

Loving you changed my life. It should come as no surprise that losing you has done the same.

–Chloe Fraynë

Quick Links

Hollandhospice.org

YoungWidow.org
book lists, online resources
and support

GriefNet.org
online support groups

GROWW.org
online bereaved community

wpsgr.org
Grand Rapids Widowed persons
service: local groups and support

Dougy.org
website for children, teens and
parents following a loss

WebHealing.com
grief resources

Centering.org
grief resources and books

Griefshare.org
nationwide grief support
program; find one nearby

Griefwatch.com
resource for more websites

Griefwords.com

The Journey of Grief

You are on the journey of grief. This journey is not one you chose and is not one you can choose to avoid. Much like the continued turning of the calendar and changing of the seasons, grief sweeps you up and in without permission. Because you are an individual with your own personality and distinct relationship with your person, your journey of grief is unique to you; remember, though, that you do not walk the path alone. The Hospice of Holland Bereavement Team is here to assist you. We hope you receive this newsletter as a reminder you are not alone and find in it helpful articles and resources, as well as reminders of upcoming events.

Grief & COVID-19

In addition to all the usual patterns of grief as discussed, it is important to know that our current reality is likely heightening your grief responses. As a result of COVID-19, there is increased isolation and a need to maintain physical distancing from those who might be most helpful to you in your grief. You may not be able to give or receive hugs, sit nearby, or even have a face-to-face conversation without a mask covering half of your face. It is important to find ways to feel connected with others, even for minimal amounts of time, to assist you in moving forward in grief. If you're surprised by the intensity of your grief right now, know it is likely due to the world around you. You haven't done anything wrong and there is nothing abnormal about your grief. If you have any concerns about how your grief is manifesting, please contact a bereavement counselor. Being heard and validated can go a long way in alleviating the additional burden you might be carrying in this season.

Seasons of Grief and Healing

Words and phrases often associated with autumn include: crisp air, sweater weather, changing colors, falling leaves, and pumpkin spice. There's a change in the air as nights become progressively cooler and days take longer to warm. It's a season that gives us permission to curl up with a book and warm beverage or sit outside by a fire. It is also a season during which schedules are resumed and holidays loom. Many find these changes exciting, but as a griever those same changes instead can cause anxiety or a desire to turn inward.

If you are early in your grief, returning to any previous routine or schedule likely feels wrong. You're coming to realize that you won't return to life as it was "before" and adapting to that reality is challenging. What others see as beauty in the changing seasons might feel to you like too bold a reminder of life and death. Remember, it is okay at times to close the curtains and turn off your phone.

If it has been several months since the loss of your person, you may experience fall a bit differently. For you, a color tour while sipping hot cider may be something you can envision enjoying. You may need to be intentional about how many outings or social gatherings you schedule in a given week, yet, overall, you're pleasantly surprised at

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Seasons of Grief and Healing *Continued*

the returning desire to actively participate in life. Even still, just as a sudden change in weather can catch us off guard in this season, so can your grief waves continue to hit hard without warning. On those days, you wait, with hope, for the storm to pass.

Maybe you are someone who has lived nearly a year since your person died. Many in your life assume with this milestone comes a sudden ability to return to a life filled only with blue skies. You know the truth, though. You might attend the bonfires, go for the hikes and color tours, sit with friends and family to begin planning for the holiday season—all the while, a quiet presence of grief is with you. It doesn't interfere like it used to, but it is there as a reminder of your person and of your shared love.

No matter where in grief you find yourself this fall, remember you are not alone and you do not need to force yourself to feel anything but what you feel. Release yourself from any expectations or "shoulds", and extend grace. Let each day unfold and be what you need it to be. Just as we can count on one season to change to the next, so you can be assured your grief will continue to change, the edges will dull, and you will regain a desire and ability to participate more fully in life. Read on for a few tips to help you cope with this latest change in season.

Self-Care Suggestions

- Go at your own pace. Remember this is your journey and you set the expectation for each day's tasks. When considering an activity or a project, ask yourself if it is life-giving or draining. If it is draining, consider putting it off to another time.
- Create your Connection Space. As we prepare to spend more time indoors, it is important to have a dedicated place you can go to feel your grief and connect with your person. Start with a list of what brings you comfort and then begin creating that place for yourself. Use all 5 senses as you prepare the place. Lighting, scents, comforting blankets/seating, calming images, a sound machine or app, tasty treats; all of these can combine to give you a safe space to connect and experience your grief.
- Explore. As the temperatures change, it becomes easier to explore nature. Nature is also a great way to connect with yourself, with your person, and/or with the divine. Spending time just being in nature can be a true balm for the soul.
- Speak your person's name and story.
- Reach out to your support system or ask them to reach out to you if you're not ready to do the contacting. Grief is unique and individual, but we aren't meant to do it alone.

Upcoming Events/Support Groups

Grief Walking – This outdoor group will focus on four steps of grief walking; nature, movement, mindfulness/meditation, and remembering. Meetings will take place at the Upper Macatawa Natural Area (1300 84th Ave in Zeeland) on Thursdays from 10am to 11am beginning September 17 and ending October 15. Please contact Hospice of Holland at 616-355-5594 for details and to register by September 15. Space is limited. Face masks are required and social distancing will be practiced.

Journaling Your Grief – This virtual workshop teaches four different journaling techniques that can be used to creatively process and express your grief. The complete video instruction and accompanying handouts are available on a USB; USB port and video player are required for use. To have a copy of the workshop mailed to you, please contact 616-355-5594.

It didn't seem possible
to take the next breath

But I realize today that
I am surviving your death.

Some days are hard
when weakened by sorrow

Remembering you inspires me
to face my tomorrow.

–Author Unknown



Please remember Hospice of Holland bereavement counselors are available to speak with you one-on-one to help in your grieving process.

Contact our office at 616-355-5594 for more information.