

CALVARY IN TOUCH

BEREAVEMENT DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

JANUARY-APRIL 2025

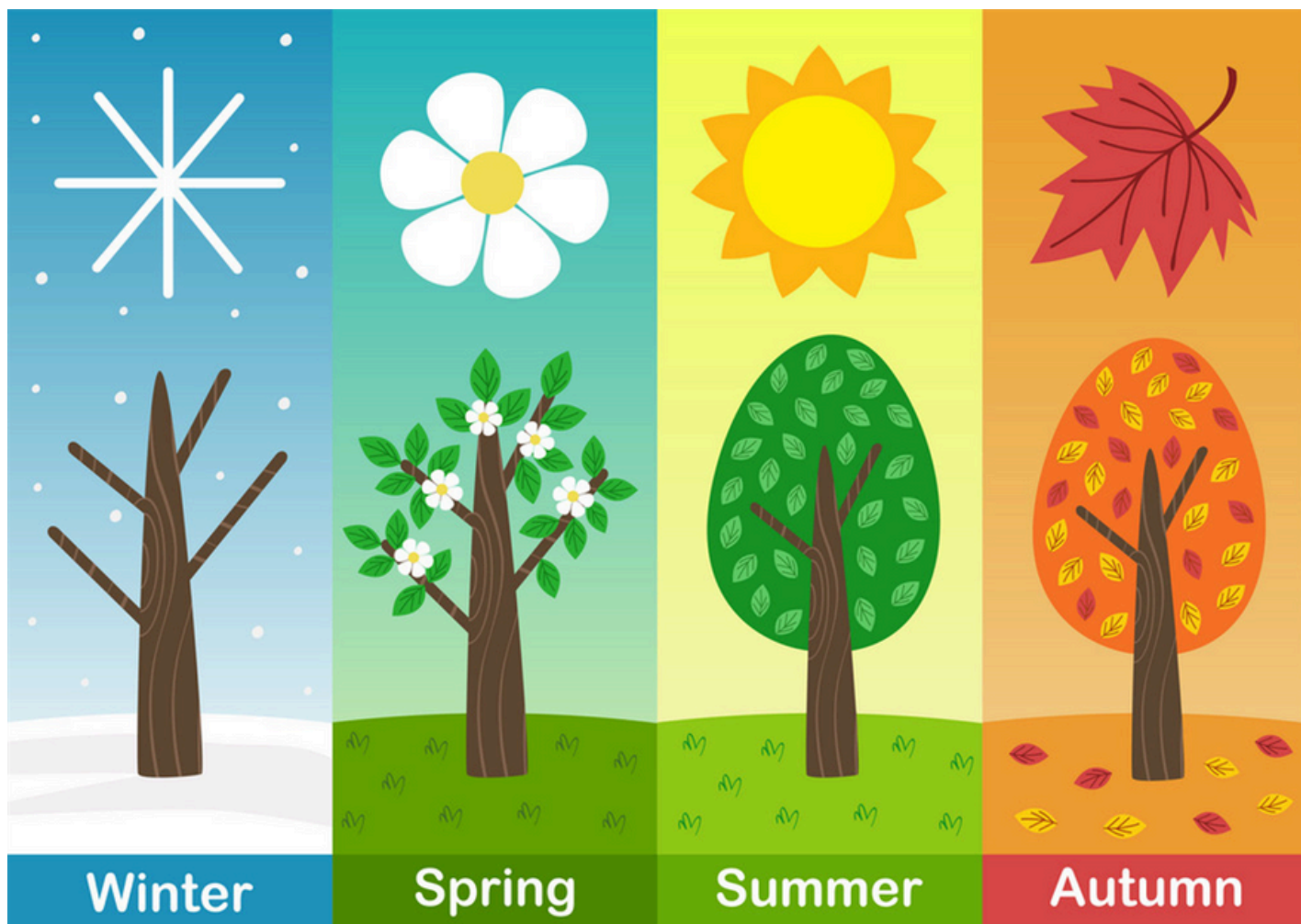
GREETINGS

In the seasons of winter, spring, summer, and autumn, we experience the balance and interconnection of the weather and the lifecycle of all living things on the planet. The transition from season to season can be a metaphor for the transitions associated with grief. When a person dies, one experiences acute grief. The symptoms can vary in intensity and frequency, and the grief can affect all domains of our experience: mind, body, emotions, social life and spiritual life. One can experience shock, disbelief, inability to make decision, a fluctuation of emotion, withdrawal and isolation, and existential questions about life and death and the meaning of one's faith beliefs.

