



Just Among Friends ***A Newsletter for Bereaved Persons***

JULY & AUGUST, 2010

YOUR BEREAVEMENT STAFF

The Bereavement Program is carried out by Hospice staff and a group of dedicated Hospice volunteers.

As a Medicare certified hospice program, Hospice of Mercy is required to reach out to identified family members periodically in the 13 month period following the loved one's death. If at any time, you feel that this outreach is not necessary, or, for any reason you prefer that we not call, you may always request this.

Bereavement support is offered to you completely free of charge. We are eager to serve and assist you through periodic contacts, individual counseling, as well as facilitated support groups. Bereavement staff members Barbara Koch, Pat Elkington, and Vicki Finkstein can be reached by calling Hospice of Mercy at 398-6735. We welcome your e-mail, too. Contact us at

bkoch@mercyare.org or pelkington@mercyare.org or
vfinkstein@mercyare.org

- If you do **not** wish to receive this newsletter, we'd welcome the opportunity to save our resources and reduce clutter in your mailbox and home!
- Or, if you would like to receive this Newsletter via e-mail, we do that, too!

Communicate your request by calling 319-398-6735 or e-mail: bkoch@mercyare.org

JULY & AUGUST SUPPORT GROUP & LUNCHEON DATES & TIMES

Each month, Hospice of Mercy offers support groups at various times. Our groups are small and informal. **The groups meet at The Dennis and Donna Oldorf Hospice House of Mercy, 315 18th Avenue, Hiawatha**, and are facilitated by hospice staff. A support group can be considered a "safe place" to share your experiences, and to hear how others are making their way on grief's journey.

A Cup of Comfort & Conversation meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. This group is for men and women grieving spousal, parental, or other death losses. Cookies, conversation, and comfort await you. See you July 6th and August 3rd.

The ***Younger Spouse Support Group*** meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. This group is for women, age 65 and younger, who grieve the death of their spouse/partner. See you July 8th and August 12th.

The ***Evening Learning Together Group*** meets the 3rd Thursday of the month from 5:30 to 7 p.m. this group is for men and women who grieve spousal, parental, or other death losses. This is a good opportunity to learn a bit about the experience of grief and to be assured that you are not alone. See you July 15th and August 19th.

The ***Bereavement Luncheon*** is a monthly, noontime, Dutch-treat fellowship event for all. It is held at Ryan's at 230 Collins Rd. NE, Cedar Rapids. We have tables reserved especially for us, and you will be greeted by Hospice bereavement staff. See you July 22nd and August 26th.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT RESOURCES

Griefshare is a non-denominational support group that features biblical teaching on grief and recovery topics. Locally, there are several churches that offer this valuable program. For more information, go to www.griefshare.org or call the Bereavement Office, 398-6735.

LADOS (Life After the Death of a Spouse) is a local group for widows and widowers. It meets at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 8300 C Ave. NE, Marion, on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Gary Williams at 832-1292.

Mother Loss: Grieving Daughters Our newest grief education group was very well received this past spring. We are planning to offer this four session series again in October. Watch for more information in our next newsletter, or feel free to contact us at 319-398-6735.

Other Grief Support Groups: Seeking an additional group experience? We have information on additional resources. Give us a call or send an e-mail.



LET FREEDOM  (to Grieve) RING!

In July, we observe and celebrate our Independence Day. So it seems fitting to take a look at how the concept of *freedom* relates to the grief process.

I'll be borrowing concepts from two well known grief educators. Let's start with Doug Manning. In his book, "Don't Take My Grief Away From Me (1979, In-Sight Books), he describes the many and varied ways well meaning family, friends, and others deny a bereaved person's *right to grieve* with statements such as:

"Get a hold of yourself."

"You can't carry on like this."

"Come on, stop crying."

"You should be glad he's in a better place."

"She lived a long life; you need to move on."

As a clergyperson, Manning had often found himself doing and saying things that inhibited the natural and normal expression of loss. In his own words:


"I wondered how many times I had succumbed to the idea that sympathy was somehow harmful. It was almost as if I believed if sympathy were given, folks would wallow in it and never get well. These feelings seemed to be my stance. I do not know how I got


around Jesus' standing at the tomb of a friend and weeping."


He goes on to describe the ways in which we unintentionally discourage people from processing their loss. It does seem that we have a tendency in our society to *move on* and *get over it* far too quickly.


Much of what we do in providing bereavement care is very simply to *normalize the grief experience*. By that I mean we endeavor to offer some basic education about the depth and breadth of grief; to raise awareness of the emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and social aspects of grief; to encourage the bereaved to embrace their grief rather than avoid it.


