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Grief Notes: Skipping Grief

01/04/2024

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Grief Support Group

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Skipping Grief by Ron Cunningham, Bereavement Coordinator

Grief is a natural response to losing someone or something that you care about. Unfortunately, people are often under the impression that their grieving is all wrong because it does not follow a specific formula that they read in a book. Some people even believe that expressing the emotions associated with grief shows weakness. Hollywood movies often romanticize the heroes who deny their feelings of pain and sadness yet somehow triumphantly move on with ease after the death of a loved one. In reality, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and the grieving process does not follow a pattern – it varies from person to person and even from day to day. Even though it can be messy and uncomfortable at times, the grieving process is extremely vital to good mental and physical health. What happens when a person avoids grieving? Some people think that grief will eventually go away if it's ignored long enough. However, grief, like any other stress in life that we don't attend to, will grow and attempt to take over our lives. Psychologists report that not grieving a loss can make subsequent grief even harder to process. It can also have a negative impact on both mental and physical health. It can lead to a higher risk of anxiety, depression, heart disease, aches and pains, difficulty sleeping, apathy, irritability, social isolation, and more. Grief can negatively affect relationships or even lead to a person not taking good care of themselves. I recently had the opportunity to talk with a gentle, soft-spoken lady who had just lost her father. She had many things vying for her time and was not able to allow herself the time to grieve her father. She was staying busy and distracted by many activities, so she thought everything would work out. Soon, she started to become outwardly angry and very difficult to be around. It was not until someone was brave enough to finally talk to her about her behavior that she became aware of how grief could affect her, and she tracked those feelings back to the loss of her father. Grief can be emotionally painful, but the grieving process helps us to heal. Don't lose hope. It takes time and support to work through a loss. Acknowledge and express your feelings, be kind and patient with yourself, find healthy ways to cope, and remember to seek support from family, friends, and your community. Let yourself grieve in your own way and in your own time, and you will eventually find that the cherished memories of your loved one will bring you comfort.

Six Week Grief Support Group – Aroostook County

Have you lost a loved one? When someone we love dies, it can feel overwhelming. You may feel alone and that no one understands what you are going through. The truth is that many are walking a similar path. Consider coming to a place where you can talk, grieve, and move forward with people who are also grieving.

A Six Week Grief Support Group will be held for six consecutive **Tuesdays, starting January 9, and concluding on February 13**. They will be held at AR Gould Hospital in Presque Isle from 6 to 7:30 pm. This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants, so please be sure to RSVP.

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

As your Bereavement Coordinator, I am available by phone for grief support. If you would like to arrange a time to talk or meet one-on-one, please e-mail your request to gmclaughlin@northernlight.org or call me at 207-498-9039. I will get back to you as soon as I can. Our agency toll-free number is also available to you: 1-800-757-3326.

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WHEN: Six consecutive Tuesdays beginning March 12th and concluding April 16th from 6:00-7:30 pm.

WHERE: Northern Light A.R. Gould Hospital (East Annex, Door 2 – Conference Room)

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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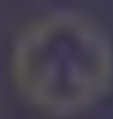
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Circle of Care: Dr. Nancy O'Neill

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Dr. Nancy O'Neill, M.D.

"Trained initially as a family physician, I took on the most fulfilling aspect of my professional career as a hospice physician in 1994 with Hospice of Aroostook, currently known as Northern Light Hospice. Though I left the County several times to practice family medicine in other states, I continued to work as a medical director of a hospice agency in rural Alabama and Bangor while also working as a medical director of a large practice. Eventually, I fulfilled my ultimate goal of becoming certified in Hospice and Palliative Care. It was not possible to embark on a Palliative Care mission in Bangor at the time. Thus began an exciting endeavor to develop a Palliative Care service in the County within the TAMC service area. Since Palliative Care involves working with the most seriously ill patients who are trying to navigate their care needs, it made sense to me to return to where patients would at least have a familiar name and even a familiar face, having spent years practicing at Aroostook Family Practice. While working in cancer care as a palliative care physician, the Aroostook House of Comfort opened its doors and continues to provide care and comfort for our patients on hospice from all over the County. Since the day the House of Comfort opened, I have been one of the many providers working here. I consider it a wonderful, humbling privilege to work with the most compassionate team of men and women ministering to the needs of patients and their families at a time when the many forms of suffering are the most intense. My friends often ask how I can continue to work with dying patients. I reflect on this question often, but I keep coming back to how much "life" there is in death; the stories I hear about their loved ones are uplifting and life-giving. Witnessing a suffering patient and family achieve comfort and peace in these final moments is the most profound gift any one of us can receive in this ministry. There is never a day when I don't look forward to coming to work at the Aroostook House of Comfort—it is a privilege."

- Dr. Nancy O'Neill

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Grief Notes: Love With No Place to Go

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Love With No Place to Go by Tim Soucy, Bereavement Coordinator

With the first deaths I experienced in my teen and early adulthood years, there were countless thoughts, feelings, and times that I was unprepared for in my grieving process. What was unsettling for me was how many times my grief intensified periodically for what I thought was no apparent reason. As a young adult, I sought a therapist to assist me with my grief. The therapist was a kind and caring individual who explored, listened, and educated me on grief and grieving. The therapist shared a statement with me that was transformative in my understanding of grief. It is a statement that I have and continue to share with those who are grieving. A statement you may have heard yourself, "The first year after the death of a loved one is a year of firsts, without."

The therapist went on to list the first new year, first birthday, first anniversary, first holiday season, and so many other firsts I would face without my loved one. For many of us, we just went through our first holiday season without our loved one, and now we are in the heart of our first Maine winter without. The long, cold winter days turn into even longer winter nights. In the midst of this, February with Valentine's Day will arrive. Whether or not we participated in Valentine's Day in the past, we will be reminded of the love we have for those who were in our lives in very special ways and who are no longer physically present. Jamie Anderson shared, "Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give—but cannot. All the unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and the hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go." So many of the ways we express our love through actions end. Simple expressions like holding our loved one's hand, giving and receiving hugs, doing tasks for them, buying lunch or a gift are no longer possible. We struggle with what to do with the love, yet our love for them may grow even stronger with appreciation for them having been a part of our lives. The love itself does not die. In our year of firsts and living without, may you be able to acknowledge the love you had and continue to have for your deceased loved one. May you find new ways of expressing your love in meaningful and profound ways that provide self-care and that honor those who have died. We all grieve in our individual ways. Sometimes, it helps to have someone to talk with. If you are struggling or have questions about your grief and grieving, the Northern Light Bereavement Coordinators are here to listen and be a resource for you.

