This is the second of two mailings that includes quotes from family members who had a loved one die while under the care of BJC Hospice. This mailing includes thoughts on how grief changes with time, the impact of grief on relationships, and how to remember and honor someone after a death. Here is a brief introduction to the people who shared insights with us at least one year after their loved one died. You can look for their icons throughout the mailing.

**MATT** lost his wife, Brooke, to brain cancer. He is learning to be both mom and dad while following in the footsteps of his wife.

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

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

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

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

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

**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.

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**Kids’ Coping Corner**

Christina and Matt shared the following coping tools that helped their children.

The kids decided to do a canned food drive to collect 215 cans, one for every day Chris suffered through his cancer. It is a good way for the kids to remember him and to increase awareness about cancer.

Part of my responsibility is to keep her legacy alive. I have pictures of her on the computer and keep a rolling screen of them so the girls can see pictures of their mom every day and we can talk about memories.
HOW GRIEF CHANGES WITH TIME

People often ask how long grief will last or how long it will feel so hard. There is not a clear cut answer for questions like these since grief is different for everyone and changes over time with some days or moments being harder or easier than others. Here are some insights from these family members about their experience with grief over time.

- I thought in 3 or 4 months I should be over this, but when I realized what grief was, it took much more. The grief ebbs and flows, but it doesn’t ever completely go away and sometimes it strikes at the strangest times.
- I never put a timeline on it. I would tell people to just try to know yourself and how you react to things. It’s going to be your own process, you can’t really compare yourself to other people.
- The first year was more of a shock. I kept waiting for Chris to come home. The second year was harder. I didn’t cry as much, but it was harder.
- I feel like one of the shortfalls of the American culture is that we say, “Okay, so they’re dead, get back to work. What’s the matter with you?” It’s unrealistic to expect somebody to just jump back up and get back into action.
- Time is not necessarily a measure of well-being.
- I think when Bill first died, it was like there was a doughnut that had a huge hole and very little dough. And the hole part gets smaller as time goes on, it’s always going to be there, but it gets a little smaller. And the sense of loss starts to change.

CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS

After a significant loss, relationships with friends and family often shift. This might be a change for the better or it might be a change that is hurtful and feels less supportive. Here are some experiences these family members had after the death of their loved one.

- There is definitely not as much couple interaction. I felt some people couldn’t understand it, and at first I wanted them to, but then I realized that they hadn’t gone through it so how could they?
- The third year came along and loneliness set in. I prayed that if I am supposed to marry again, please send me someone who will be a good dad and help him understand that our family is not a normal family because Chris will always be a part of our life.
- I had absolutely no interest in socializing. I just didn’t want to expend the energy to be social and pleasant, so I withdrew from friends and family for a while.
- Some of the people we were friends with as a couple have kind of drifted away. It was hard to do some things solo, especially things that are more couple oriented, like eating alone in a restaurant or going to a movie by myself.
- I didn’t think I would be able to love someone the way I loved Chris but, for me, it is kind of like when you have that first child. You love that child and you think you will never be able to love the second one as much as the first, but you do.
It has been 16 months and I feel like I am just NOW starting the grieving process. I keep waiting to wake up and find out that this bad dream is over.

People would tell me that the first Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc. would be hardest. I did not necessarily find this to be the case because I think there was such a numbness that some of the second events seemed harder than the first.

Although I still feel it every week, I think it’s something that lessens with time and changes form. More happy memories surface, fewer unhappy memories arise, and I see that if I’m really focusing on those experiences, I’m not really present, and I want to be experiencing my life right now in its fullness.

I am starting to realize you don’t have to stop cherishing the memories in order to move on.

I had his wedding ring downsized and I wear it underneath my wedding ring.

A hospice volunteer framed a picture of Dad with memories and phrases from Opa. Each of my children contributed to this with what they learned from him. When I am truly missing him, I go view that framed masterpiece.

I am still learning how to keep her memory alive.

One simple thing I do is to light a candle when I eat at home by myself.

In the Jewish religion, to show you went to the cemetery, you put a stone on the grave. I collected some stones and I leave one every time I go.

I kiss a picture of my parents.

I kept a few of Jeanne’s t-shirts that I wear once in a while.

I think of my mom when I’m doing things that I know she would enjoy, so those things become kind of living memorials.

I have a hat that he wore, and I smell it from time to time, because it reminds me of him.

At the holidays, I set a place for my parents and we have two candles burning.

My wife loved the beach. Putting my toes in the sand helps me feel connected with her.

I put together a team for Pedal the Cause in Jeanne’s honor and have used this as a coping tool.

I am keeping the family tradition of Christmas dinner going.

REMEMBERING YOUR LOVED ONE

There are many ways people honor and remember those who have died. Remember that grief is unique, so the ways you choose to memorialize someone will be unique to you. Here are some ideas these family members found to be meaningful.

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Journaling can be a way to honor your loved one as well as your own experiences with grief. You can use a notebook, journal, scrap pieces of paper, computer or anything you have available. You may wish to keep your journal private or share parts with others. They can be filled with many things including letters, feelings, memories and pictures. Here are some prompts to help you get started:

- I wish...
- I want to tell the person who died...
- Today I feel...
- Others think I should...
- I will always remember...
- The person who died gave/taught me...
- I believe when someone dies...

Don’t think too much about it, just write whatever comes to mind. Use the contact information on the back page to reach out to the bereavement staff at BJC Hospice for more prompts or information.
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