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2012

Soothing the Spirit

By Jennifer Shontz, LSCSW, LCSW
Grief Support Specialist, KCH&PC

Faith Questions

When we hurt, we cry. When we're tired, we rest. When we're injured, we bandage our wounds. When we have pain in the depths of our being, we seek spiritual solace. Grieving the loss of a loved one affects us emotionally and physically, but we're also spiritual beings.

Yet in times of crisis, we may have questions about our faith and may even experience the emptiness of a faith abandoned. Questions such as "Why?", "Where is God?", "What is my purpose now?", "Will I see my loved one again?" or "When will my pain end?" can be disturbing or uncomfortable, though normal questions to ponder. Yet our faith community and traditions offer valuable comfort and support to those who are grieving, and many report a strengthened faith through the healing journey of grief.

Faith Traditions

Religion provides us traditions, rituals and structure within which we nourish our spirits, search for meaning and find solace. Attending worship services at a church, synagogue or mosque can provide sanctuary from the pain of grief, the support of a caring community, and guidance about how to cope with the loss.

If you don't attend a church, you can still have a rich and meaningful spiritual life by designing your own spiritual practice with prayer or meditation, time in nature, music, respite in a quiet sanctuary in your home or workplace.

If you attend a church but aren't comfortable returning yet, you may choose to have "church" with a circle of friends or family, or by listening to inspirational tapes. However you choose



The Spirit

Sensing the Spirit
Is like finding the first spring flower
On the forest floor.

A woodpecker drums out assurance
That a new day has come.

The outline of a path appears
Among the drifted leaves.

- Robert G. Fisher

to practice your faith, staying spiritually connected is important during your time of healing.

Spiritual Support

It's helpful to have an avenue to explore your spiritual questions with someone who will understand and listen without judging, minimizing or dismissing them. People in your spiritual community are often eager to provide help but may need you to describe your needs for practical matters such as meals, help with household projects, etc., or for emotional support and comfort. Many churches, organizations and ministries offer grief support programs and services.

What's most important is that you have people who can share the journey of grief with you. Grief is easier to bear if we share the burden and recognize that we are not alone in the world, here and beyond.

Managing Finances in an Economically Stressful Time

Q&A With Bill Hammond, J.D., founder and owner of the Elder and Disability Law Firm in Overland Park, Kansas

Q. Is it common for people who are grieving to have financial concerns?

A. It's natural to be concerned or anxious about the future when you've just suffered the loss of a loved one. Due to our national economic crisis many are overwhelmed with two losses: the death of a loved one and the death of some investments. Both circumstances involve the stages of grief.

Q. How do I assess my financial situation?

A. First, take an inventory. Some people do this very informally and some people take a very detailed inventory. Either is acceptable. The main concern is to get a handle on your income and your assets as quickly as possible. Begin with a simple financial checkup. Write down your monthly income from whatever sources ... social security, pensions, investments and so on. Then make a list of your resources, such as bank accounts, stocks, bonds, mutual funds and life insurance proceeds.

Next, prepare a budget so that you can know what you are working against.

Q. How do I protect my assets?

A. The question of asset protection is really quite

personal to the amount of assets you have. For some people this can be as simple as making sure that you have your assets in very safe investments like interest-bearing bank accounts, government bonds or your family home.

For others with more substantial means, asset protection can take the form of shifting assets to other family members to spread out the risk or perhaps putting your assets into a trust. If you have more substantial resources, a financial advisor can often be of great assistance.

Q. How do I find a good financial advisor, and how much does it cost?

A. Now more than ever, good financial advice is essential. With the election of Barack Obama as President economic policy change will be a high priority. A financial planner well informed on current developments can be of great help.

Talk to others for a recommendation, such as people you have met through support groups or friends. Find an advisor who has seen many years worth of financial developments. You want someone who understands investment risks—who has made or at least preserved money in down markets as well as up markets.

Good financial advisors will never cost you money—they will save you money. Sure, there may be some



cost involved in their services (otherwise they wouldn't be in business) but consider the services of a trusted advisor to be an investment worth making.

Q. Do I need a professional to prepare my taxes?

A. It's a good idea to seek professional help in tax preparation the first time following the death of a loved one, especially if you have not been previously involved in managing household finances. In addition, tax laws can change rapidly and some policies may affect issues such as estate planning, homestead credits and final returns.

If your finances are relatively simple and you can't afford to spend funds on tax preparation, help is available through the AARP and VITA Tax-Aid programs. The AARP service provides free tax preparation and assistance services to low and middle-income taxpayers, with special attention to those ages 60 or older. The VITA

(Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) provides assistance to those with a low income. For more information on these programs visit the Kansas City Public Library website at www.kclibrary.org and click on "tutorials and guides."

Q. How do I avoid pitfalls?

A. Be careful about giving money to marginal friends and relatives who ask for financial help. Draw clear boundaries and give serious thought to the nature of your relationships with those who make such requests.

A good advisor is a valuable resource in such situations. He or she can act as a "wall" between you and others and can say things that you can't or don't want to say.

As soon as you can muster the strength and courage after the loss of your loved one, it's important to look at the finances. You need to know the financial challenges you face and the resources you have.

