Holidays...Have It Your Way
Amy Thomas, LCSW, Grief Counselor

Every now and then a person comes for grief counseling, and the conversation starts out like this: “My _____ (friend, mother, sister, spouse) lost his _____ and is doing so much better than I am. I'm afraid there's something wrong with me.” The first thing I explain is that grief is very individual. Just like the relationship with the person who died is unique, your personality and life history are yours alone. There are many factors that go into what your grief process is like. The important take-away is … don't compare what your grief feels like to you with what you think someone else’s grief experience looks like from the outside. And as we used to say in the 70’s, “Don't let someone else lay a trip on you”.

This is especially true when we are anticipating special holidays or anniversaries. Much as we might not want to think about it, the “Holiday Season” is starting to tap on our awareness. Not far into August, the Halloween items started to appear in stores. It's hard enough to figure out what will be right for you in the upcoming season without having pressure from others who think you should be “doing it their way”. I had a call from a concerned friend who thought the best way for her bereaved friend to “have a happy Christmas” was to have the usual big family gathering with all the traditional activities. She also was trying to insist her friend join a grief support group as well as participate in all their church holiday activities. As we talked, this woman admitted she is very outgoing, a “people person” herself, and that when she was widowed she continued with her leadership positions in her church and community and ran her own grief support group. Her friend, however, she described as “very private and shy; she wishes she could pretend Christmas wasn’t happening this year”.

There can be a big difference in the grief experiences of folks who are extroverts and outgoing and those who are more reserved, private or introverted. In order to “recharge emotional batteries”, extroverts need people around. Introverts often really like other people but time alone is what recharges their emotional batteries. So as draining as the grief experience is universally, it makes sense during special times of the year for one person to seek out other people and their traditional activities while others might need to reduce demands on themselves and conserve their physical, emotional and mental energy. If your traditions and rituals are a comfort to you, and are an important source of meaning, identity and security,
Music is powerful. And the holidays always bring reminders of special music. Music taps the deepest part of our spirit and expresses what words cannot, or simply says in melodic ways exactly how we are feeling or what we are thinking. Music creates a vision of people, places and spaces we’ve seen or only imagined. As a chaplain, it is an offering I bring on the visits to the homes of the patients and families that we serve. As a chaplain, I also learn that I usually take more away from a visit than I could ever bring.

I have shared this story with my team members because it meant so much to me in understanding the distinction between the pastor and the chaplain roles in healthcare and ministry. I visited with one of our patients and asked her “What’s your favorite song?” She said easily, “Silent Night, of course!” As I began to tune my voice to croon the hymn, the patient then went on to add “Silent Night, by the Temptations!” I paused and admitted ignorance to that particular rendition.

That night I went home and studied the beautiful melody recreated by the pioneers of the Motown sound. I listened and imagined what it was that the patient had experienced so profoundly from this song. I was grateful to be learning musically, something new, as this version of Silent Night filled my home.

During our next visit, I used my smart phone to play the song for the patient. As the it floated through the airwaves, I sat back to listen along with the family. The patient stared out the window and it was as if she was transported back to her childhood, when she first heard her favorite hymn. I could see with my mind’s eye, the patient with her family, gathered around the Christmas tree under the shimmering lights, listening to the ringing high and low resonant notes of that musical masterpiece. I took away from that visit a feeling of joy, and the patient told me how grateful she was that I listened and was able to grant her request.

This is the season (actually any season) for music. Whether we sing, play an instrument, or turn up the volume from the apps on our smart phones, music can be a powerful comfort and support for patients and families while they are facing the end of life or grieving a loss.

I enjoy singing to patients because it is a part of me that I gladly give in service. And as someone once said, “When you sing, you pray twice.” Be blessed this holiday season!

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Tis the Season for Musical Interventions

By Patrick DeJuneas, M. Div.

