

Sharing the *Journey*



A BEREAVEMENT PUBLICATION OF VNA HOSPICE CARE

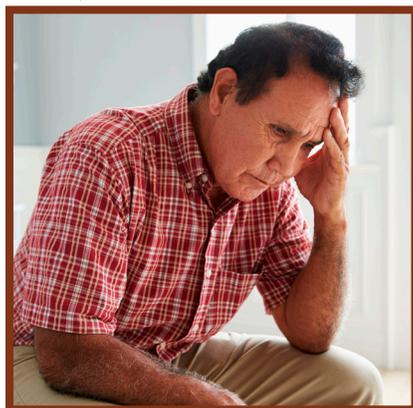
Grief, Loss, And Pandemic! Oh My!

Kevin Moore, M. Div., Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator, VNA Kaufman branch

So here we are, a few months into a global pandemic. Yes, things seem to be calming down. People are going back to work, restaurants are reopening, and things are slowly returning back to “normal.” But are they really? Social Distancing is still in play. Will schools reopen, and if they do, what will that look like? Lots of people are wearing masks in public. Nursing facilities are not allowing visitors. It is not very normal!

We have yet to mention the loss that you have recently experienced. In the midst of chaos, confusion, and fear, you are trying to experience the grief of losing a loved one. Some days that seems quite impossible. It seems too much to handle. It just isn't fair!

You're right, it isn't fair. Grief doesn't care about being fair. The only thing fair about grief is that it happens to everyone. But for those who have lost a loved one soon before, or during this pandemic, it really isn't fair. Some of you were not able to have a funeral or memorial service. Others had one, but for only a limited number of



people, while others had to rely on technology to beam the service out to loved ones.

Some of you feel like your loss has been minimized because it wasn't directly related to COVID 19. Others feel cheated because this new virus was the cause of your loved one's death. Either way, it's just not fair!

The journey through grief after the loss of a loved one is hard. This worldwide pandemic has made it even more complicated. So, what are you supposed to do? You can't change the fact that your loved one is gone. That is the first step. You have to find a way to accept that the loss has truly happened. It is only when you accept the reality of your loss that you can begin to heal.

Next, you learn to accept that there have been many things that have been outside of your control. You could not control the fact that you couldn't have visitors during your loved one's last days. You could not control the restrictions on visitors to the hospital or nursing home. You could not control the restrictions on a funeral or memorial service. You could not control the fact that your friends and families have not been able to come by and share in your grief in-person.

Continued on next page

The VNA Hospice Care Bereavement Staff hope the information in this quarterly newsletter will comfort, educate, and support you in your time of grief.

SUMMER 2020

Grief, Loss, And Pandemic! Oh My! *(continued)*

You didn't have control over these things, but you can still grieve in healthy and effective ways.

It is also beneficial to learn to accept your emotions, whatever they are and allow yourself to feel. Intense sadness, anger, relief, guilt, exhaustion, peace—whatever it is you are feeling, it is OK to feel. By giving names to the emotions you are feeling, you begin to take away the power they can wield over you.

One of the most important things you can do while grieving in the midst of a pandemic is to stay connected to people who love you and will support you. While this is more



challenging in these times, it is still something you can do. The phone is a good tool to talk with someone. Maybe you have access to FaceTime, Skype, or another video chat platform. If not, ask your kids or grandkids—they can help you! The bereavement coordinations with VNA are also available to speak to you and walk with you through this journey. There are also various support groups that are beginning to meet on Zoom or other video conferencing platforms. Our bereavement coordinators can help you find one that can help meet your needs. Again, kids or grandkids can help with the technology there.

Most of all, know that you are not alone. In the midst of crisis, confusion, isolation, and grief, you are not alone. There are people out there who desire to walk with you through this journey. Seek them out. Utilize their help. Accept their love. You will make it through this season.

Please Ask

Someone asked me about you today.
It's been so long since anyone has done that.
It felt so good to talk about you,
to share my memories of you,
to simply say your name out loud.
She asked me if I minded talking about
what happened to you —
or would it be too painful to speak of it.
I told her I think of it every day
and speaking about it helps me to release
the tormented thoughts whirling around in my
head.
She said she never realized the pain
would last this long.
She apologized for not asking sooner.
I told her, "Thanks for asking."
I don't know if it was curiosity
or concern that made her ask,
But told her, "Please do it again sometime —
soon."

