Cathy lost her husband, Bill, to thyroid cancer. They loved traveling together. They each accomplished their goal of visiting all seven continents.

Sue lost her father, “Opa,” to ALS and lost her mother, “Oma,” several months later after battling COPD and dementia for years. Sue imagines her parents dancing together in heaven.

Christina lost her husband, Chris, to melanoma. They had three small children together. She remarried several years later and has a child with her new husband. As a blended family, they have found ways to honor Chris.

Gene lost his wife, Jeanne, of 27 years to lung cancer. They enjoyed playing music together and singing in the church choir.

Sharon lost her husband, Ron, to congestive heart failure. She has found strength in volunteering with the Wife, Widow, Woman support group.

Lauren lost her mom, Sally, to lung cancer. The dragonfly has become an important symbol that represents a connection to her mother.

Dorothy lost her husband, Roy, to COPD. Roy was an architect and designed the interior of their home.

Kids’ Coping Corner

Creating a MEMORY BOX is a simple and meaningful activity that kids can do on their own or the whole family can do together.

• Find a box of any shape and size.
• Decorate the inside/outside with materials (markers, stickers, pictures from magazines, etc.) to reflect something about your loved one such as some of his/her favorite things or things to represent your relationship.
• Fill the box with anything that reminds you of him/her such as pictures, letters, memorabilia, etc.
• Add things to your box or look through it on days when you miss him/her.

Christina shared some coping tools that she and her children used after the death of her husband.

We made candles out of beeswax with the bereavement specialist from hospice. When the boys were feeling sad, we would light our candles or write notes to dad and send them off in balloons.

We had two bears made out of Chris’ hunting shirts. They call them their “daddy bears.”

There are volunteers available to provide this through the BJC Hospice Lumina Program. Contact the hospice office for more information.
EMOTIONS OF GRIEF
Grief includes a wide range of emotions. Some are easier than others to feel and express. The following quotes represent some emotions these family members felt during grief.

Every day that I came home, I thought, “Is today the day? Is today the day he’s gonna die?” And not that I wished him to die, but it was just the waiting. There was a certain relief when he died, but at the same time, I felt guilty about that, and sort of embarrassed to tell others.

Probably the most powerful feeling I experienced was missing her physical presence; just doing the everyday things we did together like eating, cleaning the house, going to church and holding hands.

Absolutely everything was on my shoulders now. I had to do the taxes and pay the bills. I have things breaking in the house and Roy would always fix everything before. That’s the part that was really hard. I didn’t realize that I would have to pick up and do all those things.

I didn’t have time to grieve or even wash my face because, for 5 or 6 days, people were coming or going and I had no control. I was numb because I lost control.

In the car, I would just start crying. It was no special place, it was just the solitude, and the loneliness.

One of the biggest and most surprising emotions that I experienced during that first year was fear; fear of doing things as a single rather than a couple.

The thing that made me feel better when he died is that he didn’t have to worry about oxygen. He didn’t have to worry about the feeding tube. He could lay down and relax. Just to know that he didn’t have to worry.

After the relief I felt sadness; sadness that she was gone, that I couldn’t talk to her anymore.

I got rid of everything. In a way, I wish I would have saved something.

I felt very guilty. I did everything I could, but it seemed like I couldn’t finish what I was supposed to do.

It’s not that I was incompetent and it’s not that I curled up and didn’t do anything, but I had this underlying feeling of incompetence.

For a long time, I avoided talking to my children about my husband, and then I realized that they had feelings too. I needed to talk to them.

I was very surprised at Thanksgiving after Mom passed away. I felt orphaned; I had never felt that way before.

There was a sense that we were never going to be able to do what we had planned to.

“Some of the best support I got said absolutely nothing; it was a strong hug, a gaze in the eye, and you just knew. If words were out there to ease the pain, Hallmark would have coined them by now.”

-Matt, whose wife died in December 2013

Coping in Five Dimensions
(Continued on next page)

Adjusting to grief is a difficult process. In the last mailing, we shared about grief in the five dimensions. On the following page are examples of how some people experienced and coped with grief in each dimension. Remember there is no “right” way to cope with grief; you have to find what works for you.
### Spiritual:

- I like to talk to Roy and tell him how things are going.
- My mom knew that I liked dragonflies, and the very first card that came in the mail after she died had a dragonfly on it. That gave me such a sense of joy and peace.
- I started going to temple more. I think it just was a time to let everything else go and live in the moment.
- I prayed and I went to the cemetery to visit Oma and Opa.
- I see my mother in God’s beauty such as a beautiful blue sky or leaves rustling in the wind. Those are all things that speak of this infinite energy that we are all part of, and it gives me comfort.

### Emotional:

- I think things are better, not because the emotions are less strong but because I have learned to cope with them better.
- I could be fine one moment and crying the next. My husband didn’t enjoy the tears so I finally said, “There isn’t anything you can do to solve it, so just hug me, and that is all I need.”
- My most challenging emotion was anger because I didn’t want to be angry with Chris, or God. I tried to redirect the anger and focus on my kids.
- I journal because there are things I don’t necessarily want anybody else to hear.
- Meeting with the bereavement specialist from BJC Hospice was helpful because I could safely express my emotions. Not just the acceptable emotions of missing my mom, but also anger, resentment, and feeling alone in this process.

### Physical:

- I bought myself a whole pint of ice cream that I ate all in one night.
- I would walk my dog when I got a little lonely and sometimes I would get to visit with neighbors while I was out.
- I made sure I got my shower every day the way I liked to, and I got on my treadmill.
- I have utilized healing touch which helps my balance and overall welfare.
- Some of the clothes I saved, like a pair of gloves so I can put my hands in there, and even though they’re too big, I know his hands were in them.
- The act of getting out and doing things can help.

### Mental:

- I think the biggest thing that has helped me is accepting that my life has changed and will never be the same and realizing that these changes, although hard sometimes, are necessary and required.
- I was very forgetful, which I assume has something to do with being tired, and the way I coped with that was to write everything down. I had lists on top of lists, but at least I was organized.
- Jeanne and I used to play music together for enjoyment and I wanted to keep that music going so I picked up her Irish penny whistle and began to teach myself to play in her memory.
- Try and make a list of what you’re grateful for. I would try to think about how fortunate I was that we had been together in the first place.

### Relational:

- I find that sometimes I don’t need to talk to someone, I just need to talk at someone. I don’t want your input, I just want you to be there and listen.
- The first year, I went over to my daughter’s every Sunday for dinner.
- I learned to reach out and accept help from wherever it could come.
- I didn’t think I would find comfort in the widows’ group but that was where I found the most comfort. I had plenty of friends but no one that really understood.
- I went back to volunteering.
SUPPORT THAT SURROUNDS

BJC Hospice offers the following programs at no cost to the community.

**Daybreak** — A one-day grief retreat for couples who have lost a child.

**Labyrinth** — A one-day grief retreat for teens who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

**Portals and Threshold** — Grief support groups for spouse and partner loss.

**Stepping Stones Camp** — A weekend camp held annually in August for children ages 6-12 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

**Weavings** — A weekend retreat held annually in the fall for mothers who have experienced the death of a child.

**Wings on Wheels (W.O.W.)** — A mobile expressive and music therapy program to support individuals, families, and groups impacted by illness and loss.

**Lumina** — A program to help people share their life stories and create legacy projects for loved ones.

For more information, please call 314-953-1676 or email griefsupport@bjc.org.