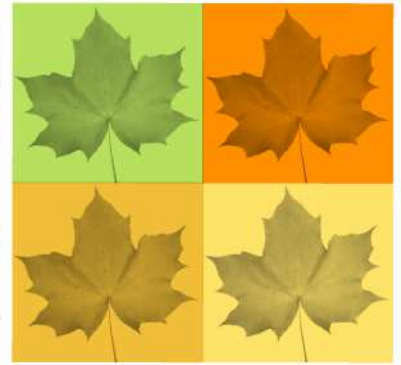


# SEASONS

*"Embracing the Seasons of Life."*



## *July/August 2009*

We all experience grief, but none of us experiences grief in exactly the same way. Our reactions are as unique and individual as we are. Some may grieve a spouse, others a parent, child, sibling, or friend. The uniqueness of these relationships influences how we experience our grief. Some may have been close relationships; others may have had tension or conflict. Circumstances differ: sometimes a loss is sudden while others follow a prolonged illness.

In the process of grieving a loved one there are many emotions. Feelings of sadness, longing for that person's presence, jealousy of those who have not experienced our profound loss, or even relief that a prolonged illness has ended. The process of grieving takes a lot of time and effort. Grieving consists of coping with memories and emotions, as well as attending to the myriad of details of sorting and settling material possessions. Grief is work!

Our culture pushes us to find the quick and easy path. We hurry through our pain as quickly as possible, foregoing the difficult part of grief and sailing on to recovery. Grief is a process we must move through, not over or around. Our grief work may take us into unfamiliar territory. Even in familiar surroundings of home and work, family and friends, we find ourselves ill-prepared for this new life. "Who am I, now?" is the oft asked question by Paul Alexander in his song of the same title. The chorus asks:

Who am I now without you?  
 Who will I turn out to be?  
 I stand alone, I'm broken in two.  
 Does anyone realize how much  
 I'm missing you?

As we take time to grieve we realize that life will be different and sometimes difficult. We need to be gentle with ourselves as we explore this new reality. The loss of our loved one changes our identity. We once were part of a couple as husband and wife, parent and child, siblings or friends. The loss of this relationship challenges our sense of who we are. Loneliness is just one of the emotions that bubbles during grief.

Dr. William Sadler, an authority on loneliness in American life, points out two kinds of loneliness: "intimate" and "social". Intimate loneliness is the result of being cut off from a significant and beloved person. While this is most often associated with a spouse, it also relates to parent, child, or best friend relationships. It is the loss of the person with whom you have shared your most personal and intimate thoughts and feelings. While death is the ultimate break in a relationship, moves and conflicts can also cause the loss of intimacy and lead to loneliness.

Social loneliness is the result of separation from groups with which you had close ties and interests. Often the loss of an intimate relationship also changes a person's social standing. You may no longer be part of a pair. You may have lost your spouse, sibling, parent or child. After initial help, social friends usually continue with their own lives and interests, leaving the grieving person alone. Co-workers, friends, neighbors, and even family members may avoid the person in emotional pain because they do not know what to say or do to help ease the hurt. Others may withdraw because they, too, are hurting.

Loneliness often leads to isolation. Those who are hurting recognize they are not much fun to be around, and so they withdraw. Being with others who have their loved ones around intensifies the awareness of the loss, and the grieving person tends to further withdraw. The temptation is to stay at home with only the TV or radio for company. A person who is lonely and withdrawing may find they are spending more and more time in bed.

What can ease the pain of loneliness? The person who helped bring value and meaning to your life is gone. There is no reason for you not to value yourself. You are special. Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body needs energy for repair.

Eat well. Good nutrition is important. Decrease junk food. Eat a balanced meal.

Get enough sleep.

Exercise. It offers an opportunity to work off frustration and it aids sleep. Physical activity helps lessen stress. Remember, your body and your mind work together.

Be patient with yourself. Healing takes time.

Talk about your loved one. Join a support group where you are not seen as "poor\_\_\_, whose loved one died." You are seen as someone seeking to share. Shared sorrows, shared experiences, and shared solutions can bring comfort and spark new friendships and interests.

Do something for someone else. Helping others does much to ease the pain.

Choose to be among people you enjoy. Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy.

If you need to talk with one of our staff, privately, please call the nearest Diakon Hospice Saint John office. Please see attached calendar for upcoming Bereavement groups.

### ***Diakon Hospice Saint John Pastoral Care and Bereavement Team***

\*Rev. Linda Williams

Allentown Area

(610) 391-2300

(888) 754-4608

\*Rev Linda Haring

Wyomissing Area

(610) 320 – 7980

(610) 882-4530

\*Rev. Peggy Sue Pfeffer

Hazleton Area

(570) 459-6778

(877) 438-3511

Honesdale Area

(570) 251-8712

(800) 622-3315

*Rev. Brian Kern*

*Bereavement Coordinator*

*Allentown/Wyomissing Area*

*(888) 754-4608*

*Rev. Tom Neuviller*

*Bereavement Coordinator*

*Hazleton/Honesdale Area*

*(800) 622-3315*

**MISSION** In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

 **DIAKON HOSPICE SAINT JOHN**  
A LUTHERAN FAMILY & COMMUNITY MINISTRY

[www.diakon.org/hospice](http://www.diakon.org/hospice)

Please remember if you are feeling cut off and alone in your pain, we are here to listen; we do care.

## **ALLENTOWN AREA**

**(IN THE CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE TO CONFIRM)**

### **Grief Support Group Meetings**

Bereavement support is provided by the Allentown chaplain and Diakon Family Life Services. Please contact Chaplain Linda Williams at (610) 391-2308 for information about grief support groups being held in your area.