In 1947, Erich Lindemann conducted the first Bereavement Study. He studied 101 survivors of the Coconut Grove Night Club Fire in Boston, MA, in November 1947. Lindemann's finding concluded that acute grief reactions impact all areas of human experience: the physical, emotional, and social. He observed that grief reactions occur in unpredictable waves. The waves of grief can be triggered and become acute again during anniversaries of death, birthdays, marriages, holidays, when a person experiences another loss or during other stressful times. Lindemann also concluded in his findings that there is a transition of grief from intense reactions to subsiding of reactions to healthy bereavement and, finally, return to individual functioning and enjoyment of activities. The metaphor of the seasons can exemplify this transition of grief recovery. Usually, after a period of undetermined time of acute grief, one can experience integrated grief in which one understands and accepts the loss; is able to engage in meaningful and pleasurable individual and social activities; and can celebrate and honor their deceased person by finding enduring connections through legacy experiences and by relishing in what their person imprinted in them.

In some circumstances people can experience prolonged grief, characterized by the symptoms of yearning for the deceased and preoccupation with the circumstances surrounding the death. A person experiencing prolonged grief may need additional psychological and emotional support.

Grief does not have an end time, and it can be cyclical like the seasons, but the intensity and the destabilizing symptoms can decrease, and then one can enjoy again the chill and clear skies of winter, the sights, taste, and smells of new life blossoming in the spring, the warmth of the sun in summer, and the fall colors of autumn.



WRITTEN BY
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The Laundry Princess

I had never done laundry. Laundry was one of my husband's skills and passions—from sorting and spot-cleaning to deciding which tender garments got hung to dry. I took his doing the laundry in stride, didn't pay much attention to this aspect of our well-rehearsed domestic life, and only realized that perhaps this wasn't the usual division of labor when friends commented on what a great deal I had.

When he died, I was suddenly left with a laundry bag that contained more socks than remained in the drawer, as well as jeans, shirts, and underwear. I knew there was a laundry room in the basement of our building, and I knew there was a plastic card that could extract money from a credit card to pay for the washer and dryer. But I had never entered the laundry room, never used the card.

I soon figured out how to navigate the laundry shoals. There is nothing like the spur of need to encourage quick learning. I knew I fell down in the finer points of laundry. I didn't always sort colors when there wasn't enough laundry to bother, and I machine-dried all the socks and underwear.

When I felt my husband overseeing my efforts, sometimes I wept from loneliness. Sometimes I snarled, "So where are you then when it's time to do the laundry?" Sometimes I just shrugged, so what if I'm not doing it his way, the best way. I forge my own way in the laundry room, and no colors have bled, and jeans turned inside out can be dried in the dryer. I always have clean clothes to wear.

When my husband died, I felt as though I had been abandoned. In a storm of tears, I scrawled, "Who will supply me with the names and places I've forgotten? Who knows the old songs, the old familiar jokes? Who will wash the pots, open the jars, close the sticky windows? Who will do the laundry?" I wept in rage, frustration, and solitude.

The other day the filter on the water faucet came loose and dropped three seemingly unrelated pieces into the sink. I couldn't screw them back on, nothing fit. They didn't fit on the second try either, or the third. I screamed, I stomped, I ranted, "NO, NO, NO! I can't do it! It's too hard! I need help!" And then I turned off the water, rinsed the pieces and laid them on the drainer. I went to bed. The next day I left the house early and came home late. I picked up the pieces and looked at them again, fit them together. I screwed them back onto the filter. And who said, "Good job!" There was no one to applaud. There is no one to applaud. There is only me.

Marcia Schonzeit

A TRIBUTE TO MY BELOVED HUSBAND

My beloved husband died in a nursing home on the morning of October 1, 2023, at the age of ninety-four. We were together for thirty-six years, and he was the love of my life.