— *Barbara Taylor Hudson*

ONLINE SUPPORT

For additional grief resources, please visit
VNA's website at: vnatexas.org/griefhelp

Or scan QR
code with your
smartphone.



A QR reader can be installed from either
Google or iTunes. Once installed simply scan
the code and it will take you to the website.

Surf's Up!

Matt Wadsworth, MA, MBA, LMSW, Former VNA Hospice Bereavement Coordinator

Several years ago, I vacationed along the pacific coast. A friend and I had just finished graduate school. Trying to stave off the real working world as long as possible we motored west from Dallas for a short retreat (seven weeks!). One afternoon while meandering along the shoreline in Northern California I noticed a large, ominous wooden sign.

“BEWARE OF SLEEPERS” was carved in large letters. I remember thinking, “Who in the world would sleep out here and why should I beware of them?” I read on. Sleepers weren't people. Sleepers were waves. Very big waves. The sign warned that while the surf was typically two to three-foot waves, every-so-often a twenty to thirty-foot wave would come crashing into the beach. Unsuspecting beachcombers surprised by a sleeper could be washed out to sea. The last line warned, “Never turn your back on the ocean.”

I have heard many bereaved family members describe grief waves that remind me of those sleepers. Maybe you've heard a song, smelled a smell, seen your loved one's favorite food in the market and the sleeper came. Maybe you can't always identify the “trigger.” Sometimes, just like the name implies, a huge grief wave comes out of nowhere and sweeps you away. You feel tossed to and fro, out of control, wondering how long it will last and if you will ever feel okay again. What can you do?

First, realize grief waves are normal. Big grief waves may threaten our sense of emotional control, a painful and frightening experience. Because many bereaved folks feel they are losing their minds while getting pummeled by monster waves, many grief counselors refer to this as the “going crazy syndrome.” Almost everyone who has lost a loved one feels overwhelmed at some time. Avoid much unnecessary pain by realizing sleepers are part of the normal grief process.

Second, invest in a good life preserver(s). Get intentional about identifying one or two safe people you can be with and who will listen when you feel overwhelmed or out of control. Talking through what you're experiencing with a trusted friend can be like a lifeline to calmer waters. Studies prove it. If you don't have someone you can talk to call your hospice bereavement coordinator.

Third, don't turn your back on your grief. Don't avoid or try to go around it. If you do, you're inviting more sleepers. As Helen Keller once said, “The only way out is through.” Keep doing your grief work, remembering, talking, weeping, journaling, etc. This is how you will learn to negotiate or surf the grief waves. And believe it or not, the sleepers that feel huge now will come less and less frequently and become more and more manageable.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Warm Place - Fort Worth, (817) 870-2272
www.thewarmplace.org

GriefWorks - Dallas, Fort Worth, (800) 375-2229
www.christian-works.org/grief/griefworks/

Journey of Hope - Plano, (972) 964-1600
www.johgriefsupport.org

Lighthouse for New Hope -
Mesquite, (972) 226-3110
www.lighthousefornewhope.org

SAM's Place at Grief and Loss Center of
North Texas, Dallas, (214) 452-3105
www.mygriefandloss.org

Texas' First, Most Experienced & Trusted Hospice Provider



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Dallas, Texas 75235-2316



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For more information, email gethelp@vnatexas.org or contact your local VNA branch:

VNA LOCATIONS

VNA Headquarters & Dallas Branch

1600 Viceroy Drive, Suite 400
Dallas, TX 75235
(214) 689-0000

Sue Rafferty (214) 689-2922
rafferts@vnatexas.org

Counties Served: Dallas & Tarrant

East Texas Branch

874 Ed Hall Drive, Suite 105
Kaufman, TX 75142
(972) 962-7500

Kevin Moore (972) 962-7500
moorek@vnatexas.org

*Counties Served: Ellis, Henderson,
Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro, Rockwall &
Van Zandt*

Collin Branch

7290 Virginia Parkway, Suite 2300
McKinney, Texas 75071
(972) 562-0140

Susan Bryan (214) 733-5543
bryans@vnatexas.org

Counties Served: Collin & Grayson

VNA Ann's Haven

2800 Shoreline Dr., Suite 250
Denton, TX 76210
(940) 349-5900

Kim Mackay-Pearson (214) 263-1916
kimberly.mackaypearson@vnatexas.org

Counties Served: Cooke, Denton & Tarrant

VNA encourages family members to wait a minimum of one year following the death of a loved one before serving as a hospice patient care volunteer or bereavement support volunteer.