Saturday, November 14, 2015
2 pm
Levine & Dickson Hospice House - Huntersville
11900 Vanstory Drive, Huntersville

Thursday, December 3, 2015
6:30 pm
Park Road Baptist Church
3900 Park Road, Charlotte

Sunday, December 6, 2015
3 pm
Levine & Dickson Hospice House at Southminster
8919 Park Road, Charlotte

Tuesday, December 8, 2015
6:30 pm
HPCCR - Lake Norman
Mt. Zion United Methodist Church
19600 Zion Avenue, Cornelius

Light Up A Life

..... our annual interfaith gatherings to honor your loved ones and celebrate special memories.
Start a new tradition of remembrance by attending one .
Holidays … Have It Your Way  (continued from page 1)

and if you have the emotional energy to participate, by all means do. But if some or all of those activities are too difficult or painful this year, talk to the others involved about whether to alter or skip previous traditions, at least for this year. And be prepared that you are not all going to have the same needs and feelings. Give yourself permission to bow out or limit what you can participate in. Sometimes the most kind and generous thing we can do for ourselves and each other when emotions are intense and painful is to jointly create a supportive environment for grief and remembrance, understanding that we’re all just trying to find (and have) our way in this new reality.

| In Good Company  
| Event Calendar  
| (All are welcome!) |

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| **Homestead Grill**  
357 North Generals Blvd.  
Lincolnton, NC  
Contact: Kathy Douglas  
704.887.6437  
1st Tuesday monthly  
5:30 pm |
| **Two on Earth Bakery & Café**  
5:30 pm |
| **Rippington’s**  
109 W. South Street  
Waxhaw, NC  
Contact: Katrina Cauble  
704.335.3587  
2nd Tuesday monthly  
11:00 am |
| **Bob Evans Restaurant**  
16707 Northcross Drive  
Huntersville, NC  
Contact: Amy Thomas  
704.602.0930  
2nd Thursday monthly  
6:00 pm |
| **Panera Bread**  
9321 JW Clay Blvd.  
Charlotte, NC  
Contact: Beth Brittain  
704.887.6304  
3rd Thursday monthly  
10:00 am |
| **Panera Bread**  
10 am |
| **Grits and Greens**  
125 North Main Street  
Lowell, NC  
Contact: Kathy Douglas  
704.887.6437  
3rd Tuesday monthly  
6:00 pm |
| **Bob Evans Restaurant**  
6 pm |
| **Julia’s Coffee**  
1133 North Wendover Road  
Charlotte, NC  
Contact: Katrina Cauble  
704.335.3587  
4th Tuesday monthly  
10:00 am |
| **Panera Bread**  
10 am  
Grits and Greens  
6 pm |
| **Two on Earth Bakery & Café**  
333 Main Street  
Pineville, NC  
Contact: Marge Brokaw  
704.335.4308  
1st Thursday monthly  
10:00 am |
| **Julia’s Coffee**  
10 am |
| **Bob Evans Restaurant**  
11:30 am |
| **Bob Evans Restaurant**  
11:30 am |
| **Panera Bread**  
10:00 am |
| **Panera Bread**  
10 am |
| **Panera Bread**  
10 am |
You’re Invited - A Gathering for Support

Take some time to fellowship with others, enjoy a catered meal and learn practical tips on how to approach the coming holidays. Please RSVP at 704.335.4300

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region

Uptown – Main Office
Monday, November 9, 2015
5:30 – 7:30 pm
1420 East 7th Street, Charlotte

Levine & Dickson Hospice House

Huntersville
Tuesday, November 10, 2015
11:00 am – 1:00 pm
11900 Van Story Drive, Huntersville

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region

South Charlotte Office
Thursday, November 12, 2015
10:00 am - noon
7845 Little Avenue, Charlotte

Registration has begun for upcoming “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups. The meetings start early February 2016 at our various HPCCR locations. A pre-group interview with one of our grief counselors is required before registration. To find out more, and to schedule an interview, please email brokawm@hpccr.org or call 704.335.4308. For our Lincolnton support groups, email journigan-douglassk@hpccr.org, or call 704.887.6437.