

Journey

Winter 2023

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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Filling the Empty Seat

By Roland Brown, M.Div.

After the loss of a loved one, an empty seat or an unused stove becomes a constant reminder of what is missing. This brings a flood of memories and emotions and it's often difficult looking at an empty seat in a home that was once filled with life, love, and laughter.

Experiencing the death of a loved one is a journey like no other. Life events such as moving, going away to college, or even a disagreement, cannot compare to the loss of life. Often when there are unresolved issues, it can be more challenging to move on. Taking time to address the mixed emotions that come with death can help the grieving learn to let go of any potential guilt or resentment that is lingering.

Here are a few suggestions to help overcome misunderstanding and pain:

- Make peace with the person who is no longer living, through the

seat or the stove, by addressing issues that can lead to a path of finality.

- Take time to share memories that can help others appreciate who that person was or help to forgive what they cannot change.
- Write a note addressed to your loved one to express your feelings, whether it be love, forgiveness, or understanding.
- Sit in that empty seat or turn on that stove. This will create new memories.

Lastly, because the empty seat and unused stove will still be in your home after a death of a loved one, make use of these objects as they will help with navigating the grief journey. Most important, be kind to yourself so you may find peace.

Then Jonathan said to David, *"Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed because your seat will be empty."* I Samuel 20:18



First in *caring* for life's final months

From Rockford's Bereavement Coordinator



Tempus Fugit! My how 'time flies' by... here we are at the beginning of another New Year, 2023. I am going to combine my column with my musings and an exercise that anyone can create as we ponder and reminisce about the life of our loved one. As I have shared in the past, a wonderful and healing means to grow in grief is to remember the stories of the past connected to our loved one.

This month, take some time out of your days and look through some photos of your loved one and take some time to re-tell the stories associated with those photos and then create a "Memory Collage." It doesn't have to be professional, only sentimental to you. Find photos, those you've taken, or others have taken, along with additional pictures from magazines or words, and let your heart lead you in healing. Paste these on a sheet of paper and remember the stories connected to them – share them with other family members or friends.

My mom did this. Rather than gluing photos down, she has several end-tables in her condo that she laid out photos of family, including my dad who died back in 2012, on the table tops, she then placed glass on top of the photos. A photo album laid out that anyone who comes to visit can see – no books to collect dust on shelves - just photos and stories all around the condo. Be creative.

My prayer for everyone is that you will continue to heal this year through your grief. Remember to be gentle with yourself and know that it's okay to say "No." — and, when feelings and emotions start to well-up and become too much, be in it for a moment, step back from the experience, breathe, and let it go.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew J. Vitale". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Andrew J. Vitale, CT
Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor

2023 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. To register, please go to our website northernillinoisospice.org.

Grief Support Group

January Dates/Times/Location:
TBD

For more information on Rockford area events, email Andrew Vitale at avitale@niha.org.

Bridge of Hope

Six-consecutive Mondays
Beginning January 24
2:30 - 4 PM
Federated Church
612 W. State St., Sycamore

For more information on DeKalb County events, email Jen Conley at jconley@niha.org.

Ask the Expert

Q: Why do feelings and emotions 'flare up' out of the blue when you least expect them? Where do they come from?

A: These are called "Trigger Events." Moments - conscious, unconscious, and subconscious - just happen. It could be the sound of a beloved song, or the smell of something baking, or even a calendar date or memento. Any of these can create havoc, flaring up our emotions. Emotions are similar to the ocean waves – oftentimes they are calm, and they just come up to cover our feet. At other times, they may be a bit stronger, and we need to offer some resistance so we don't succumb to falling into the water. In any case, if we slow down and try to stay 'in the present moment,' we can oftentimes control these emotions and feelings from overcoming us; we can see them coming. "Control your feelings or they will control you." We become powerful once we learn how to control what we react to.

Deep Breathing Brings Calm

By Jen Conley, MT-BC, LPC

In November, Northern Illinois Hospice completed its first *Bluebirds Fly Children's Grief Support Group*, led in collaboration with Northern Illinois University Center for Grief and Loss. The children explored myths and facts about death, engaged in play therapy via therapeutic sand boxes, made grief masks and memorial ornaments, explored feelings and coping, talked about family changes, and came up with an individual list of things that

bring comfort.

During one game, one little guy was excited to share the "flower and candle" exercise that his teacher taught him. He explained, "First you smell the flowers," (he held his index finger to his nose, inhaling deeply). "Then you blow the candle," and he added quickly, "But don't blow it out! You just want it to flicker." (He then extended his arm fully, with index finger still up, and exhaled very slowly and intentionally). We all did this together and it is

an excellent strategy for deep breathing. Since then, this simple, imagery-based approach has been a great tool to share, even with adults.

When we feel stress, anxiety, or grief, remembering to breathe deeply may not come easily, but it is essential to helping instill calm. Deep breathing increases oxygen supply and helps calm the nervous system. Please utilize and share the "flower and candle" technique. The images are easy to recall and put into practice.

Memorial Ornament Workshop

For the second year in a row, Northern Illinois Hospice hosted a Memorial Ornament Workshop, allowing anyone to come, share stories and memories, and make an ornament in memory of someone they loved and lost.

This year's December event was held at Sycamore Public Library. Clear bulbs were handed out along with a plethora of decorating options include ribbon, stickers, pom poms, and even fake snow.



8 (Reasonable) New Year's Resolutions for Grievers

1. Go easy on yourself.
2. Spend time with people you like.
3. Engage in one hobby or activity that makes you feel good.
4. Be honest about how you feel.
5. Speak your loved one's name.
6. Plan opportunities for remembrance.
7. Give (and receive) support from others who are grieving.
8. Seek formal support such as a support group or professional counselor.

Source: www.whatyourgrief.com



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“Say not in grief that they are gone,
but give thanks that they were yours.”

— Hebrew Proverb, Memorial Prayer Cards

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