Six Week Grief Support Group – Aroostook County

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Executive Director: (207) 540-1080

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WAGM: AM Chat with Shawn Cunningham

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Shawn Cunningham, host of WAGM's AM Chat, sits down with Abbey Clair, Executive Director of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation, owner of the Aroostook House of Comfort. Together, they talk about the profound impact and indispensable role AHOC plays in providing hospice care within our community. Shining a spotlight on the Aroostook House of Comfort invaluable support system, offering solace to individuals and families during life's most challenging moments. They explore AHOC's mission, the diverse range of hospice services it offers, its philosophy of care, the nurturing homelike environment it provides, and how you can lend your support to the Aroostook House of Comfort.

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Grief Notes: The Cliché Trap

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The Cliché Trap by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

We live in a world that is full of cliches and quaint sayings that we often feel fit the situation that we or someone else is currently dealing with. These phrases are often meant to be humorous or said in a way to emphasize a point trying to be made and roll off the tongue without much thought for their relevance to the current situation.

Cliche, also spelled cliché, is a 19th-century borrowed word from the French that refers to a saying or expression that has been so overused that it has become boring and unoriginal. The French word “cliché” was first used to describe the sound of a printing plate, which prints the same thing repeatedly. Like the original meaning, we can easily fall into the trap of using these phrases over and over again. Doing so is “as easy as pie”. But before we “throw the baby out with the bath water,” we know that cliches are still used often in books, poetry, advertisements, television shows, and movies. Even Shakespeare, in his classic writings, often used clichés, such as “All that glitters is not gold,” “Melted into thin air,” and “jealousy is the green-eyed monster,” to mention a few. So clichés are not always seen in a bad light.

But how does this relate to those of us who are grieving the loss of a loved one? If you have not already experienced the pain from clichés on your grief journey, you probably will at some point. Well-meaning relatives, friends, and co-workers who don't know what to say to someone suffering the loss of a loved one often say nothing at all or fall into the trap of using cliches. They fear saying the wrong thing, but when sensing the need to say something, they may say the first thing that comes to mind is a cliché.

Some of the most common clichés are:

- > “I know how you feel.”
- > “Time heals all wounds.”
- > “It's time to put it behind you.”
- > “They're in a better place.”
- > “You have to keep busy.”
- > “Every cloud has a silver lining.”

Amid our loss, we can feel abandoned by people because of these or similar statements. We, too, may have said many of the same things to our friends or loved ones over the years. It's easy to fall into the cliché trap. In the weeks and months to come, be prepared for clichés to be thrown your way. Make an effort to be gracious to those who may say the wrong thing in an attempt to be a comfort or help to you. They may “drive you crazy” but usually have “their hearts in the right place”: they just didn't choose their words well. Even poor attempts to bring comfort can be appreciated and will help you cherish those who are able to share meaningful words of love and support or who are just there to provide a listening ear. They are “worth their weight in gold”!

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WHEN: Six consecutive Wednesdays beginning April 17th and concluding May 22nd from 6:00-7:30 pm.

WHERE: Northern Light A.R. Gould Hospital (East Annex, Door 2 – Conference Room)

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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Grief Notes: Learning to Forgive

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Grief Notes

Learning to Forgive

by Ronald Cunningham, Bereavement Coordinator

Death is so finite and it often comes without warning. We do not always have the opportunity to say goodbye or to deal with unresolved conflict or unfinished business. Feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, and guilt can perpetuate our suffering, making it quite difficult to move on with our lives. We cannot find true peace as long as we are holding onto grudges and are unable to forgive.

Feeling anger towards a deceased person is common, and there are many reasons why that anger may feel justified. Perhaps you are angry that your loved one didn't take care of themselves like you think they should have, or maybe you feel like they didn't fight hard enough. Maybe they put themselves in harm's way or perhaps they've said or done hurtful things in the past. Avoiding dealing with unresolved issues can lead to pain and heartbreak. An inability or unwillingness to forgive can lead to bitterness, anger, and resentment.

What exactly is forgiveness? We've all heard the familiar and overly simple mantra "forgive and forget." Forgiveness is not excusing the wrong that has been done to you. It is not just saying the words, "I forgive you." Is it simply being willing to forfeit your right to resent or judge another person who unfairly hurt you? Is it practicing compassion and love toward that person despite their behavior?

Forgiveness is a choice. It is being able to recognize that you have the right to be upset, but instead of focusing on the negative feelings, you make the purposeful decision to let them go, whether the person deserves it or not. Forgiveness is not only an important part of the healing process, it can also provide benefits for your mental and physical health. Studies show that forgiveness and letting go of negativity in general can reduce anxiety and stress levels, lower blood pressure, provide a better immune system, reduce symptoms of depression, improve sleep and cholesterol levels, and even reduce pain.

What can we do when we have lost a loved one and are forced to realize that we will never be able to get a response from them? Try writing a letter to your loved one, telling them what you wish you could say to them. Speak out loud or have an imaginary conversation, or find a family member, friend, or your Northern Light bereavement coordinator to talk to. Another thing you can do is to look inward and seek self-forgiveness. Recognize that you are only human. We all make mistakes and sometimes it is ourselves we need to forgive. Beating ourselves up about it won't change the past, but it can significantly impact our future.

Loss is often sudden and startling, but time really does heal wounds. No one said forgiveness is easy, but with time, you can learn to forgive others and yourself. Do not let resentment and anger define you. Instead, choose to let forgiveness refine you.

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AHOC Celebrates 6 Years!

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The Aroostook Hospice Foundation, owner of the Aroostook House of Comfort, proudly celebrates its 6th anniversary on May 9th. Since opening its doors in 2018, the Aroostook House of Comfort has provided inpatient hospice care to over 900 individuals in 67 Maine communities while also supporting their families and caregiver teams. This milestone is shared with valued hospice partner Northern Light Home Care & Hospice. It represents not only years of dedicated service but also a testament to the unwavering support from the community.

Founded in 2009, the Aroostook Hospice Foundation spent years fundraising and collaborating with community members and volunteers to make the Aroostook House of Comfort a reality. Today, the six-bed, inpatient hospice facility operates in partnership with Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, the only Medicare-certified hospice provider in Aroostook County. The mission of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation is to provide quality, compassionate, end-of-life care, regardless of one's financial capacity. Donations are crucial for covering operational and facility expenses, including their Charity Care program, which offers financial assistance to patients in need. The Aroostook Hospice Foundation sustains its work through a range of fundraising activities, such as the Annual Golf Classic, Walk for Hospice, and Remembrance Way. In addition to these events, they actively pursue grant funding opportunities and maintain strong relationships with donors. Their fundraising and community outreach efforts are key to sustaining the Aroostook House of Comfort and raising awareness about the importance of hospice care.

