May 2015

The Unbroken Bond

“Just because your beloved has died, it doesn’t mean that your relationship has died too. When a star dies in the universe, its light continues to penetrate the darkness for millions of years. Our loved ones are like stars in the heavens now, and although their lives have ended on this earth, their lights continue to shine. Their influence endures.”

From Ashley Davis Bush’s Transcending Loss

When faced with the loss of a loved one, we might be tempted to try and hold on with both hands. The thought of losing him or her is absolutely unbearable and early on, we want (or need) to stay as connected as possible. We find comfort in the photos that surround us and the possessions that remain behind, as we fumble through our day-to-day lives still in shock and disbelief.

As the clouds begin to lift and we open to the raw emotions that accompany our loss, we search for ways to express our love and our desire to remember this significant relationship that shaped and formed our lives. We meet each day as best we can, hoping that in time, the pain will lesson and we can remember them without the flood of tears and searing ache that accompanies most of our memories.

We understand that while our loved one is physically gone, our love endures. One hand holds tightly to our memories while the other opens to connect with those around us. Life moves us along and we begin to feel the presence of our loved one in our own thoughts, actions, and words. We understand how to do both because our bond is not broken by death, only changed in form.

On the following pages, you will find invitations and opportunities to continue to explore your relationship with your loved one. Whether experienced with others in a group or a workshop or in private moments of reflection, I encourage you to seek ways to remember and reaffirm your unbroken bond with your loved one.

Yours,
Christine

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Grief & Loss Support Group
May 15 – June 19, 2015 from 1 – 2:30 pm (Fridays in Bethlehem)

Chronicling Memory: A Memoir Workshop
May 21 – June 18, 2015 from 6:30 – 8pm (Thursdays in Bethlehem)

5th Annual Charity Bike Ride
June 6, 2015
Grief and Loss Support Group

This is a 6 week support group for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. Our support group provides an opportunity to come together with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one to share stories, offer and receive support, and find hope and healing. A group can offer both peer support and education and information about the grief journey. It is important that participants are able to attend all 6 weeks. **Registration for the group is required.** There are no drop-ins permitted. Please note that the group is subject to be canceled if sufficient registration is not reached. Space is limited. Please call for more information.

Lehigh Valley Area
May 15th – June 19th, 2015 from 1 – 2:30pm.
St. Luke’s Bethlehem Education Center (Room 103), 801 Ostrum St., Bethlehem, PA.
Call Christine Holmfelt at (610) 997-7132 to register for this group.

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**Chronicling Memory:**
**Re-Storying the Lives of Those We’ve Lost**
**A Memoir Workshop**

Writing stories about beloved friends or family members may seem a daunting task – but creating a memoir of things you want to remember can become a treasured keepsake. It also is a way of sharing those stories with others. This five-week workshop will teach the basics of memoir writing in a supportive atmosphere. You’ll receive step-by-step help in beginning to write about special memories. Group work and one-on-one meetings with the workshop leader will be included. You do not need to have written anything before in order to participate. Writing can be done with a pen and paper or on a computer. **This workshop is not recommended for the recently bereaved, but is intended for those who experienced a loss at least five or six months ago.** Vicki Mayk, professional writer and magazine editor, will be teaching this workshop.

The workshop will be held from May 21st through June 18th, 6:30 – 8pm in room 103 at St. Luke’s Bethlehem Education Center. To register, please call Christine Holmfelt at (610) 997-7132.

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**Questions for Reflection:**

What is the most important thing you learned from your loved one?
How does he/she continue to inspire you?

“In this universe nothing is ever wholly lost. That which is excellent remains forever a part of this universe.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson
In a strange, paradoxical way, the dead do seem to accompany us, like a shadow only slightly removed from our own being. I don’t think this happens in any sustained fashion right away. Perhaps we have to wait a while, know the reality of separation, and give ourselves time for the components of our lives to sift down into their new patterns before we can begin to see the relationship with the one who had died is not over. It is different, but it is not over. It is not what we would wish, but it has its own reality and comfort.

Perhaps our sense of the loved one comes unbidden; perhaps we invoke it by our thoughts. It comes to us in different ways – a sense of the person’s presence, a warmth of love in the room. A dream that speaks directly to our need.

Long ago, when my grief was still quite new, I wondered aloud to my son about the origin and meaning of one of those experiences – Was it real? Could I trust it? And he said, “Why don’t you just accept it as a gift?”

I will listen. I will welcome as gifts the memory and presence of love.

Letter to Your Loved One

It seems there is never enough time to say all of the things in our minds and hearts before our loved one is gone. Writing letters can be a way to express those unspoken words as well as reopening the connections that are deeply held.