Support for Children

Solace House

Solace House: A Center for Grieving Children, Individuals, and Families offers grief support groups for ages 3 through adults.

Children's support groups are divided based upon developmental age while adult groups are based on relationship loss or special circumstance; which include spouse loss, child loss, suicide loss, and mixed adult (parent/sibling/friend/ex-spouse/grandparent). Individual counseling is available as needed.

Registration is required to participate. Please call 913.341.0318 to learn more. Solace House is a program of Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care.

Additionally, Solace House offers a seminar for parents and caregivers of grieving children and teens which addresses questions about the grief process of children's and teens, supporting the grieving child or teen, and an opportunity to hear from other parents and guardians. This seminar is free and open to any parent, guardian, or individual who

is interested in participating. The "Hold My Hand: Walking with Children & Teens through their Grief Journey" is ongoing on a monthly basis. Call Solace House for the current schedule, 913.341.0318.

Weekend Camps

Camp season 2012 will be here sooner than you think! Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care and Solace House offer two options.

First, our peer camp, Camp Erin, will be held June 8-10 for school-aged students who have lost a loved one.

The Moyer Foundation helps fund this high-energy, weekend summer camp.

Then, in the fall, Camp Carousel, our family retreat weekend, will be held September 21-23. Both camps are held at Heartland Center in Parkville, Missouri, and include a variety of art, music, recreational and memorial activities to help children and adults process their loss.

For more information and/or an application, visit kchospice.org (click on the Grief Support tab) or call 816.363.2600.

Scattering Dad's Ashes...

By Beth Kelly

The day we planned to scatter the ashes of my dad, Jerry Kelly, had arrived and my anxiety level shot off the charts. Several times I considered backing out because I was scared. What if I freaked out?

When I arrived at Alex George Lake off Blue River Road, the late afternoon sun sparkled on the calm water. The trees boasted bold fall colors – yellow, red, orange – and the wind blew gently.

For the 30 years my family lived in south Kansas City, this small watering hole was Dad's place of refuge from a demanding world of high-pressure sales jobs, navigating 50 years of married life and raising seven kids. An avid angler, he would cast his line and

await the big one. He once told Mom this was his little piece of heaven here on earth. Often, he would park here and bike or run down Blue River Road.

Dad died Jan. 15, 2011, but my family chose to wait until October because, quite frankly, few of us had been ready before now, and it was near his birthday. Once we all congregated at the lake, we admitted we had no idea what we were doing. As my brother Jeff said: there is no manual for this experience.

So, we got creative. Kelan held out the box containing the ashes as the rest of us scooped. Steve, who often fished with Dad, had on his waders and made his way into the lake. Ann and I scattered ashes atop the green algae, making Dad's initials: JEK. Denis and Jeff

tossed ashes out into the lake. Mom sprinkled ashes on flowers along the bank.

At one point, I stepped back to snap a few scenic pictures. I didn't want to be insensitive or intrusive to my family, but somehow I needed a recorded history of this day.

As it turns out, my siblings were thinking the same thing but also didn't want to be inappropriate. When Jeff turned and saw me snapping photos with my iPhone, he whipped out his cell phone and started taking photographs. He was followed by Ann and Denis. We spent the next 20 minutes taking photographs as the ashes clung to the moss-cover and floated on the water. We took turns recording video as we talked about what Dad meant to

us. We ended by walking from the lake to the roadway and scattering ashes where my Dad would depart for a bike or a run. As soon as we got to the road, a strong breeze gusted through the trees; it was as if my Dad was saying hello.

That afternoon of remembrance proved immensely cathartic. Scattering my dad's ashes freed up a hurt place inside my heart. It was a time of recalling memories and making a new one we could all feel good about. We each departed with a small amount of ashes to dispense at special places where we individually connected with our dad.





Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care

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If you would like your name removed
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call *Kansas City Hospice & Palliative
Care* at 816.363.2600.

Editor: *Kenyon Anderson*

Upcoming Grief Support Groups

Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care offers grief support groups and workshops. Groups are designed for adults who are at least two or three months past their loss at the time the group begins.

It's free to attend groups, but registration is required. Registration may be closed when a group is full, or groups may be cancelled because of low registration.

If you have questions or to register, call Grief Support Services at KCH&PC, 816.363.2600.

Adult Children Who Have Lost a Parent

Mondays, 6 to 7:30 p.m. • Feb. 13 to Mar. 12 • Valley View United Methodist Church • 8412 W. 95th Street • Shawnee Mission, Kan. Register by Feb. 6.

Managing Grief

Mondays, 6 to 7:30 p.m. • Mar. 5 to Apr. 2 • Ridgewood/Pleasant Heights Community of Christ Church • 4341 Blue Ridge Blvd. • Kansas City, Mo. Register by Feb. 27.

I'm Grieving and No One Gets It

Monday, Apr. 30, 6 to 8 p.m. • One night workshop • Kansas City Hospice and Palliative Care • 9221 Ward Parkway, Suite 100 • Kansas City, Mo. Register by Apr. 23.

Additional Grief Support Resources:

Grief Support Network
P.O. Box 2114
Shawnee Mission, KS 66201
griefsupportnetwork.org

Solace House
8012 State Line Road, Suite 202
Shawnee Mission, KS 66208
913.341.0318
kchospice.org