A recent testimonial from Sam Clockedile of Houlton, whose mother received care at the Aroostook House of Comfort, encapsulates the impact of this mission: "I can't believe Aroostook County went without a hospice facility for so many years. We appreciate the love and compassion shown. My mother wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

The Aroostook Hospice Foundation is dedicated to expanding its reach and strengthening its commitment to compassionate care for this community. This mission is made possible through the generous support of people like you, and they are truly grateful. To learn how you can join them in this mission click [here](#) or contact Executive Director, Abbey Clair at (207) 299- 2053. Together, we can continue to make an impact.

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Circle of Care: Dakota Koch, RN

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Dakota Koch, RN

Why did you choose hospice care as a career path?

I've spent the majority of my career working in critical care. I loved the intensity and complexity of intensive care units, but as I worked with patients and witnessed their suffering, I wanted them to experience relief, quality, and comfort in whatever amount of time they had. The hospice philosophy provides that.

I'm a firm believer in experiencing and living life to its fullest. I believe that this is a human right, even at the end of life. Hospice allows people a chance to live and experience more quality with whatever quantity they have left. It is so rewarding to be a part of and witness families, friends, and partners receiving holistic care and support in incredibly unfair and challenging times.

How long have you worked at the Aroostook House of Comfort?

I've worked at the Aroostook House of Comfort since the fall of 2023. I enjoyed my time working at the House so much that I also started doing home hospice this year as well. Experiencing my patients from home receiving end-of-life care at the Aroostook House of Comfort is so special and a blessing for me.

How does your work help the patients, families, and your community?

I said before that I believe in LIFE. I believe that every person deserves their last days to be the way life should be: fulfilling, beautiful, and filled with support. One of my favorite parts of this job is educating on the benefits of hospice and the way that it improves the quality and experience of walking with someone through their last days. Aroostook County is home to some of my favorite people in the world; hard-working, loyal, strong people. I want the people within my home community to know that they have support and options when faced with very tough disease processes.

What is special about the Aroostook House of Comfort?

Aroostook House of Comfort is a sanctuary for our patients and their families. When people come to the House, they experience peace and rest knowing their loved ones are cared for AND so are they. Caregiver stress is a serious issue for a lot of people walking the hospice journey. The House offers a breath in the middle of a marathon for many. The attributes of the House are fostered among the many volunteers, staff, and visitors. I love reading through the family journals that are placed throughout the House. They catalog years of experiences that loved ones have had here: support, listening, caring, comfort, peace, choice—that's special.

What is most rewarding about your job?

It's hard to write down what the most rewarding part is. Life is about holding tension. Hospice is walking the tightrope of tension with others. This is an honor for me. It is an honor to help others bear their struggle and to sit with them through that. It is an honor to experience and participate in their relief. Not everyone prefers to work or even talk about death and dying, but being able to hold the hands of others as they experience it, being able to care for them, listen to them, and hold space for them will House of Comfort is so special and a blessing for me.

How does your work help the patients, families, and your community?

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Grief Notes: Grief or Relief: Is it okay to feel both?

 05/17/2024

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Grief Notes

May 2024

Grief or Relief: Is it okay to feel both?

by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

Several years ago, I officiated at a Celebration of Life Service for a fairly young man whom I had known for a relatively short while. The gentleman had battled Alzheimer's disease for many years and his spouse had been his primary caregiver. A few days after the service I stopped by to see how she was doing since most of the family from away were now gone. She shared with me the sense of guilt she was feeling due to family members and friends who had expressed to her their amazement at how well she seemed to be doing. She went on to explain that due to the progression of her husband's disease, it seemed that she had lost him many years ago and so had already gone through the grieving process. With his passing her grief had turned to relief. This made her feel guilty, but she was reluctant to share this with others for fear they would not understand.

After having experienced the long slow death of a loved one or friend, a surprising sense of relief can sometimes wash over us and is often followed by a sense of guilt. Such emotions are natural, however, and we should not feel shame or guilt to admit that although we are grieving, we are also relieved. Relief is quite normal when the caregiving for a loved one has concluded. Few people would miss the anxiety of restless and sleepless nights, hurried trips for necessary errands, or worrying about the chance of their loved one falling or suffering any possible harm. Life as a caregiver is very focused and intense. Therefore, when this role is completed, the tension subsides. We then feel relief and begin to consider resuming many of the activities that had been set aside to fulfill the role of caregiver.

Experiencing relief does not mean regretting the time spent caring for a loved one. You can rejoice at being able to accomplish such an incredible goal. Take pride in fulfilling that role and the commitment it took to complete such a mission of love. It may have been tougher, longer, and more grueling than you anticipated, but you did it and that is to be admired.

Experiencing relief is certainly not forgetting a loved one. Be thankful for the time spent together as you provided care and cherish the memories made. But remember that their death does not define them, their life does. As you begin to get back to doing the things that you enjoy, honor their memory and consider what would please them. Celebrate their life as you live out your own.

While moving through the grieving process, we will experience a mixture of emotions, none necessarily right or wrong. Remember that it is okay to feel relief, you've earned it. And it can be an important step in your personal journey of knowing healing and wholeness again.

Six Week Grief Support Group – Aroostook County

Have you lost a loved one? When someone we love dies, it can feel overwhelming. You may feel alone and that no one understands what you are going through. The truth is that many are walking a similar path. Consider coming to a place where you can talk, grieve, and move forward with people who are also grieving.

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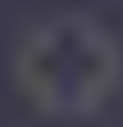
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Billing Questions: 1-800-757-3326
Executive Director: (207) 540-1080

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Meet Our Board: Nancy Putnam, FNP

05/24/2024

Aroostook House of Comfort

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"In support of the AHOC mission, the inpatient care at AHOC is exclusive and not available through any other inpatient facility. The AHOC is there for an exclusive and necessary service to those in hospice care when the patient's and/or family's needs are greater than what is available at home. This claim is supported by family testimonials, as they are witness to their loved one's end-of-life care."

Nancy Putnam, FNP

Hospice has been an important part of end-of-life care for patients in Nancy Putnam's work as a Family Nurse Practitioner at Houlton Family Practice since 1996. In-home hospice nursing care allows many patients to stay at home with their families through their last days. Once the Aroostook House of Comfort became available, she advocated for its role for patients, families, and her colleagues. Nancy experienced the personal value of the hospice team in 2016 when her husband was dying of cancer.

