved ones still in our hearts!

This year, let's look to heal ourselves. There are many ways to do this and through The Grief Café, this newsletter, and other suggestions along the way, we will offer suggestions to help heal each other; caring for each other, whether friend or stranger. We all walk a similar path and we're all in need of help and support along the way. May our grief lift us up and shine light on all.

Peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew J. Vitale'.

Andrew J. Vitale, CT  
Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor

## 2021 Virtual Support Groups and Additional Support Offerings

Open to anyone who has experienced the death of someone close to them, our groups and workshops focus on learning, healing and encouragement. All are welcome. Pre-registration is required. Please email [avitale@niha.org](mailto:avitale@niha.org) or call 779.774.9820 to RSVP. Be on the lookout (via the Northern Illinois Hospice website and The Grief Café on Facebook) for our new offering: Facebook Live – Talking about Grief and Resilience.

### Virtual Support Group Zoom Platform

6-consecutive Mondays  
Beginning February 22  
10-11 a.m.

RSVP is necessary as this will be a closed group

### Mindful May Mondays (MMM)

6-consecutive Mondays  
Beginning May 3  
3-4 p.m.

No RSVP is necessary, but requested.

This group will be open to Northern Illinois Hospice families, caregivers, and the community-at-large.

## Ask an Expert

**Q: Everything on the television, news, and the state of society in general has me a bit freaked out. I tend to get panic attacks due to overload. What can I do?**

**A: Try a grounding exercise. These are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment – the here and now. They can be quick strategies, like taking 3 deep “belly” breaths, or longer, more formal exercises, like meditation. The main aim is to keep your mind and body connected and working together.**

# Using Music During Your Grief Journey

By Mallory Pannell, MT-BC  
Music Therapist

Losing a loved one is not easy and learning to navigate the grief journey can be overwhelming. The grieving process is not the same for everyone and it's important to acknowledge your individual needs. Engaging in self-care is essential when processing difficult feelings. A great way to do this is by making a connection through music. Whether you enjoy singing, making playlists, turning on the radio or playing an instrument, using music can help during these challenging days.

## CREATE A PLAYLIST

One way to help when grieving the loss of a loved one is to create a playlist of music in honor of them. This playlist might involve songs that they loved or that you frequently sang together. Add songs that remind you of that person. Often, love songs resonate with us differently after we lose someone. They go from being about the love for a partner to the love of a friend or family member. For example, "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston might have a different meaning when you are thinking of your loved one who died.

## LISTEN TO SPECIAL SONGS

Sometimes it might be painful to listen to your loved one's favorite songs and that's okay. A song might make you cry and it's okay to turn it off. Often songs with words



are too difficult and instrumental music would be a better option. You might find it helpful to listen to songs that reflect the emotions that you're currently feeling. It can be cathartic to allow yourself to feel those feelings. Moving through the grief process triggers many different feelings other than just sadness. Some might feel anger that their loved one died and an upbeat song about how 'everything will be all right' might not match the mood. When using music, it is all about what each individual needs at that time. There is no right or wrong answer. Choose music that makes you feel better.

## SING!

Singing is another way to improve

emotional well-being. In a 2015 study at the Royal College of Music in London, scientists studied the effects of singing on cortisol levels in their participants. The results showed a "significant decrease in both cortisol and cortisone across the low-stress condition" suggesting that singing is a stress-reducing (and possibly health-promoting) activity. Not only does singing promote relaxation, but it also fills your lungs with oxygen by encouraging you to take deep breaths. Find a place that you feel comfortable to sing by yourself or with others. Choose songs that have special meaning to you in that moment that you can pour your heart into. Sing with a recording while playing an instrument, or by yourself.

Many people find it beneficial to experiment with music while coping with grief. What's important is to find what feels right to you. Grief is a journey that is different for everyone. If you continue to struggle with your grief, there is help available. You do not need to work through your grief alone. I hope that these ideas help you in your times of need and that music can bring some beauty into your life.

*Mallory Pannell is a board-certified Music Therapist with Northern Illinois Hospice. Mallory uses her expertise to enhance the lives of patients and families by addressing physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs with music.*

## Facing the New Year — Learning to Pause

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are re-programming our brains. Brain plasticity, or my quarter-word for the day, neuroplasticity, is a term that refers to the brain's ability to change and adapt as a result of experience.

Modern research has demonstrated that the brain continues to create

new neural pathways and alter existing ones in order to adapt to new experiences, learn new information, and create new memories. While people used to think the brain became fixed after a certain age, newer research has revealed that the brain never stops changing

in response to learning. Mindful meditation is just one way we can help grow our brains during our grief journeys. More on this exciting information on The Grief Café, our upcoming Virtual Grief Opportunities and Groups, and upcoming newsletters.



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## Mindful Moment

Labels can help us bring order to chaos in an instant.  
The challenge is that each person and  
situation is more than any one label you might give it.

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