He had cared for me and my two sons for years, loving us unconditionally, accepting them as his own and protecting and saving us from the abuses of my first marriage. Our love for him was returned in full measure. We were a happy loving family unit, and he was our knight in shining armor.

As he aged, I took care of him at home as he slowly physically deteriorated. My grief began as I witnessed bits and pieces of him slowly being devoured by his arthritic condition. His habit of setting out my breakfast dishes for the next morning, putting toothpaste on my toothbrush, cleaning my hairbrush and rubbing my head became too difficult. Finally, his physical condition was impossible for one person to handle. He kept falling and needed two people to lift and care for him, and he suffered from excruciating pain that, according to his doctor, could no longer be managed at home.

The next step in the grieving process was for me to accept that my husband could no longer stay at home. His doctor would not support it, and the aide that I had was hurting herself trying to lift him when he fell. She loved my husband but told me if I continued doing what I was doing, I was going to have a break down. I was getting no sleep. He was up and down all night with pain and bathroom issues. I knew I had no choice. It was hopeless. I had put the Christmas tree up in the beginning of November. He always loved the tree with all of our decorations from different places we had visited. I knew it would be our last Christmas and New Year's together at home. I focused on the goal ahead as I wheeled him past our tree, and into the elevator. I was cheery and numb knowing I had to keep it together for him.

After pain management and physical therapy, we moved into a nursing facility in mid-February 2023. This was another difficult adjustment and step in my grieving process. Every morning when I walked through the doors, I prayed to Gød for strength and guidance. I was now navigating a broken system and constantly advocating for my husband. I went every day and stayed for hours. I was on a mission. I knew I couldn't stop my husband from dying, but I could make the time we had together as enjoyable as possible and protect him as best I could just as he had protected us. It was the idea of living in the moment and making each one count, as we created our own world in one room.

We did watercolors in painting class and made friends on the floor. My husband loved people, and it made him happy to have the contact. We did physical therapy and practiced the exercises together in our room. He asked me to put up photographs on the wall of the two of us to remind him of all the great times we had together. I plastered the walls with 8" X 10s" and they comforted him. "They're temporary. We can take them down when I go home," and I agreed.

I washed and cut his hair, brushed his teeth, cleaned his eyes, gave him shaves and manicures, massaged his neck and put cream on his dry skin. We laughed and joked. I set up a small space and called it our movie theater with his wheelchair next to my chair, holding hands, we watched the old black and white films that we loved. I fed him lunch and dinner to make sure he ate, lugged heavy trays back and forth and took his dirty clothes home to wash. Many duties were the aides' responsibilities but went unfulfilled. Some would disappear before their shift ended in order to avoid having to do the Hoyer Lift, undressing and cleaning. Some would just refuse, and then we would have to wait, sometimes for hours. He would whisper, "Please don't leave me," and I would stay until after dinner to make sure the aides gave him his medications, hoping he would then fall asleep for the night.

It was so hard for us to say goodbye to each other. We were so attached, and I had such dread. Fear that if I left him alone, something would happen, and it was not unfounded. "I want you to take a cab home. I'll call you in the cab and when you get home. I want you to be safe," he would say. I always kissed him seven times on the forehead before I left. "One for each day," he would say. When he could no longer call me on his phone, I would call the floor to check on him. I was so busy and running on empty, I didn't have time to think or feel much. I just kept going, focusing on what had to be done next, afraid that if I stopped, I wouldn't start again. Exhaustion was taking a toll on my body with constant ocular migraines and nerve pain going down both arms from doing too much. I left the Christmas tree on. It comforted me when I came back from the nursing home. I collapsed, shattered, in our bed alone.

I was constantly looking for another solution for us and finally found one on Long Island where the elderly were treated humanely. I was so excited, but they didn't have an immediate space. I told my husband about my plan, and we were so excited. We had hope.

Several times, our church had arranged to come in and give us communion. It was such a comfort for both of us, and when it was time, the Rector of our church came in and gave my husband his last rites. My husband lifted up his hand to acknowledge it in peace.