Nancy's dedication to the AHOC and in-home hospice care is unwavering. Joining the Aroostook Hospice Foundation Board of Directors in 2021, she set forth two ambitious goals: to elevate the role of the specialty home in the eyes of patients and the Houlton community, and to contribute her volunteer service to this invaluable community resource. Retirement from her nursing practice in April 2024 did not diminish Nancy's commitment to in-home hospice care and the AHOC. She continues to be a beacon of service, volunteering with the Houlton Community Garden project and advocating for clean water in Maine lakes. Her dedication to community service is truly commendable.

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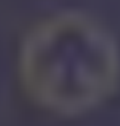
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Circle of Care: Dr. Robert Shaw

 06/04/2024

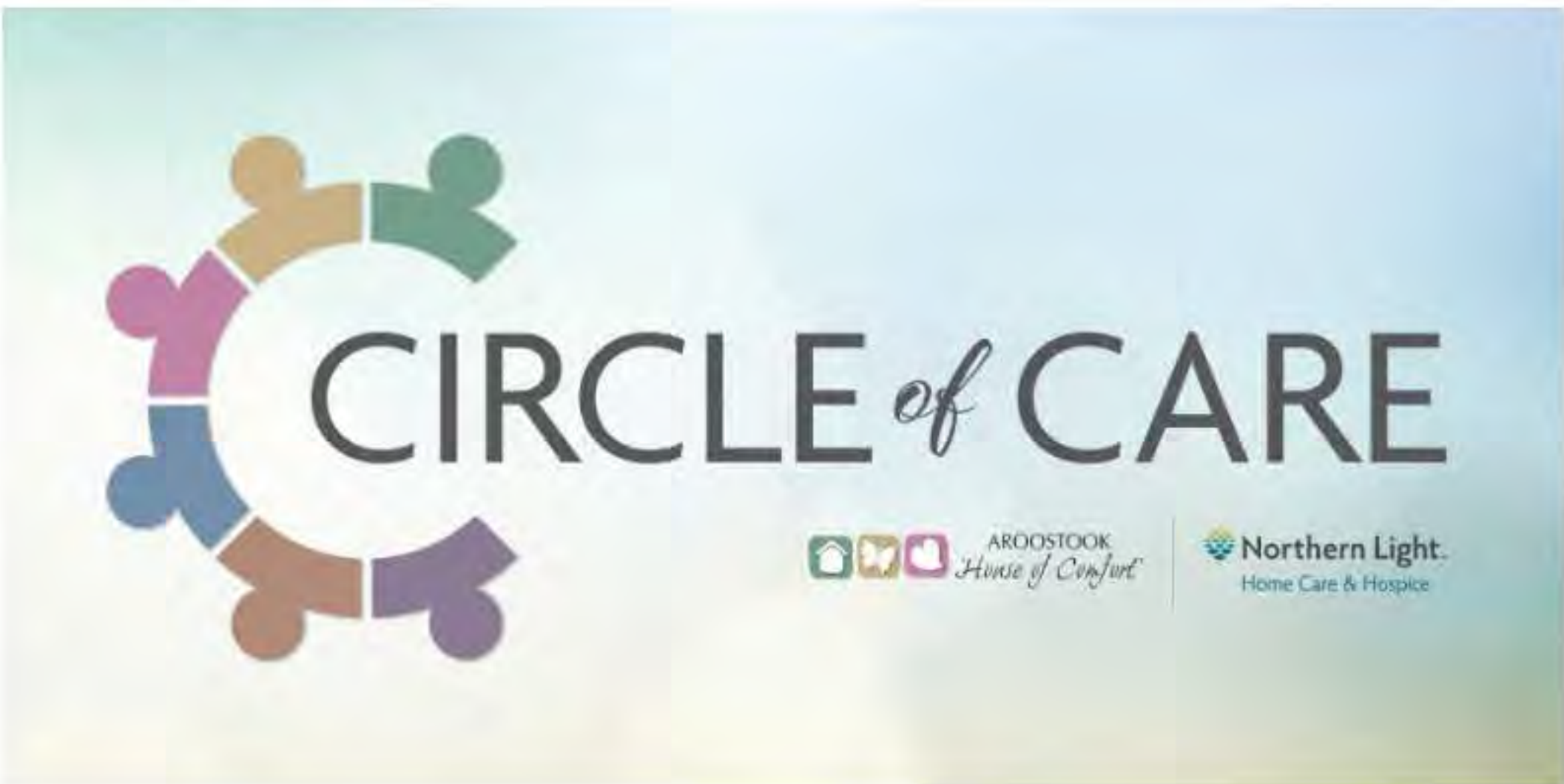
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Dr. Robert Shaw

"Through my 40 years of medical practice, I have found it an honor and a privilege for patients to entrust me with the most important, sensitive aspects of their lives. Following a 28-year career at the Veterans' Administration providing primary care to those who served our country in peacetime and conflict, I feel blessed now to be able to work alongside the incredible team at hospice. It is with pride and gratitude that I can continue to offer service, support, and compassionate care to patients at the Aroostook House of Comfort."

Dr. Robert (Bob) Shaw grew up in Veazie, Maine. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Maine at Orono and, subsequently his medical degree from the University of Vermont. A 3-year family practice residency in Lancaster, Pennsylvania followed. In 1985 he returned to Maine to begin the private practice of family medicine in Mars Hill, he then worked for 28 years at the Caribou Outpatient VA Clinic as the Lead Physician. He has enjoyed assisting at the Aroostook House of Comfort since its opening in 2018. Dr. Shaw resides in Mapleton with his wife Paula. He has 4 grown children and 5 lovely, energetic grandchildren who live nearby. In his free time, Bob enjoys golf and relaxing at his camp at East Grant Lake.

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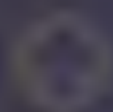
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AHOC Golf Classic Raises Over \$80,000

06/20/2024

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Lynne and Bob Graves
(Platinum Sponsor for Logan P. Graves Foundation)

The Aroostook Hospice Foundation proudly hosted its 11th Annual Golf Classic on Saturday, June 15th, at the Presque Isle Country Club, raising over \$80,000 for the Aroostook House of Comfort. This remarkable achievement was made possible through the generous contributions of 162 sponsors, 46 teams, 60 in-kind donors, and 32 dedicated volunteers.

The Aroostook Hospice Foundation extends sincere gratitude to the Logan P. Graves Foundation, the 2024 Golf Classic Platinum Sponsor, for their \$10,000 contribution, as well as to everyone who played a role in this year's event. Since its opening in 2018, the Aroostook House of Comfort has provided compassionate, inpatient hospice care to over 1,000 patients in partnership with Northern Light Home Care & Hospice. Funds raised through events like the Golf Classic are vital for supporting operational costs and Charity Care funding.

