How do I ever get over this? “Will it always hurt this badly?” As a grief counselor, I hear these words every day. My first response to families is always helping them to understand grief is a lifelong process – they will always miss their loved one. How could we not forever miss those with whom we have shared our lives? The hurt that comes with loss does ease over time, but we will continue to have moments for the rest of our lives which feel as intense as the moment of the loss.

These feelings and the many others we experience in grief are part of our human connection with one another. In his new book, “Loving from the Outside In, Mourning from the Inside Out,” Dr. Alan Wolfelt gives us these words:

“The capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn. In other words, love and grief are two sides of the same precious coin. One does not -and cannot-exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of our lives. What higher purpose is there in life but to give and receive love? Love is the essence of a life of abundance and joy. People sometimes say grief is the price we pay for the joy of having loved. If we allow ourselves the grace that comes with love, we must allow ourselves the grace that is required to mourn.”

What are those things for you that bring a lump to your throat, a tear in your eye while also a smile to your lips and a laugh in your heart? Is it the smell of chicken frying that takes you back to your grandmother’s kitchen on Sunday afternoons? Is it the sight of a couple holding hands in the park that takes you back to the days of “courting” your love? Is it the sound of laughing and singing that takes you back to family gatherings where it was your son who “kept the party going?” Is it the velvety touch of the sofa where you spent every evening as a child for bedtime stories on your mother’s lap? Is it the taste of Christmas fudge lovingly made each year by your big sister and she always let you lick the spoon?

I encourage you to embrace these connections, understanding they are what give us the story of our lives.

No matter what life brings our way, love is our highest goal, our most passionate quest.

– Dr. Alan Wolfelt
A Tapestry of Grief and Hope

Our grief counselors are highly skilled in supporting clients through the grief process whether it is in an individual or group setting. An awareness and ability to provide a safe and caring atmosphere is key to an individual or members of a group becoming comfortable in sharing their grief and beginning the road to healing. Here, a grief counselor reveals one of many ways members of a group get the support they need. At the beginning of the first group session, each member shares how he or she feels or thinks about grief. Near the last session of the group, each member writes what hope is or looks like for him or her. The result is a blended and wonderfully written tapestry of the group’s feelings and experiences.

Grief is:

A burden. Numbing. Hell. An overwhelming emotion. Dangerous. A lack of control. Such deep sorrow missing a loved one. One cannot figure out what has hit you. It invades your spirit, your thoughts, your memory, and if you are not careful, your health. Not touching or being touched by my life love. Bitterness and resentment that my loved one was taken too young and missed too much life (retirement, children getting married, grandchildren, travel). Grief is the ache in your heart when you finally realize your loved one is gone for good. A voyage in uncharted waters in a leaky boat. A process and a journey of healing. Grief is trying to grow again and be whole after a huge loss. Trying to become more adventurous. Grief is an everlasting journey which lessens with time, but does not ever disappear.

Hope is:

Being able to get up each day with hope of “getting through”. Looking ahead without being lost in the grief of the past and present. Gradual healing and being able to start another chapter in my life. Watching my children grow and mature and learn to live with the reality of the loss of their father, with loving and warm memories. A positive outlook on the future. A feeling that life will be better and more satisfying. A feeling that I have something positive to offer to those in my family and for my friends. A new beginning for the future, building on what has been the past. Hope is the future, unknown at first but gradually finding the way to go. Hope is looking for tomorrow and making peace with your loss. Hope is working through all our mixed emotions and wanting to feel whole again, sometime.

Did you know….

During bereavement try to delay major life decisions until you are feeling better. You don't want to decide to make a big change like selling your home or leaving your job when you are grieving and perhaps not thinking clearly. Let major decisions wait, if possible.

Welcome to The Grief Corner, a new feature that will appear from time to time in the Bereavement Bulletin. In this space our readers and staff can give voice to their own experiences of grief and loss to share with others on the grief journey.