For some time, part of my advocating for my husband was to get him on hospice. I kept fighting to get Calvary involved, but I was told, time after time, he did not have a specific diagnosis like cancer and did not qualify. Finally, after being hit with two simultaneous infections and sepsis, on intravenous antibiotics with no improvement, he qualified for Calvary. The place on Long Island called to say a space had opened up for my husband, but it was too late.

My husband was in the last stages of dying, and finally Calvary took over and changed our lives forever. For the first time, my sons and I had educated, kind, and caring professional support. They knew how to keep my husband out of pain and remain comfortable. They said hallucinating was normal. They taught us how to swab his mouth with fluid, lubricate his lips with balm and put cold compresses on his forehead for the fever. They told us how to watch for signs of pain like grimacing and to let them know right away. They kept reinforcing that we were doing everything right and checked in on a regular basis to give us guidance, comfort, and updates. They removed our fears and stereotypes about death turning the process of dying into an exquisitely painful and beautiful experience, profound and fluid with dignity and honor, uniting the four of us in grief, loyalty, trust and love always to be treasured. My husband whispered to me over and over, "I love you so" as I held his hand, sang his favorite love song, and lay across his chest for the last time.

I am so grateful to Calvary for guiding us through this experience together. It was so important for me to share the dying process of my beloved husband with him and my sons together. It was the beginning of the healing process. Having the opportunity to express and give back the unconditional love he had given to us helped to complete the circle of life.

In November of 2023, I started grief therapy with a Calvary therapist who began to lead me through the twists and turns of grief. I was exhausted, but my adrenaline was still pumping full blast from all the stress. I needed to rest to calm down, but it was impossible to will it into existence. I was in a fog and making decisions seemed almost impossible. I felt confused, rudderless, and cried constantly. I spoke to my sons, and we grieved together. Socializing with others was out of the question. I preferred to be alone; to avoid having well-meaning questions hurled at me or being told it was time for me to get on with my life.

Grief was my new companion, and I had no control over the waves of indescribable sorrow that consumed me. I thought I was losing my mind but was reassured by my therapist that all of my reactions were normal. What a relief! Having this knowledge grounded me.

Slowly, I began to clean out our home of thirty-six years to put on the market in the spring, and I started physical therapy to help my body heal. In the beginning, the smallest chore like shredding papers seemed overwhelming, and I would leave it aside and then go back to it, until little by little I was able to do more. I was downsizing and there was no escaping my grief. I was reliving life with my husband through photographs and love letters, his smell when I opened the closet door, his clothes and shoes and voice on my phone. I envisioned him walking through the door, the way he always did, holding his three dozen red roses for me, "I'm home, darling girl." Walking into the kitchen, I would stop remembering when he would embrace me on the threshold and whisper, "I'm never going to let you go. You are my life." I vacillated between feeling nauseous to wanting to fill up the black hole inside me with comfort food. My therapist listened and supported me: "There's no right way to grieve. Everyone grieves differently. You are doing an amazing job."

Over the summer, I sold the apartment and moved into a much smaller place with a view of the sky. My sons and I went up to our home one last time to say goodbye. We prayed together and thanked my husband for all of his love, that he would always be with us and would never be forgotten.

This month, at the one-year mark of being together with my grief therapist, it was time to say goodbye and reflect on my grief journey. She had said that you never get over it. It is always with you but, it can change with time.

The intensity and frequency of crying has diminished. Holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries are still difficult. They always will be. I think of him with love, not tears, when I clean out my hairbrush.

This is the first time in my life that I have lived alone. I'm not lonely. I just miss him beyond description. Now the focus is on me, and I am adjusting to it. I joined a gym and am making new friends and trying new things. I have internalized my husband and hear his voice in my head encouraging me, "Once you make up your mind, you can accomplish anything."

I honor him every day. I try to be as courageous and strong as he was. To show kindness and to have an open heart. I wear his monogrammed shirts, pick up lucky pennies from the street and randomly give out packages of his favorite Oreo cookies in his memory. I pray to him every morning asking for his guidance and protection. I light a candle every evening for him. I talk to him and feel his presence in me and surrounding me in my new place, thanking him and God for our time together. I look for signs of him everywhere: birds singing, a butterfly on a leaf, the sun shining, and I am grateful for having shared my life with him for thirty-six years.

