This newsletter includes quotes from family members who had a loved one die while under the care of BJC Hospice. Here is a brief introduction to the people who shared their insights with us. Look for their icons throughout the newsletter.

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

Betty lost her sister, Mary, to colon cancer. She finds comfort in going outside and looking at the stars at night.

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.

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.

Sharon lost her husband, Ron, to congestive heart failure. She has found strength in volunteering with a grief support group.

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

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

Pat lost her daughter, Loretta, to abdominal cancer. Her faith has brought her much comfort.

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

Cynthia and Cliff lost three children of their blended family, Duane, Tawana, and Steven, due to tragedy and illness.

When our children see us expressing our emotions, they learn their own feelings are natural and permissible, can be expressed, and can be talked about. That’s an important thing for our children to learn.

~ Fred Rogers

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.
GRIEF CAN BE COMPLICATED

Grief can make people wonder how long the hurt will last or how long it will feel so hard. There is no clear cut answer for these questions. 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.

HOW GRIEF CHANGES WITH TIME

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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.

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 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.

Finally I got past most of my guilt and was able to grieve my sister, and talk about her without crying each time.

Time is not necessarily a measure of well-being.

I can’t say when it happened, but I don’t cry as much. There can be certain times I have a thought of them and I can smile.

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.

GRIEF CAN BE COMPLICATED

Grief can make people wonder how long the hurt will last or they may believe that their feelings of grief should be over in six months or a year. Some may feel pressure from others to “get over it and move on.” However, there is not a typical timeline or set of predictable stages for grief. Other stressors and life changes such as loss of a home, divorce, caring for children or other family members, substance abuse, or your own physical health can make it even more challenging to work through grief and take care of yourself. We encourage you to be patient with yourself and take the time you need to fully grieve. Please consider taking even a few minutes a day to reach out to your support system and try different coping or self-care tools such as the ones listed in our HEAL mailings. Contact BJC Hospice if you need more ideas or support.

Please contact your primary care doctor, mental health practitioner or the BJC Hospice bereavement team if...

• You are still feeling sad on most days
• You are having a hard time completing daily tasks
• You feel your grief is getting worse
• You are having thoughts of suicide (in case of crisis, call the Suicide Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255)

These professionals can discuss, self-care tools, medications and supplements, counseling, and other options with you to help figure out what works for you and helps you move towards healing.
“The experience of grief is powerful. So, too, is your ability to help yourself heal. In doing the work of grieving, you are moved toward a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in your life.”

- Alan Wolfelt

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 meaningful.

- I had his wedding ring downsized and I wear it underneath my wedding ring.
- 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 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 get my photo albums and I sit and look and cry.
- I look at a lot of sports because my kids were into sports. Duane could tell you stats, and now that he’s gone I look at ESPN, trying to learn all about the players.
- I am still learning how to keep her memory alive.
- At the holidays, I set a place for my parents and we have two candles burning.
- A hospice volunteer framed a picture of Opa with memories and phrases from him. Each of my children contributed to this with what they learned from him. When I am truly missing him, I view that masterpiece.
- 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 still feel that she is with me. I channel her when I cook.
- On the one year anniversary, we put the big picture up of her, lit candles and released balloons.
- I kiss a picture of my parents.
SUPPORT THAT SURROUNDS

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

**Labyrinth** — A one-day grief retreat held annually in June for teens ages 13-18 who have experienced the death of a family member or friend.

**Support Groups** — Call for more information about various grief support groups.

**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.

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**WE ARE HERE FOR YOU...**

The mission of our bereavement program is to provide grief services to people of all ages affected by the death of a loved one. We strive to build a more compassionate and connected community, facilitate mourning, and foster resilience by providing grief awareness, education, support, resources and hope.

Please contact us for support. We can...

- Talk on the phone or meet in person
- Provide information about support groups and therapists
- Send reading material about grief and loss
- Discuss any questions or concerns
- Provide information on grief camps and retreats

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