

# Journey

Winter 2024

A grief community publication  
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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## In this issue:

2 From DeKalb's Bereavement  
Coordinator

2024 Bereavement  
Support Groups

3 Memorial Pillow Workshop

4 Ask an Expert

## The Winter Blues

By Cynthia Holda, M.Div.

The start of a new year often brings with it cold temperatures, snowy conditions, and gloomy days. This is also a time of year when some people start to feel what's commonly referred to as the "winter blues." Those who have experienced loss may feel that it's difficult to cope in the winter months because it's dark and dreary, making it harder to get motivated to get out of bed, stay energized, be productive, exercise, or complete to-do lists.

On the other hand, those who experience grief in the winter may actually prefer this time of year because it's easier to "hibernate" and "be alone" when others are spending more time indoors. There may be less expectation for someone experiencing grief to be as joyful as they might have to feel in the summer months with their family and friends, going on outings,

having barbeques, taking vacations, and playing outdoor sports.

Experts at [www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com) offer eight reasons for winter being the hardest time for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one:

1. Lack of sunlight. Vitamin D levels and serotonin are affected by exposure to sunlight and may leave you tired, irritable and "blue."

2. Cabin fever. Spending too much time indoors can increase depression, restlessness, an irritable mood and thinking difficult thoughts, with little relief.

3. Social isolation. Being alone too much may impact you negatively in your physical and emotional health.

4. Lack of exercise. Even a small amount of movement can boost your emotional and physical wellbeing. During the winter



First in *caring* for life's final months

Story continues on page 3

# From DeKalb's Bereavement Coordinator

Grief...and life...are so very unpredictable. We often start our journey as adults expecting our story to unfold in a certain way. Sometimes it does, or at least for a time, but eventually life upends us – including profound losses. At times the loss may be someone so beloved we cannot even articulate words profound enough to express it. We are left adrift, bereft, and with no solid ground to stand on.



The early days of loss are all about survival, sometimes taking “one day at a time” is too long, so we take one minute at a time. Sometimes even getting out of bed is an act of courage. As time goes on, we typically find a way to navigate this uncharted territory better, but we can still be hijacked by our grief emotions at any time. Learning to be “okay” with this is a big task, but the acceptance (rather than judgment) of our grief journey will profoundly help us as we travel it. Rather than push against these unpredictable experiences, lean into the unexpected and unpredictable nature of grieving. It is a kind gesture towards yourself, and new awarenesses may unfold.

In some grief circles we like to speak of having been “broken open” by grief, rather than “falling apart.” There may be times when it is our grief journey itself which helps clarify how we want to spend our days, invest in our relationships, and adjust how we define what is important. This new lens may be an important factor in the legacy we carry forward – of the beloved person we have lost.

Those of us in a certain age group fondly remember Gilda Radner, a Saturday Night Live comedian who died at age 42 of ovarian cancer. Gilda communicated much through her humor and full engagement with the world. She also embraced the unknown, in fact referring to it as a “delicious” part of our lived experience. I leave you with one of my favorite quotes from her.

“I wanted a perfect ending. Now I’ve learned, the hard way, that some poems don’t rhyme, and some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment, and making the best of it, without knowing what’s going to happen next. Delicious Ambiguity.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jen Conley".

Jen Conley, LPC, MT-BC  
Bereavement Coordinator/Music Therapist

## 2024 Bereavement Support Groups

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.

### Memorial Pillow Workshop

June 29, 2024

Two sessions

9:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

DeKalb Public Library

Yusunas Room

309 Oak St., DeKalb

*Registration is required and space is limited. Registration is through the library at [dkpl.org](http://dkpl.org), or 815.756.9568.*

### Bridge of Hope Bereavement Care Group

May/June 2024, dates TBD.

### Bluebirds Fly Children's Grief Support Group

Fall 2024, dates TBD.

To register, visit our website, [northernillinoisospice.org](http://northernillinoisospice.org) or contact Jen Conley at [jconley@niha.org](mailto:jconley@niha.org).

*"Grief never ends...  
but it changes. It's  
a passage, not a  
place to stay. Grief  
is not a sign of  
weakness, nor a  
lack of faith. It is  
the price of love."*

— author unknown





*Volunteers assisting in making the pillows included (from left to right) Karen Carrier, Denise Curran, Debi Uhl, Dawn Carlson, Kathy Merner, Sue Goudy (seated front), Krista Biedler, Kathy Bach, and Catherine Koemptgen.*

## Memorial Pillow Workshop

On January 27, eight volunteer sewers and sixteen participants gathered in the Yusunas Room of the DeKalb Public Library to create 28 original pillows made from cherished items of clothing. The Memorial Pillow Workshop, co-hosted with the DeKalb Public Library was an event full of warmth, tenderness, laughter, and tears. As one participant stated, “The energy in here is palpable, and it is healing.”

There is a theory in the study of grieving that was introduced by researchers M.S. Moss, and S.Z. Moss called Continuing Bonds Theory. When someone deeply beloved to us dies, we are left adrift and unanchored. While ultimately, we need to find a new equilibrium, we also need to be able to maintain a connection with our loved one. They are gone, but the love we hold in our hearts remains. One way this can be accomplished is through intentionally fostering a continued connection with our loved one.



A memorial pillow is an excellent way to do this. Through an article of our loved one’s clothing, we create a unique and individual object that is tangible, and huggable! It is a link connecting us to them and can provide a great deal of comfort and solace.

In addition to the pillows, there are a number of ways we can foster continued bonds with our loved one:

- Talk with your loved one – you are not going crazy – this is natural and normal. It can be in your head or out loud.
- Keep a photo of your loved one visible or consider a shelf or small place in your home for a “shrine,” with photos, small objects or mementos.
- If you have a decision to make or feel overwhelmed, imagine how they might give advice or help you walk through it.
- Don’t be afraid to talk about your loved one with new people who come into your life. It’s okay and will help keep their legacy alive.

## The Winter Blues

*continued from page 1*

months, people are more hesitant to spend time outdoors. This is when it’s more important to utilize an exercise program - even a little bit of movement goes a long way in your health.

5. Poor eating habits. Grief and the winter blues can often tempt you with comfort foods.

6. You’re sad. You’ve just endured the holidays, which can bring on more sadness as loved ones are missed and remembered.

7. You’re experiencing SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), which affects more than ten million Americans each year according to Psychology Today. This is a type of depression where the symptoms occur in the fall and early winter and tend to ease up during the springtime. Having SAD can naturally complicate the ability to cope during the winter months and it often mirrors symptoms of grief. If you think you may have SAD, please seek the help of a medical professional.

8. It’s cold. The weather makes it difficult to get outside and do things.

It’s important to remember that although this season is challenging, it is just that – a season. Before we know it, the snow will melt, the flowers will begin to grow, and we will be enjoying the sunlight as spring arrives. My hope is that as you come out of the winter blues season, you will enter a new season which brings you growth, joy, and strength for the seasons ahead.



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## Ask an Expert

**Q:** Everything on the television, in the 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.

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