Grief will always be my companion, and it is a gift, a testament to our love for each other. My sons and I will always carry on his legacy.

I would like to give special thanks to my therapist at Calvary who has made my grief journey so valuable to me. I would have been lost without her gentle guidance, feedback, and support. She is in my heart.

With gratitude and appreciation,
Mary Downe



Me and my beloved husband Ed

VIRTUAL BEREAVEMENT GROUPS

DEATH OF A SPOUSE/PARTNER

- Tuesday 1:00 - 2:30 PM
- Wednesday 5:30 - 7:00 PM

Facilitator: Joanne Castellanos
917-574-4941
jcastellanos@calvaryhospital.org

Monday 11:00 - 12:30 PM
Facilitator: Edgardo Lugo
347-963-7001
elugo@calvaryhospital.org

Thursday 6:00 - 7:30 PM
Facilitator: Jackeline Abbondandolo
347-949-1266
jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org

Thursday 3:00 - 4:30 PM
Facilitator: Jacqueline Marlow
917-708-0133
jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

ADULT DEATH OF A PARENT

- Tuesday: 6:00 - 7:30 PM
- Wednesday 6:00 - 7:30 PM

Facilitator: Jackeline Abbondandolo
347-949-1266
jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org

Wednesday: 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Facilitator: Jacqueline Marlow
917-708-0133
jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

Thursday: 5:30 - 7:00 PM
Facilitator: Joanne Castellanos
917-574-4941
jcastellanos@calvaryhospital.org

Friday: 10:00 - 11:30 AM
Facilitator: Edgardo Lugo
347-963-7001
elugo@calvaryhospital.org

ADULT DEATH OF A SIBLING

Tuesday 5:30 - 7:00 PM
Facilitator: Joanne Castellanos
917-574-4941
jcastellanos@calvaryhospital.org

Monday: 1:00 - 2:30 PM
Facilitator: Edgardo Lugo
347-963-7001
elugo@calvaryhospital.org

DEATH OF A CHILD

Death of a Child

- Monday 5:30 - 7:00 PM

Death of a Child - 2 Years & Beyond

- 2nd & 4th Thursday 12:30 - 2:00 PM

Facilitator: Joanne Castellanos
917-574-4941
jcastellanos@calvaryhospital.org

Death of a Young Child

Wednesday: 3:00 - 4:30 PM
Facilitator: Jackeline Abbondandolo
347-949-1266
jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org



VIRTUAL BEREAVEMENT GROUPS

MEN'S DISCUSSION

1st Thursday 12:30 - 2:00PM
Facilitator: Jackeline Abbondandolo
347-949-1266
jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org

TWEENS AGES 10-12

Thursday 4:00 - 5:15 PM
Facilitator: Jacqueline Marlow
917-708-0133
jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

TEENS AGES 13-17

- Tuesday: 5:00 6:30 PM
 - Thursday: 5:30 - 6:45 PM
- Facilitator: Jacqueline Marlow
917-708-0133
jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

IN-PERSON TWEEN & PARENT GUARDIAN BEREAVEMENT GROUP IN THE BRONX

Tween Group
Monday: 4:00 - 5:30 PM
Facilitator: Jacqueline Marlow
917-708-0133
jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

Parent/Guardian Group:
Runs concurrently with Tween Group
Monday: 4:00 - 5:30 PM
Facilitator: Jackeline Abbondandolo
347-949-1266
jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org

Calvary Hospital
1740 Eastchester Road
Bronx, NY 10461

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering aftermath, many of us continue to grapple with unprecedented emotional and mental health challenges; if you're feeling overwhelmed, please remember that you're not alone, and don't hesitate to reach out to Calvary's Individual Counseling Services for the support and guidance you deserve during these trying times. These services attract a nominal fee.

If you would like more information, please call 718-518-2281, or email calvarybereavement@calvaryhospital.org.

TREE OF LIFE



Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your significant person's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital. This is a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information, please call 718-518-2689.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

Calvary In Touch has been made possible by a generous bequest from Michael Camara.