As you begin your letter with “Dear …,” your thoughts and feelings might easily pour out. If you are having trouble getting started, you might consider the following guides to help you:

What I have always wanted to tell you is…
My most treasured memory of you is…
What you never understood was…
What I want you to know about me is …
What I now realize is …
The one question I have wanted to ask is …
I want to keep you in my life by…

Letter writing is a powerful way to reconnect, but can be even more important on significant occasions when the loss is felt more intensely, such as on anniversaries, birthdays, or holidays.

from “When Great Trees Fall”
Maya Angelou

And when great souls die, after a period peace blooms, slowly and always irregularly. Spaces fill with a kind of soothing electric vibration. Our senses, restored, never to be the same, whisper to us. They existed. They existed. We can be. Be and be better. For they existed.
Resources for Children and Teens

Memory Books

Enid Samuel-Traisman, MSW, has created memory books for children ages 8 – 12 (Remember: A Child Remembers) and for teenagers (Fire in My Heart, Ice In My Veins). Each journal provides space for letters, stories, pictures, and drawings along with guidelines for reflections.

The following are prompts in Remember in the section “Honoring Your Life”:

- When I am involved in these activities, I feel closer to you:
- When I see these things, I am reminded of you:
- This is what I did special in your memory:
- This is why it was meaningful:
- I have kept some of your personal things. This is what I have kept and why they are special to me:
- Here is a poem or short story about you/us:
- This is how I want to remember you:

In addition to helping children and teens explore their grief, memory books provide an opportunity to reinforce and reflect on their enduring bond with their loved ones and the legacies that remain.

Memory Boxes

Creating a memory box can be a special way to honor a loved one. It provides a safe space to remember and reconnect while exploring the range of feelings that accompany grief. (Depending on the age of the child, he or she may require adult supervision for this project. Adults may want to create their own boxes.)

First, find an empty box with a lid (maybe a shoe box or a craft box). Consider the items you want to place inside to decide on the size of the box. Then you can decorate the outside with photos, fabric, ribbons, stickers, tissue paper, or paint. Choose colors or images that are special to you and remind you of your loved one.

Once the outside of the box is decorated, pick out objects that will be kept inside. You could include photos, letters, toys, drawings, ticket stubs, or special possessions. Anything that brings back memories of your loved one can be placed in your box.

When you find yourself missing your loved one, you can visit your memory box.

Camp Cocoon

A bereavement day camp for children ages 5 – 16
Saturday, May 30th (register by May 16th)
9am – 3pm
Nazareth, PA
To request more information or to register, contact Jason Boyko at (610) 969-0330 or email Jason.Boyko@lvhn.org
Bereavement Services in the Community

This is a listing of additional free bereavement resources in the area. If you have a need for something and don’t see it on this list, please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for referrals to other services.

**GriefShare Groups** are a faith-based, evangelical approach to grief and loss. GriefShare groups are provided at various locations around the Lehigh Valley. To find a location near you, please visit www.griefshare.org.

**Free Spirits** is a group of more than 2 dozen older widows who go out to lunch once a month to keep active and offer support to each other—and to newer widows. Most are members of Church of the Manger UCC, Bethlehem. Call 610-866-8223 for more information.

**VNA/Hospice of Monroe County** offers a support group the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at noon. Call 570-421-5390 for more information.

**Lehigh Valley Health Network** offers grief support services in the form of counseling, support groups, and workshops for adults and children, as well as a lunch club for women. For more information, please call 610-969-0330.

**Grand View Hospital Hospice** offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

**Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress, and Life Transitions and Grief Education and Counseling Groups** offered by Wendy Littner Thomson M.Ed., LPC, RYT. For locations, times, or more information please call 610-730-1992 or visit www.givinggriefavoice.com.

**The Compassionate Friends** offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling. To find a local chapter, visit the organization’s website at www.compassionatefriends.org and click on “Chapter Locator.”

**Family Answers** holds a **Survivors of Suicide** support group at 402 North Fulton Street in Allentown, PA. This group is held the first and third Monday each month from 7-8pm. Call 610-435-9651 for more info.

**Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley with St. Luke’s** offers the **Hope and Healing Series.** Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org for more information.

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**Become Part of a Dedicated Team**

St. Luke’s Hospice is actively seeking volunteers to serve and support hospice patients and families within the Lehigh Valley and Carbon county areas. Specially trained volunteers are an integral part of the St. Luke’s Hospice team. Volunteers serve as a welcome friend to the family. They share their time and talents in many ways. Volunteers can visit with patients in their homes or in St. Luke’s inpatient Hospice House. They can also assist with administrative office duties and help at special events.

For more information or to join our next volunteer training session, please call 610-997-7121.

*Applicants who have recently experienced the loss of a family member are asked to wait until they have completed a bereavement period of at least one year before applying to become a hospice volunteer.*

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**Thank you!**

We’d like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all of you who have made donations from your heart as a way of expressing your appreciation for our hospice bereavement services. It is an honor to companion you on your grief and life transition journeys. Your gifts ensure that this service continues to evolve in meaningful directions to meet the ongoing and growing needs of our families and our community. Many of you ask for a telephone number for donation information.

You may contact the Development Office at 484-526-3067.

Again, heartfelt thanks.