Dr. Alan Wolfelt, another highly regarded grief expert, has written extensively, and like Reverend Manning, he empowers bereaved people to claim their *right to grieve*. In his book, "Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal" (1992, Accelerated Development Inc.) he explains his viewpoint through a listing of 12 fundamental *freedoms*. So...here they are, paraphrased.


 **Freedom #1: You have the freedom to realize your grief is unique.** No two people grieve the same way; and no person grieves each death the same. Disregard other's admonishments or "advice" on what you should do or not do, or how long your grief should last.


 **Freedom #2: You have the freedom to talk about your grief.** Here's the tricky part: Not everyone is going to be comfortable with or supportive of your very basic need to express yourself. You may need to seek support from people who can be present to you in the midst of your pain. Remember that it is in expressing your grief that healing occurs.

 **Freedom #3: You have the freedom to expect to feel a multitude of emotions.** Normal grief can be a roller coaster ride of feelings and sensations. Grief can impact you emotionally, physically, spiritually, and cognitively.


 **Freedom #4: You have the freedom to allow for numbness.** This is a very common occurrence after the shock of a death loss. Feeling numb and disconnected from your surroundings is a normal, and functional response to extreme circumstances.


 **Freedom #5: You have the freedom to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.** The death of a loved one may leave you feeling fragile in mind, body, and spirit. Now is the time to be very kind, very gentle to yourself.


 **Freedom #6: You have the freedom to experience grief attacks or memory embraces.** Most bereaved will have those moments when seemingly "out of nowhere" they are hit hard by their grief. Grief attacks are normal and natural, but they can promote a sense of being out of control, overwhelmed, etc. A helpful strategy might be to intentionally seek out a trusted person to whom you can talk freely about your feelings.


 **Freedom #7: You have the freedom to develop a support system.** Frequently, the bereaved person wonders, "Where the heck are my friends? I thought they would be here for me, but I'm feeling abandoned!" The sad truth is that when you're at your lowest, you may have to do the reaching out to support persons on your own. But this action of self-care is a powerful testament to your courage and your will to *see your*


way through the hardest of days. (Note: Attending a bereavement support group and/or visiting with a counselor may be the *best gift to yourself...and you deserve it!*)

 **Freedom #8: You have the freedom to make use of ritual.** Most of you who read this newsletter have already been through the funeral ritual, but have you considered how you might utilize rituals throughout your bereavement? Simple acts of intentional remembrance, meditation, prayer, etc. can be tremendously helpful, and can promote healthy, healing grief.

 **Freedom #9: You have the freedom to embrace your spirituality.** Having a strong faith system does not spare you or insulate you from the experience of grief. Bereaved people may feel detached from their faith; others may feel even more connected.

 **Freedom #10: You have the freedom to allow for a search for meaning.** Regardless of whether you are "churched" or "unchurched", or "religious" or "not religious," a very common consequence of a death loss is the re-examination of those *Big Questions* related to the meaning of life and one's beliefs. Grief is a journey that *will take you where you need to go*, if you will only let it. Most bereaved people will tell you that in the aftermath of a death loss, their life perspective is altered... usually for the better. Believe that your grief offers you the opportunity for creativity, growth, and change.

 **Freedom #11: You have the freedom to treasure your memories.** Doesn't this seem like a "no-brainer?" But it's important to mention this because some bereaved might have the inclination to avoid or block-out memories "since they just make me cry too much." Dr. Wolfelt notes that an important task of grief is to transition your relationship with the bereaved from a relationship of *presence* to a relationship of *memory*. And yes, this process may evoke tears and distress. But to deny yourself access to treasured memories can derail your grief journey.

 **Freedom #12: You have the freedom to move toward your grief and heal.** It's counter-intuitive to *move towards* pain, isn't it? From the time we are little kids, we are taught to "Don't touch the flame, you'll get burned!" More recently, our culture has given out strong messages to "Get over it!" or "Move on!" When we seek to heal from a death loss, there's just no getting around it...we need to walk into the "fire" of our pain. Remember that grief is a *process* and it is lengthy.

—Barbara Koch, Bereavement Coordinator



Looking ahead to September, 2010

A Cup of Comfort & Conversation:	Tues. 9/07, 10 am
Younger Spouse Support Group:	Thurs. 9/09, 7 pm
Memorial Service @ Mercy Med. Ctr.	Tues. 9/14, 7 pm
We will be remembering those who died in April, May, June & July, 2010.	
Evening Learning Together:	Thurs. 9/16, 5:30 pm
Luncheon	Thurs. 9/23, 12 Noon