

# Journey

Fall 2021

A grief community publication  
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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## In this issue:

- 2 From Rockford's Bereavement Coordinator  
  
Virtual Grief Workshops & Other Events  
  
Ask an Expert
- 3 Journaling for Healing
- 4 Sharing Gratitude Gives Healing and Helps Others

## During the Holidays: Gather photos, tell stories, and treasure good memories

By Chaplain Roland Brown, M. Div.

As we draw closer to the holidays, memories of loved ones who recently died are fresh in our minds. Often, our thoughts drift to memories of how they died and the days following their death. During this time, many prefer to be alone with the sadness that their loved one is no longer here, or have feelings of regret for not expressing love or forgiveness before the death. This is a natural and human reaction that doesn't always fade on its own.



and others get through these challenging days. As family and friends gather, use this time to share photos of your loved one who has passed. Sharing memories can be healing as you work through the grief process.

### GATHER PHOTOS

Everyone has photos of loved ones who have passed away. Some are on smart phones, walls, or in photo albums, etc. Gather as many as possible and bring them all together. For each photo, reminisce about your loved one, reflect on the happy times you had. There may be kids, even adults, who may have never seen that picture before.

During the holiday season, the sense of loss may feel magnified but there are ways to help yourself

Story continues on page 3



First in *caring* for life's final months

# From Rockford's Bereavement Coordinator

Where has the year gone? We can blame most of last year on the pandemic, but this year was a year of venturing out into society again — safely. Whether an introvert or an extrovert, it's been difficult to readjust from social isolation in this strange world.



As we continue to reintegrate our lives in a 'new normal,' here are a few suggestions all of us can benefit from: 1) **Be patient with yourself and take your time.** We are oftentimes our own worst enemy, placing outside and internal stressors upon ourselves when there is no need for them. Just because it seems like everyone else is doing it doesn't mean you have to do it too. 2) **Routines are important.** Not only are routines important for children during times of upheaval, but they can also help adults too. When our lives become crazy due to grief and other pressures, creating and sticking to a daily routine is a wonderful way to remain in control. 3) **Get your feelings and emotions in check.** This can be as simple as listing your feelings in a journal — 'if you can name it, you can tame it' — and try not to allow your brain to take you down a negative alley. Our brains are wired to be negative, so we have to try harder to counter that with positive thoughts and gratitude. The month of November is set aside for just this — Thanksgiving. Take some time to reflect on those things that you are most grateful, whether large or small.

As we enter these months of holidays, the time can be difficult when complicated with the death of a loved one. Take time to write down and share stories about your loved one — say their name to others (that gives others permission to use it too! Often they are afraid to bring it up in fear of making you sad.). Laugh and cry. Include your loved one in holiday rituals — create a memorial ornament or set a place at the table with a candle in their spot, and share stories or include them in your family thoughts.

Peace,

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

Andrew J. Vitale, CT  
Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor

## Virtual Grief Workshops & Other Events

As we conclude a 9-week program of "Mindful Meditation for Grief and Resilience" at Anderson Japanese Gardens, we have been invited to participate in a new program, "A Path to Renewal," a program developed and written by Randolph K Zimmerman next season in the Gardens (2022). Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor Andrew J. Vitale, CT and a few others from the community have been asked to review and pilot the program this year in preparation for next season. Participants of the 9-week program have had a 'peek' at the program. This upcoming program will be another opportunity for those who are grieving to find solace and peace in guided and themed walks in this program. More on this exciting collaboration coming in future months.

The Grief Café logo features the text "THE Grief CAFÉ" in a stylized font, with "Northern Illinois Hospice" written below it. To the right is a white coffee cup with a latte art design on a saucer, set on a dark wooden surface.

Join us for a "safe space" to gather, ask questions, and share ideas about grief, loss, and bereavement.

Search The Grief Cafe on Facebook.

## Ask an Expert

**Q: How can I honor a loved one during the holidays?**

**A:** There are many ways. Try to think outside the box and of something specific to your loved one. Suggestions: hang stockings and give a small gift to your loved one; give a gift to a child in need or donate to a charity in your loved one's name; as a family, create a seasonal in-home memorial (photos, their favorite things). Did your loved one like snow? How about a family snowball fight? It's okay to laugh and celebrate; is there a special dish or dessert that your loved one enjoyed to make? Recreate it as a family in the kitchen. Don't just grieve your loved one — celebrate them as well! Remember, there's no right or wrong way to grieve.

