



Leaves of Change



Bereavement Newsletter from Whatcom Hospice—PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center

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The Bean Bag Chair

By Sheila, Whatcom Hospice volunteer, March 2017

Not long after my husband's death, I was taking a walk and passed by a yard sale. Right by the sidewalk was the oldest bean-bag chair that I had ever seen. It was missing most of its filler and had collapsed into a misshapen heap of faded wrinkled color. I kept walking, plodding along, lost in my fog of grief, and headed home where I felt safe from the world.

Sometime later that old bean bag popped into my head. Why? Who knows? This happened again a few weeks later, and that is when another memory came to me: a video of children playing with a bean-bag chair that had developed a hole, and the filler was flying out all around them. The room looked like an explosion of white beads on everything. Such are the random thoughts that bounce around in your head when life is in turmoil around you.

It then became a picture of my life. I was like that old bean bag. I was once young, filled to the brim with love of family, a vision of the future, and a fulfilling career. However, with the passing of years and the wear and tear of daily use, the "beans" of my life were slowly being compacted and were leaking out. With the repeated loss of family members, a hole had developed, and with each death the hole got bigger. My filler was leaking out faster. I would try to replace it each time with faith, hope, love and memories, but it was never the same amount.



Then my husband died. This was the last thread holding me together. Sure, I had family, friends, and neighbors, and they tried to console and help with the needs of daily existence. But when I was alone, I felt like my filler had been flung about me like the beads in that old video. Memories, photos, and a collection of 43 years of partnership were scattered all around me, everywhere. Then came the frenzied efforts to put it all back together, to organize, to hide it away, but all to no avail. I felt like a limp, empty, worn out shell with very little stuffing left. It had been beaten out of me. (Continued on page 2)

Save the Date

A Service of Memory will be held on Monday, May 15, 2017

Whatcom Hospice invites you to join us for a service of memory—a time to celebrate and honor those we've loved. Please bring pictures or a meaningful keepsake object to place on the memory table for the duration of the service. All caregivers, family and friends are welcome to attend. The service will take place at St. Luke's Health Education Center, 3333 Squalicum Pkwy, Bellingham, WA from 4:00—5:00 p.m.

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With the help of church friends, I was prodded and pushed gently into the Hospice Grief Support Group. This was a place of safety, comfort, support and freedom. It offered me the freedom to talk about whatever was bothering me without judgement or platitudes. It provided me the freedom to talk about my husband—both the good stuff and the bad. And I was allowed the freedom to ask questions—both emotional (like who am I now and what is my purpose to be?) and the practical (like what forms do I need to file or who do I call to repair things?). It was a comfort and privilege to hear other people's stories and how they were dealing with their problems and emotions. I was not in this boat alone. Most of all, I am grateful for the leaders of this group, their support and understanding, the knowing nod, the smiles, the pat on the shoulder, the always available tissues, and the helpful insights and suggestions they provided.

Slowly, so very slowly, my stuffing is being replenished. The pain is easing, I cry less often, the memories are comforting, and the funny stuff of life makes me laugh again. I also know that I will never be quite the same again. Hopefully, I will become full enough to be useful once again—to “pay it forward” by offering comfort to others.

Grief Support Group series begins May 11th - Sign up and join

It's time to sign up for *A Journey Toward Hope and Healing*, a six-week educational and supportive grief group for adults dealing with the death of a loved one. This group provides exploration of thoughts and feelings related to emotional, physical, social and spiritual aspects of grief in a safe environment. The group series is held at St. Luke's Health Education Center at 3333 Squalicum Pkwy, Bellingham, WA. The spring session begins on May 11, 2017, and ends on June 15, 2017. Registration is required. Please contact Whatcom Hospice at 360.733.5877 or mwalsh3@peacehealth.org

Memory Keepsake Workshop



In grief and loss we often seek a way to stay connected to the individual who has died. Many of us keep articles of clothing that belonged to our loved one. The familiar colors and patterns in the clothing remind us of our loved one and hold our memories through the grieving process. Linking objects may be made from a treasured clothing item. Whatcom Hospice makes it easy for you to sew a Memory Teddy Bear or Memory Pillow. We provide the supplies for assembling the bears and pillows. You bring the special article of

clothing. Join our hospice volunteer sewers in making your personal keepsake object. No sewing experience needed. Experienced sewers are encouraged to bring their own machines and we will provide instructions and guidance. Families are encouraged to attend. The next workshop will be held on **June 3rd from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.** For more information and to register please call Whatcom Hospice 360-733-5877 or email mwalsh3@peacehealth.org



The ideas and opinions in this newsletter are offered for your reflection only. We do not promote any particular philosophical or religious perspective.

If you have comments, suggestions, or would like to submit a poem or article, please call Whatcom Hospice Bereavement Coordinator, 360-733-5877 or email: mwalsh3@peacehealth.org



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