The unwavering generosity of community members and partners allows them to maintain a 9,800-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility where individuals and families receive compassionate care, comfort, and support during their hospice journey. The Aroostook Hospice Foundation, owner of the Aroostook House of Comfort, sincerely thanks all sponsors, donors, participants, and volunteers for making this event a tremendous success. They eagerly look forward to the 12th Annual Golf Classic next year!



Team Logan P. Graves Foundation
Bob Graves, Rob Graves, Mike Gallagher, Brian Gallagher



Team Northern Light Home Care & Hospice
Jimmy Batchelder, Brad Clements, Daryl Boucher, Gaige Flewelling



Team DASCO
Wes Lavigne, Graham Berry, Nick Lavigne, Nate Straetz



Team Logan P. Graves Foundation
Bob Graves, Rob Graves, Mike Gallagher, Brian Gallagher



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Jimmy Batchelder, Brad Clements, Daryl Boucher, Gaige Flewelling



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2nd Annual Walk for Hospice

 07/10/2024

 Aroostook House of Comfort

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Jason Woollard, Owner and CFO and Abbey Clair, Executive Director, Aroostook Hospice Foundation

The Aroostook Hospice Foundation, owner of the Aroostook House of Comfort, is pleased to announce the 2nd Annual Walk for Hospice will take place on Saturday, September 14th, at the Nordic Heritage Center in Presque Isle! All proceeds will benefit the Aroostook House of Comfort!

This year's event is presented by Event Sponsor, McCrum Family Holdings, LLC. Jason Woollard, owner and CFO presented Abbey Clair, Executive Director for the Aroostook Hospice Foundation with a \$5,000 check for this unique sponsorship. McCrum's has been a steadfast supporter of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation. Last year, they not only supported the 1st Annual Walk for Hospice as a Trail Sponsor, but they also took home the team fundraising award! Jay McCrum, owner and CEO shared, "McCrum's mission is to be good citizens in our communities, our state, and country. Treating our community in a responsible manner. By supporting our community we allow a family to give their loved one the opportunity to pass with dignity and respect." The Aroostook Hospice Foundation is honored to have such a respected business and family coming alongside them in this work.

The 2nd Annual Walk for Hospice will also take place in memory of Dr. David Jones, esteemed Medical Director, dedicated Aroostook Hospice Foundation Board member, and cherished friend. Three other sponsorship opportunities are available including Trail Sponsor (\$500), Community Sponsor (\$250), and Friend Sponsor (\$100).

The mission of this special event is to raise funds, increase community hospice awareness, and celebrate the lives of those impacted by hospice. This is not a competitive event; and all ages and abilities are welcome. Registration is open until the day of the event, but to guarantee an event t-shirt and be eligible for prizes, one should register by August 19th.

All participants are encouraged to take advantage of a unique Facebook fundraising toolkit available [here](#). Participants may also download offline paper pledge forms at this site. A personalized trophy will be awarded to the top individual fundraiser and top team fundraiser. Raffle tickets will be available for purchase with a chance to win a 16" Ooni Koda, gas powered pizza oven and accessory bundle, sponsored by S.W. Collins and valued at \$780!

To learn more about the event, submit a sponsorship, or sign up to walk click below.

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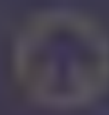
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Grief Notes: When Does Grief End?

07/11/2024

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Northern Light
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Grief Notes

When Does Grief End?

by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

November 26, 2000, will be a date forever etched in my mind as it was the day my dad died from colon cancer. That day seems like yesterday at times, but then some days, it's like a distant memory. I ask myself – is this normal? Am I normal? Grief has had a significant impact on my life since that day nearly 24 years ago and caused positive personal changes to take place as I have worked through the emotions attached to grief.

Many times, over the past 24 years when I have done something significant or experienced something really special, I have thought or even said out loud, "Oh, how I wish Dad could be here for this". While at some of my children's or grandchildren's events or accomplishments I have often wondered, "How proud Dad would have been!" or "What would Dad have thought or said?" I become lost in thought, reminiscing about what could have been and missing my dad all over again.

So how long does grief last? I have learned a lot in my years working with hospice patients and their families, but one thing that I'm constantly reminded of is that there is no time limit on grief. It will never go away completely because of the love that we have for that person who has died. We love deeply so we grieve deeply. There are different types of grief that we may experience in the journey of healing:

Anticipatory Grief can start soon after a terminal diagnosis or a significant medical event that brings significant change to our loved one. This is a grief that takes place before an impending death as you grieve the loss of potential experiences, opportunities, activities or imagined events you will not be able to enjoy together.

Complicated Grief happens when situations and events occur that add to or extend our grief. This could be additional losses you experience, life events that can shake our lives (personal health issues, financial changes, lack of emotional support...) or just due to some ongoing changes in life.

Integrated Grief is the process of acknowledging and accepting loss into your life. I have heard it also described as Abiding Grief. It's the place we get to when we come to the point of accepting the reality of our loss and begin to return to activities and relationships that were important and fulfilling. I call these support structures that have and will hold us up and keep us from falling. This doesn't mean that you love or miss your loved one less or that their memory has faded. It just means that you are healing and coping better with your loss.

We will have difficult days when fresh waves of grief will crash over us, especially around holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. There may also be other days that are special reminders of that loved one we miss. For me it's the start of Spring Training. For years Dad and I would talk to compare notes on how we thought the Red Sox were going to do "this year". I still get a lump in my throat and my eyes fill up each spring as I remember those conversations and I hope this never stops!

Six Week Grief Support Group – Aroostook County

Have you lost a loved one? When someone we love dies, it can feel overwhelming. You may feel alone and that no one understands what you are going through. The truth is that many are walking a similar path. Consider coming to a place where you can talk, grieve, and move forward with people who are also grieving.

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- Ram Dass

Meet Our Board -Sue McCrum

07/26/2024

Aroostook House of Comfort

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Sue McCrum

"I love being back in the County. I enjoy spending time with family here on the farm and at our family camp. Supporting our grandchildren's sporting events and activities is so much fun! I like downhill and cross country skiing and I'm still working on my golf game! I am thankful for the privilege of working with other Board members who support this wonderful project in Aroostook County. What a great vision the founders of the House of Comfort had to provide hospice clients and their families such a unique space to care for their loved ones."

Sue resides in Mars Hill with her spouse of 52 years, Jay McCrum. Together, they have raised three children and are the proud grandparents of nine grandchildren. Since 1971, Sue has supported her family-owned farm businesses in Aroostook County and Belfast.