Musings on Grief

Gerri Cummings, CT, CHES, Spiritual & Grief Care Services Program Manager

It’s hard to deny that the daily companion of fresh grief is like walking the path of a cherished garden in the cold, damp days of a winter morning. The bleak bare garden mirrors the brokenness felt inside. No blooms, no lush greenery and no ray of warmth from the sun to offer the promise of hope. Everything about it looks strange yet familiar, as if in another place and time. So much energy went in to creating what was once lovely to look upon, and now is gone. Will the harshness of the winter cold give way to spring? Linger awhile, feel what you are feeling, let the icy wind bring tears to your eyes and unsteady you. Keep walking the path, one foot in front of the other. Wrap your coat tightly about you, as though you are hugging and comforting yourself. If by chance an offer is made to join you on the path, if you can, allow it. It’s okay to also say no. Keep walking. Stop along the way, retrace your steps…begin walking forward, again. There is another season coming in to view. There is new growth in the garden.

No stranger to loss and grief prior to and through most of the eleven years with this organization, Gerri has walked with grief for over forty years and continues on the path.

We invite you to submit your short poems, stories or letters to cummingsg@hpccr.org All submissions will be reviewed; however, only a select few can be published in the Bereavement Bulletin.

In Good Company

“Hearts Healing & Hoping Together”

(All are welcome)

Lunch Grief Support Group
1st Tuesday of each month at 11:30 am
Big View Diner
16637 Lancaster Hwy., Charlotte, 28277
Contact Marge Brokaw, Grief Counselor, at 704.335.4308

Coffee & Conversation
3rd Tuesday of each month at 10 am
Starbucks (Trader Joe’s Shopping Center)
6432 Rea Road, Charlotte, 28277
Contact Marge Brokaw, Grief Counselor, at 704.335.4308

Dinner Grief Support Group
2nd Thursday of each month at 6 pm
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville, 28078
Contact Amy Thomas, Grief Counselor, at 704.602.0930

Lunch Grief Support Group
4th Thursday of each month at 11:30 am
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville, 28078
Contact Amy Thomas, Grief Counselor, at 704.602.0930

Coffee & Conversation
3rd Friday of each month at 10 am
Fausto Coffee
116 NE Court Square, Lincolnton, 28092
Contact Kathy Douglas, Grief Counselor, at 704.887.6437

... to complete and return the Family Evaluation of Bereavement Services Survey
Groups are now forming for “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups, beginning late January and early February in 2013, at our various HPCCR locations. A pre-group interview with one of our grief counselors is required prior to registration for the grief support groups. To find out more about them, and to schedule an interview, please email cummingsg@hpccr.org, or call 704.335.4334. For our Lincolnton support groups, email Journigan-Douglass@hpccr.org, or call 704.887.6437.

REEL GRIEF

As winter gets underway and the rush of the holidays is over, settling in with a movie is a good way to spend time alone or with others. It’s often said that art mimics life — so watching a movie about grief and loss might prove helpful in providing some insight into where you are in your grief. The following is a list of favorites, in no particular order:

**The Way** (2011) Emilio Estevez, Martin Sheen
Father travels to claim the body of his adult son who passes away while hiking a sacred path in a faraway land.

**Steel Magnolias** (1989) Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton
A young adult daughter dies and a small close knit group of friends consoles the mother who tries to be strong for her grandchild and son in law.

**Beaches** (1988) Bette Midler, Barbra Hershey
Two childhood friends struggle to come to grips with their complex relationship and the other’s impending death.

**Truly Madly Deeply** (1990) Juliet Stevenson, Alan Rickman
Love relationship is broken with the death of a partner and the girlfriend holds onto an idealized memory of him.

**Shadowlands** (1993) Anthony Hopkins, Debra Winger
Husband not given to emotional displays finds himself changed by his wife’s prognosis and death.

**Remember Me** (2010) Robert Pattinson, Emilie de Ravin
A coming of age story where two young people leading separate lives find mutual understanding after experiencing the sudden and tragic loss of a brother and a mother.