## **WYOMISSING**

**(IN THE CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE TO CONFIRM)**

### **Grief Support Group Meeting**

Bereavement support is provided by Diakon Family Life Services. Please contact Chaplain Lynda Haring at (610) 320-7980 or Family Life Services at (888) 499-2699 for the latest information on the location of these groups.

## **HAZLETON AREA**

**(IN THE CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE TO CONFIRM)**

### **Grief Support Group Meetings**

These information gatherings are open to all those who are grieving. There is no cost, however, registration is required. For more information or to register for a Grief Support Group please contact Rev. Peggy Sue Pfeffer at (570) 459-6778.

Hazleton: Monday, July 6, 2009 and August 3, 2009, 1:30-3:00 p.m. at the rectory of St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, 122 S. Wyoming Street, Hazleton.

## **HONESDALE**

**(IN THE CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE TO CONFIRM)**

### **Grief Support Group Meeting**

For more information on Grief Support Groups in this area, please contact the office at (57) 251-8712 or (800) 622-3315.

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## *A Personal Story ...*

What happens now? How should I feel? Will I forget the warmth of their touch? The sound of their voice?

I'd like to share a story with you. It is about a girl named Janet. At nine years old, Janet developed rheumatic fever which in turn became an aggressive form of rheumatoid arthritis. It was difficult for her to walk and the doctors told her parents that Janet would likely die by age 16. Janet's determination and spirit saw her receive a standing ovation as she entered her high school auditorium to accept her diploma. She went on to business college and married her high school sweetheart, Tom. They had three children in eight years, a boy and two girls.

Tom was a lobsterman and Janet a stay-at-home mother. They lived a very modest life. Janet endured many operations including hip and knee replacements. Her children realized their mother's bent and twisted fingers did not look like those of their friends' mothers. There were times her family would catch her sobbing from the pain. On good days, however, she had energy to spare. To see this 4'10" woman behind the wheel of her husband's work trucks and vans would have been comical if it hadn't been so inspiring. As her children grew she found she had more free time on her hands and took a part-time job as a clerical assistant for the local weekly newspaper.

More years passed and replacement-of-the-replacement surgeries were required. Janet and Tom celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Surrounded by family and friends, they danced to Kenny Rogers' "Through the Years." The next year Janet celebrated the birth of her first grandson. Evan was the apple of her eye. She also suffered a huge setback. The weight of her skull had become too great for the top of her deteriorating spine. Her physician recommended Boston General. The Beantown doctors added a steel plate and screws to Janet's now nearly "bionic" skeletal structure. After three days in ICU she was on her way home to Deer Isle. A loose screw and infection left Janet with some choices. They were able to treat her for the infection at her local hospital (50 miles away). Rather than return to Boston and undergo another operation she opted for a halo device to help steady (and limit) her head movement.

Janet babysat Evan. He lay on the sofa beside her during the better part of the day while his parents were building their house nearby. The usually social Janet stopped accepting visits from friends. She felt self-conscious with the halo. The following Thanksgiving, through tears but with her usual determination, Janet asked her two oldest children to help her to die. She felt so limited as to have become useless. Her children reminded her that she was a source of inspiration for everyone who knew her; that she was a source of knowledge and pleasure for Evan and he for her. She agreed that she would miss it all, but could not see her worth at this time. Her children suggested she think about it more. For whatever the reason, she never brought it up again.

A few days before Christmas found her and Tom decorating their Christmas tree. Janet loved all holidays. Painting eggs at Easter. Picnics and fireworks at the Fourth of July. Costumes at Halloween. Christmas was probably her favorite. The lights, carols, children playing in the snow. While reaching to place an ornament Janet fell and knocked her halo loose. She was rushed to the hospital. The doctors gave a prognosis three days after Christmas and she was eventually placed on palliative care. Her family held vigil at her hospital bedside. She was alert enough to greet them all and they all tried to comfort her and each other with prayer and reassurance that it was okay to go and they would all take care of each other and that they would see her again in heaven.

It was about 2 a.m. on January 2 that Janet breathed her last breath. Her son was sleeping at her side with

his hand on her arm. Her mother was asleep in a chair. Her son called for the nurse and called the hotel where the rest of the family had gone to rest. More than 500 people in that island community braved the worst ice storm Maine saw that year to pay their respects. Her father was so devastated by the loss he could barely stand up and walk to the open casket. Her mother lost her faith because she could not understand a God who would allow one of his flock to suffer her whole life only to be taken at such a young age.

I still get choked up when I write about my mother. She was 49 and I feel cheated that I didn't have more time with this woman I consider a hero. I am happy that she is not in pain any longer but a selfish part of me still wants to call her on her birthday, send flowers on Mother's Day, and see her smiling face when I visit. She loved Elvis, M&M's, sitting in the sun, rare steak, an occasional rum & coke, and so much about life that some of us probably take for granted.

At her funeral a lifelong best friend pulled my sisters and me aside and said, "I want you to know that Janet told me that she felt her best when she was pregnant with you kids." Something about her "hormones being out of whack and it helped relieve the arthritis." We didn't know that. Today I crank Elvis hoping she can hear it in heaven. I inherited her M&M addiction. And I smile when I see an expectant mother and hope she feels as good as my mom did carrying my sisters and me.

What happens now? The grieving process is different for everyone. It's okay to cry. It's okay to laugh. It's okay to share your feelings with others. Whatever you are feeling, please know that you are not alone.

If you would like to share a story of your loved one please send it to:

Diakon Hospice Saint John  
Stephen T. Libby, LSW  
1030 Reed Ave., Suite 102  
Wyomissing, PA 19610

Or via email to:  
[libbys@diakon.org](mailto:libbys@diakon.org)

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