Sue McCrum is a proud graduate of Presque Isle High School and the Augusta General Hospital School of Radiologic Technology. She was employed as an X-ray technician at Northern Light A.R. Gould Hospital in Presque Isle from 1971 to 1978. In the early 1990s, Sue trained as a hospice volunteer under Janet Durgin. She has since volunteered for hospice care in central Aroostook County and, after moving to Belfast in 2004, continued her volunteer efforts there.

She is a founding member of Maine Agri-Women, where she has twice served as the organization's state president, advocating for agriculture at the local, state, and national levels. Additionally, she is an active member of American Agri-Women (AAW), has served on the AAW Foundation Board, and is a past national president of AAW. Sue's leadership extends into the financial and environmental sectors. She has served on the Board of Directors for First Citizen's Bank in Presque Isle and as a director of the Forest Society of Maine.

Sue is also a dedicated member of the United Baptist Church of Mars Hill, where she actively participates in church activities and community outreach programs. Her multifaceted contributions reflect her unwavering commitment to her family, community, and the causes she holds dear.

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Grief Notes: Dealing with Stuff

 08/02/2024

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Grief Notes

Dealing with Stuff

by Tim Soucy, Spiritual Counselor/Bereavement Coordinator

After a loved one dies, we face natural, unavoidable, and difficult transitions. One transition we all face is the change in our relationship with our deceased loved one. The change is a shift from a relationship of presence to one of memory. I know that the previous statement may seem obvious, however, it took time for me to fully embrace the reality that my relationship with my loved ones had changed. At the beginning of my grieving, keeping my loved one's stuff somehow made me feel like my relationship had not changed even though I knew intellectually it had.

When it comes to caring for our loved one's stuff there is no "one size fits all" approach. Our unique circumstances will often dictate how much time we can take in caring for their things. For some, there will be the need to clean out an apartment, a room at a facility, or to prepare a home for sale as quickly as possible. Other constraints may be geographic, family, employment, and other responsibilities that are a part of life. For some, circumstances and present life situations will allow more time to go through everything.

Family members will often have differing opinions on how much time should be taken going through stuff, what to do with it, and who should get certain items. Much of the time these differing opinions are impacted by the ways people grieve and the depth of their own grief. It is difficult enough to go through their loved one's stuff and when there are different opinions this will only increase that difficulty.

Here are some suggestions on how to cope with our loved one's possessions:

- >

Be kind to yourself and understand that life circumstances will impact the way you manage your loved one's stuff.
- >

Separate items by what you want to keep, items to give to family or friends, and items you want to donate to a charity or good cause.
- >

Take a photo and let it go.
- >

Scan photos and place scanned photos in a digital picture frame instead of stored or collecting dust somewhere.
- >

Allow yourself a limited collection of sentimental objects that create space for you to remember your loved ones.

Holding on to things is one way we try to hold on to the person who has died and that can be a strong felt need. Letting go of items can be hard and it may feel like we are throwing a bit of that person away or are feeling ok with letting them go. We can struggle with getting rid of items.

While writing this article, I have become profoundly aware of the many photos, trinkets, books, and items I have in my office from deceased loved ones. They continue to trigger memories of my loved ones. Holding some possessions close can aid in our holding on to loved ones and so can letting some things go. There is no "one size fits all" approach in going through our loved one's stuff. We each find our own way.

Six Week Grief Support Group – Presque Isle and Houlton

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This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants per location, so please register.

Presque Isle

Northern Light A.R. Gould Hospital (East Annex, Door 2 – Conference Room), 140 Academy Street, Presque Isle
Six consecutive Wednesdays beginning September 11th and concluding October 16th from 6:00-7:30 pm.

Houlton

Houlton Regional Hospital (Center from Community Health Education - 3rd floor), 20 Hartford Street, Houlton
Six consecutive Tuesdays beginning September 17th and concluding October 22nd from 6:00-7:30 pm.

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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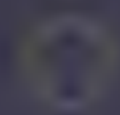
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- Ram Dass

Northern Light Grief Support Group—Presque Isle

08/06/2024

Aroostook House of Comfort

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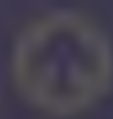
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This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants per location, so please register.

WHEN: Six consecutive Tuesdays beginning September 17th and concluding October 22nd from 6:00-7:30 pm.

WHERE: Houlton Regional Hospital (Center from Community Health Education - 3rd floor), 20 Hartford Street, Houlton

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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AHF Launches Matching Grant Campaign

08/08/2024

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The Aroostook Hospice Foundation is excited to announce a \$75,000 Matching Grant Campaign, made possible by the heartfelt generosity of an anonymous donor. This campaign, running from June 1st to December 31st, 2024, aims to secure unrestricted funds essential for proving inpatient hospice care in Aroostook County. Every donation received through the Matching Grant Campaign will be matched up to \$75,000.

The campaign is starting strong, with a generous \$5,000 pledge from Pineland Farms. The Aroostook Hospice Foundation had the honor of welcoming Pineland Farms' representatives for a tour of the Aroostook House of Comfort and a formal check presentation. This opportunity allowed for further understanding of the Aroostook House of Comfort's service to the community, ongoing fundraising efforts, and day-to-day operations.

Established in 2009, the Aroostook Hospice Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was dedicated to building and operating an inpatient hospice facility in Aroostook County. Following years of extensive fundraising and community efforts, the Aroostook House of Comfort opened its doors in 2018 and has since provided compassionate end-of-life care to over 1,000 individuals, while also addressing the unique needs of their families and caregivers.

"Our mission thrives thanks to the unwavering dedication and support of our community. We are profoundly grateful for Pineland's generosity and for the remarkable opportunity extended to us by our anonymous donor," said Abbey Clair, Executive Director of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation.

The Aroostook Hospice Foundation invites individuals, businesses, and organizations to contribute to the Matching Grant Campaign. Those interested can contact Abbey Clair, Executive Director, at 207-299-2053 or abbey@aroostookhouseofcomfort.org.

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Northern Light Grief Support Group—Caribou

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This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants per location, so please register.

WHEN: Six consecutive Thursdays beginning October 17th and concluding November 21st from 6:00-7:30 pm.

WHERE: Cary Medical Center in the Chan Center, County Room located at 163 Van Buren Road, Caribou.

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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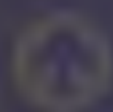
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AHOC Hospice Volunteer Training

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Aroostook House of Comfort Hospice Volunteer Training—Fall 2024 Tuesdays, October 1 through Novemeber 19 from 4 - 6:30 pm

Hold a hand, listen to stories of a life well lived, provide respite for family caregivers supporting a loved one through the end-of-life. The need is great for people to join our volunteer team.

Are you a kind, caring, and enjoy making connections? Are you looking to make a meaningful difference in your community? Do you have a sincere desire to help others? This just might be the perfect fit!