# JOURNALING FOR HEALING

Grieving can be a lonely experience, and most of us have little idea what to expect. When the holidays are looming, this can seem doubly so.

One exercise which has been shown to provide support while grieving, is journaling. Research shows that grief journaling can help strengthen coping, reduce stress, allow sleep to come more easily, and even offer a boost to your immune system.

Journaling can allow you to take concerns or struggles out of your head and heart, and bring them into greater understanding. There are many benefits to journaling; it utilizes simple and inexpensive supplies, it can be accessed at any time, and it will never demand more than you're ready to give. In addition, your journal is non-judging, for you can say anything you want, any way you want, and as much or as little as you want. Below are some ideas to help get you started:



## Journal Formats

- Pen and paper (a bound journal, spiral notebook, loose-leaf paper).
- Typing into a document on your computer/device.
- Using a journaling app on your smart phone (there are many available).

## Different Ways People Use a Grief Journal

- Brain dump – whatever comes to mind, write about it.
- Writing prompts (various content areas to get you started).
- Sentence starters (which you complete).
- Timed writing exercises (for example writing for 15 minutes daily).

## Things to Keep in Mind

- Let the words flow and be uncensored; try not to pause and reread as you're writing. Do not edit or worry about spelling and grammar.
- As emotions arise, allow them, even if it feels painful or vulnerable. This is where healing takes place.
- Always be gentle and compassionate with yourself; do not judge your efforts. The goal is self-expression.

## Potential Journal Prompts/Holiday Prompts

- Today, I am really missing...
- The hardest part about anticipating this holiday season is...
- I feel the most connected to my loved one when...

# During the Holidays...

continued from page 1

## TELL STORIES

Every picture has a story. A story of when it was taken, who is in the picture with the loved one, and what memory was created. Someone may need to hear a story for closure, for completeness, for celebration. Do that with all the photos and say something about each picture, even when you do not know the background. Tell funny stories too! Laughter can be healing.

## TREASURE GOOD MEMORIES

Photos can evoke good memories to treasure. We like to remember all those special moments, unforgettable experiences, and happy celebrations with people who matter to us. Treasure the smiles of that person, treasure the voice of that person, and treasure the memories.

We all, one day, will be a memory to those we leave behind. Take time this holiday season to share photos and stories, make it a new tradition that will ensure your loved one's legacy lives on.

## Hope for the Holidays *Grief Workshop*

Monday, November 15, 2021  
11:00 a.m. – Noon OR  
3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

*The holidays can be difficult after experiencing the loss of a loved one but there is hope for brighter days. Join Andrew Vitale, CT, Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor, as he shares ideas on how to navigate through the holiday season and how to find joy, even in a time of loss.*

*This is a virtual workshop will be offered at two different times.*

To register for this virtual workshop, please call 779.774.9820. A Zoom link will be provided to all registered participants.

*"Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure. You are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure."*

— Renee Wood



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## Sharing Gratitude Gives Healing, Helps others

Sharing your story can be truly healing. It can also help guide others on their journey. That is why Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation debuted its "Grateful Families" program in February. Through this program, families are encouraged to share their Northern Illinois Hospice story or make a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a member of our team who brought an extra measure of comfort.

Olivia, for instance, was so touched by her grandma's Northern Illinois Hospice nurse, Sandy B., that she shared her story with us. Olivia wrote, "Sandy is compassionate about what she does and the love she poured into my grandma and my family was incredible." By sharing her experience, Olivia paid tribute to her grandma and helped others understand why our care is so important. We are grateful to be entrusted with these stories and honored to have brought comfort to so many!

If you would like to share your story or make a gift, please visit:  
[www.northernillinoishospice.org/give/grateful-families/](http://www.northernillinoishospice.org/give/grateful-families/).



*Rockford resident Olivia Bruneni and her grandma, Patty Hart.*

*If you would like to be removed from our mailing lists, please call 815.398.0500.*