It started as one of those ‘good ideas’ in a committee meeting. You’ve been there. Everyone says, “Yes, that’s great” and then “Let’s do it” and before you know it, you have launched a rocket into space with nary a plan or bid on the parts. This idea, though, was destined for orbit.

The idea was to find a power pole (or are they called light poles now, or telephone poles?), have ribbons hanging from it, and then close our 2016 Chameleon’s Journey Mini-camp on April 30 at the YMCA’s Hemby Program Center by having campers, parent-guardians and staff weave strips of cloth together in a Maypole-like fashion to represent how the colors of grief—red=anger, blue=sad, green=jealous, black=fear and yellow=happy—as depicted in the story of Chameleon’s Journey, intertwine to form a unique experience. As you can see from the photo, the concept turned into an array of color full of variability and variation.

How it got there was a different story. Beth Brittain, our Chameleon’s Journey curriculum guru, found a colorful assortment of yards upon yards of cloth and personally turned it into about 90 strips of cloth ranging in length from 12 to 20 feet. The Friday before camp, our new Facilities Management Assistant David Bordino joined Beth and me at an isolated power pole across from the volleyball pit at the Hemby Center to hang the colors.

Using a staple gun and Spiderman-like stretching ability, he carefully scattered the colors around and around the pole to eventually create the finished product. Trusting the universe for no rain overnight, we left the pole there and could only imagine what the carpool drivers were thinking as they drove by it on their way to pick up kids from after school care.

The actual weaving activity was full of laughter for most of the campers as they bobbed over and under each other, but it was also very reflective for parent-guardians and staff as the colors represented both joyful memories and painful grief. After I invited the group to reflect on the sight for a few moments, we went back to the main hall for a Moe’s buffet, said good-bye to all, cleaned up our mess and drove away.

I was almost to the 485 inner loop when it hit me; we didn’t take down the ribbons. So, I turned around and drove back, got the ladder out of the shed and started disassembling the abandoned illustration. After about 15 minutes of work, I had all the ribbons down. Then, looking up, I noticed a plethora of color specs encircling the pole.

The ribbons were gone, but the remnants remained. Climbing the ladder, I pulled the remnants one by one from the pole and let them drift to the ground. As I did so, I could not stop thinking about how some of the most obvious parts of grief may fade. Campers get older and have new experiences, parent-guardians learn coping skills, and people stop asking about the loss and just assume things are back to normal.

But that’s not reality. So, if you or someone you know has experienced tremendous grief and it looks like things are better now, smile and enjoy the good memories of days gone by. Be grateful for any measure of healing. But be gentle with yourself, too, and realize that even though the ribbons may be gone, your heart still needs care and compassion for the remnants that remain.
The Sometimes Hidden Person - the Grieving Teen

By Katrina Cauble, Grief Counselor, LPCA-S

Adolescence is such a tumultuous time in life. Developmentally, teenagers are developing abstract thinking (Erickson); things like God and death may be examined at this age. Also, friends become suddenly more important than a weekend with the parents. When death happens at this age, the teenager is sometimes over looked. The concern is for the spouse when it is parent loss or the younger siblings for example. What are some of the issues the grieving teenager experiences? Recently, I read the book by Helen Fitzgerald, *The Grieving Teen*, and found it to be a good resource for this age group.

Is the failure to clean one’s room grief, or being a teenager? When someone dies in the teen’s life what are some things that might lead to problems that need to be noticed? Each teen will experience grief in their unique way. Things like how close the relationship or how much change in their life after the death will be factors in how the teen may grieve. Parent loss that is a sudden death is going to be different for the teen than a grandparent that lives in the next state. The teen may or may not question what their own death may be like eventually or if someone may die next. Bereavement can leave an adolescent with self confidence problems and looking for purpose even into adulthood (Doka, 2000). Anxiety can also be a factor for the grieving teen. In a time when belonging is important, they may feel disconnected because they are the only one in their friend group with a loss in life.

The book *The Grieving Teen* is set up for easy reading; one can look in the contents and see the subject areas the book covers. There is no need to read from the front to back. There are subsections - from before death to resuming life after the death. I enjoyed and found helpful how each section was broken down; from a specific problem to how it can be addressed. I did find some of “what you can do” to be a little repetitious, but a couple - like how to tell friends, and the different ways the teen may have found out about the death - were helpful.

The text goes through the funeral and the question to attend or not to attend. The author even lists some activities to do if you are unable to attend. It seemed helpful to talk about returning to school and the many emotions that may arise with grief. The book also covers different deaths; from the death of a classmate to parent death. Again, the book is user friendly with bullet points and direct questions and suggestions on what to do about these things.

At an age that can already be chaotic, it is very hard to add a death to the list. The teen may be expected to add responsibilities for the house and siblings. The questions such as what university may be put on the back burner or not even be an option at the moment due to finances. As in every part of life, death can be life changing and difficult to journey through. Maybe the useful gift for the teenager - and those who love them - in this situation is Helen Fitzgerald’s *The Grieving Teen*.
Chameleon’s Journey, a free grief camp for children and teens age 7 - 17, provides a safe and supportive environment for campers to share their feelings and experience of loss. Led by well trained hospice staff and volunteers, the campers learn that they are not alone in their grief. Through discussion, arts and craft, music and camp recreation, healthy ways to cope with loss are encouraged. The camp, open to hospice family survivors and the community, is held at Camp Thunderbird, Lake Wylie, South Carolina. If you have a grieving child or teen, or know of one who can benefit from this camp please call 704.375.0100 for more information or visit www.hpccr.org and the Chameleon’s Journey home page to access the application form.
Registration has begun for upcoming “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups. The meetings start in early fall 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-douglask@hpccr.org, or call 704.887.6437.

Grief Beyond the First Year

This workshop is designed specifically for those who are beyond the 1st year of their loss.

Topics to be addressed:

“What can I expect after the 1st year?”
“Does Grief change over time?”
“Should I be over it by now?”

Thursday, July 28
South Charlotte Office
7845 Little Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28226
5-6:30pm
To register call 704.335.4300 or mcgregord@hpccr.org