There are many roles for volunteers through Northern Light HomeCare & Hospice:

- Become a family and patient volunteer, making in-home visits.
- Be a soothing presence greeting visitors at the Aroostook House of Comfort and providing support to in-house patients.
- Make bereavement calls to families of loved one whom have passed.
- Donate your time through office work.
- Sit vigil with a patient in their final hours providing them safety and reassurance.

Through our comprehensive training and support we'll collaborate to make your volunteer experience both positive and rewardingwhile also providing compassionate care to our patients and their families.

Enrollment for Fall 2024 training is now open. The program is offered at no cost and will be delivered in a hybrid format. Interested candidates are encouraged to review the contact information and complete the application provided below. Please submit your application by **September 12, 2024**.



Robin Haynes
Volunteer Coordinator | Northern Light Home Care & Hospice

Northern Light Health
18 Green Hill Drive, Presque Isle, ME 04769

Office: 800.757.3326 | Direct: 207.764.9404
Email: rhaynes@northernlight.org

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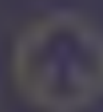
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Grief Notes: Grief and Special Days

 09/03/2024

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Grief and Special Days by Linda Hopkins, Bereavement Coordinator

When we are grieving in the early weeks after our loss, we experience that grief in so many ways with many feelings, tasks to accomplish, and people to take care of including ourselves. It is often overwhelming for a while but gradually we start to go on. Life adjusts as it must. For some of us that adjustment comes sooner, perhaps much sooner than for others. For most of us as time goes by the early intense grief becomes something less intense. As with all grief experiences this is a very individual process.

As the days go by, at some point, we are likely to have times when the sharp pain of grief returns and hurts a lot again. This can be very hard and discouraging. It may happen for reasons we cannot figure out or it may happen predictably on special days. It can help to know how normal this is and that it is not a sign of something being wrong with our grieving process.

Holidays are predictable times for grief to intrude and this rarely takes us by surprise. However, for all of us there will be other special days that will be hard for us but not recognized by the world at large as days that will challenge us. These include private holidays of the heart like anniversaries and birthdays. These also include events like weddings, graduations, and reunions where we feel the absence of the person who cannot be there. These can be difficult as the world goes on around us not aware that we are having a hard time missing someone we dearly want to be present.

We can anticipate these difficult times and find ways to help ourselves get through the day. Those around you may be unaware of your pain unless they are very close to you and those close to you may not experience the challenging days in the same way. You may have people you can share your concern with and invite them to do something with you to help get through the day. Families and friends may get together for a birthday to remember together, share a meal or visit a special place. For an event like a wedding or graduation you can let people know that the day will be hard for you and let them know you may need to “take a break” and step away from the celebration for a while. Or you may ask someone to stay next to you for support.

You may be a person who wants a private way to take care of yourself on these days. Depending on the occasion, you may decide not to attend. You may go by yourself to a special place and remember your loved one by yourself. You may visit the grave. You may light a candle next to their picture and speak or read special words. You may take time to talk to your loved one even though it is a one-sided conversation. You may even decide, if it feels right to you, to take the day off and go somewhere with no reminders except those inside yourself. There are many ways we work to take care of ourselves when we need to, and I hope some of these suggestions are helpful to you. We shared a quote from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the Grief Notes we sent last December where he wrote of “the secret anniversaries of the heart.” We wish you comfort in coping with your own personal special days.

Six Week Grief Support Group – Aroostook County

Have you lost a loved one? When someone we love dies, it can feel overwhelming. You may feel alone and that no one understands what you are going through. The truth is that many are walking a similar path. Consider coming to a place where you can talk, grieve, and move forward with people who are also grieving.

This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants per location, so please register.

Presque Isle

Northern Light A.R. Gould Hospital (East Annex, Door 2 – Conference Room), 140 Academy Street, Presque Isle. Six consecutive Wednesdays beginning September 11th and concluding October 16th from 6:00-7:30 pm.

Houlton

Houlton Regional Hospital (Center from Community Health Education - 3rd floor), 20 Hartford Street, Houlton. Six consecutive Tuesdays beginning September 17th and concluding October 22nd from 6:00-7:30 pm.

Caribou

Cary Medical Center (Chan Center, County Room), 163 Van Buren Road, Caribou. Six consecutive Thursdays beginning October 17th and concluding November 21st from 6:00-7:30 pm.

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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18 Green Hill Drive
PO Box 867
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Aroostook House of Comfort (nurse's station): (207) 764-9406
Billing Questions: 1-800-757-3326
Executive Director: (207) 540-1080

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Healing Hearts: Dyer Family

09/25/2024

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To honor my mom and my brother, both of whom passed away at the Aroostook House of Comfort (my mom in September 2022 and my brother in May 2023), our family decided to hike to the summit of Mt. Katahdin on August 26th. My mom always loved Katahdin, often referring to it as "The Mountain" or "her Mountain." For several months prior to the hike, I prepared/trained by going to the gym and going on smaller local hikes. We also decided to use this as a fundraising opportunity to benefit the Aroostook House of Comfort and had an amazing response.

The day of our hike began drizzly but do-able. We got about 3 miles into the hike (almost to the tree line), and it began to pour, hail, and then thunder/lightning. As much as we wanted to honor their memories, we knew they wouldn't want us to be in danger, so we made the difficult decision to turn around. Every hiker we encountered along the way back down had also turned around before reaching the summit. Although we didn't reach the summit, we did come across a place on the trail that my mom had her picture taken at about 35 years ago, a picture I carried with me as we hiked. My daughter suggested I have my picture taken in the same spot.

I believe the desire to hike Katahdin came from God, and so I believe He will work it out for me to hike it—someday. That was just not the right day. He wasn't saying no, just "not yet." Even though my heart and mind were ready, my body may not have been (as much as I had believed it was), and God could see that. As I've processed what happened, I'm choosing to believe that all things happen for a reason, and there was a reason we weren't meant to summit that day. I am continuing with taking care of myself, grieving two very significant losses, and trusting God with the process. I have had endless support from friends and family throughout this journey, for which I am eternally grateful.

I miss them more than I can explain, but I know they would be proud of me and of the over \$1,100 that we raised to benefit the Aroostook House of Comfort in their memories.

- Melissa Dyer



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Dr. David Jones: A Life of Compassion and Service

10/07/2024

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On Sunday, September 15th, friends, family, and colleagues gathered at the Aroostook House of Comfort to celebrate the life and enduring legacy of Dr. David Jones, a great man who touched the hearts of many in his community and beyond. Dr. Jones, who passed unexpectedly on October 22, 2023, was a devoted family man, an esteemed Medical Director for Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, a committed Aroostook Hospice Foundation Board member, and a cherished friend.

With a medical career that spanned decades, Dr. Jones made a lasting impact across the region. His contributions to family medicine in Presque Isle, his work in emergency medicine in Fort Kent, and his dedication to hospice care statewide earned him a reputation as a knowledgeable and compassionate provider as well as an advocate. His passion for hospice care, in particular, resonated deeply with those he served, both within the home hospice setting and at the Aroostook House of Comfort.

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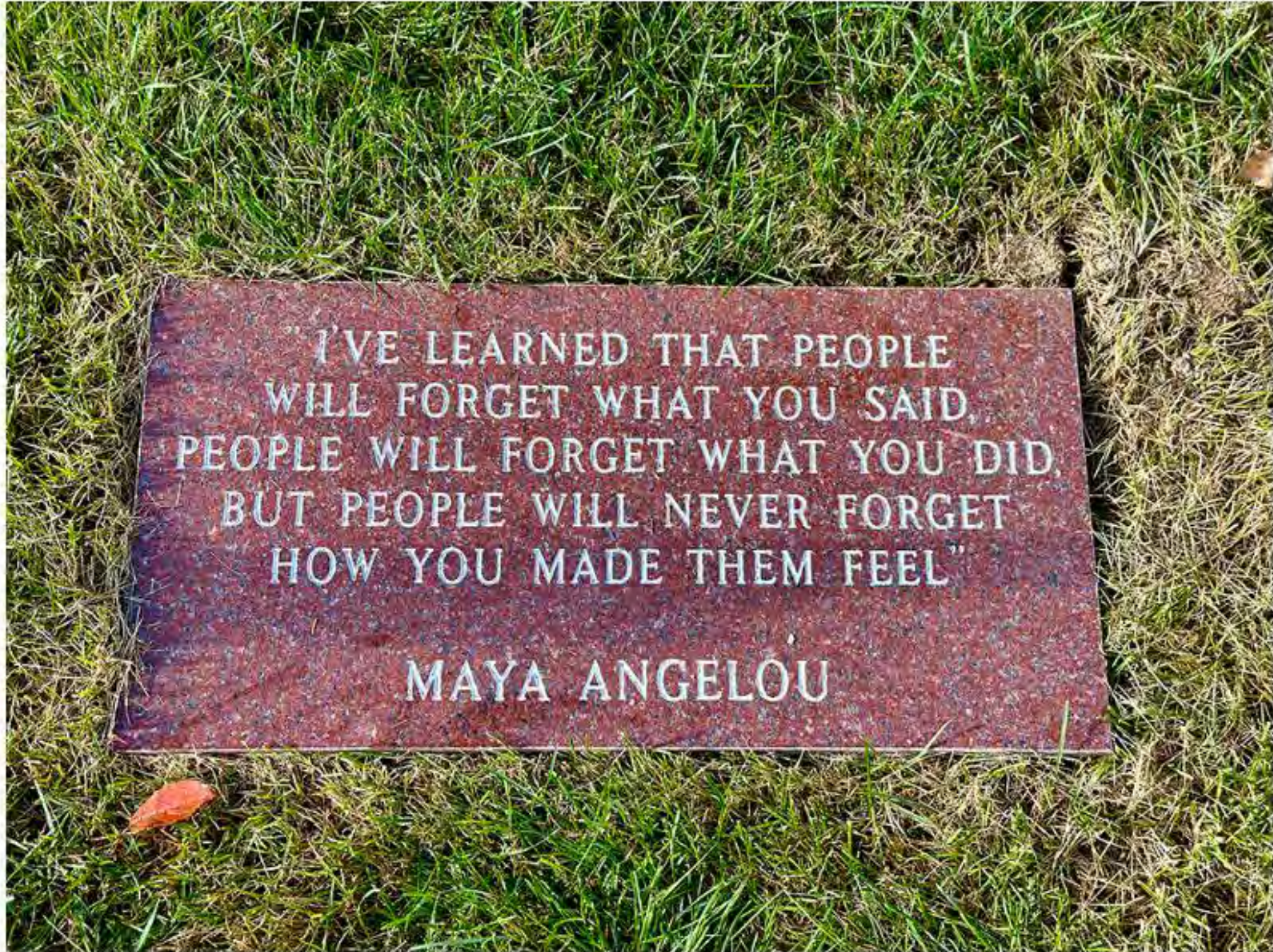
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In a heartfelt ceremony, Dr. Jones' family dedicated a bench, a steppingstone, two trees, and two blueberry bushes, all nestled within the grounds of the Aroostook House of Comfort. A beautiful memorial plaque is also displayed within the Aroostook House of Comfort. To further honor his many contributions, the Aroostook Hospice Foundation and Northern Light Home Care & Hospice gifted a Lyman Whitaker Nebula Wind Sculpture, which now stands beside the bench and greenery.



During the dedication, attendees shared personal stories and memories, reflecting on Dr. Jones' profound impact on their lives, both personally and professionally. His wife, Debbie Jones, spoke about how each item in the memorial area was carefully chosen to represent one of his personal or professional interests. The bench features an inscribed bowtie and honors both his dedication to medicine and his unique style. It is meant to offer a peaceful resting place amongst the solace of nature. In addition to colleagues and friends, his daughter Chriki, his two step-children, Carl Litsch and Sarah Litsch, and his six grandchildren were all present to honor and remember him at this special memorial dedication. His compassion, kindness, and gentle spirit were themes echoed by many who gathered to remember him.

The stepping stone, a central part of the memorial, is inscribed with one of Dr. Jones' favorite quotes, which perfectly captures his essence: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou



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18 Green Hill Drive

PO Box 867

Presque Isle, ME 04769

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Billing Questions: 1-800-757-3326

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Coping with Holiday Grief

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In spite of what most people say, everyone does not look forward to the holidays. Having lost someone through death, you may dread this holiday season. You may wish to snap your fingers, and it would be over. Holidays often magnify the feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that you feel. This one-evening seminar will address those things that often trigger our grief and provide helpful ideas and suggestions as you prepare for the holidays after a significant loss.

This seminar is open to the public and is free of charge. You are encouraged to **RSVP by Friday, November 8th.**

The presenter will be George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator for Northern Light Home Care & Hospice.

WHEN: Tuesday, November 12, 2024 | 6:00 - 7:00 pm

WHERE: Northern Light AR Gould Hospital, 140 Academy Street, 2nd Floor Conference Room (East Entrance, Door #2) Presque Isle.

For more information or to RSVP, please contact George McLaughlin by phone at (207) 498-9039 or by email at gmcloughlin@northernlight.org.

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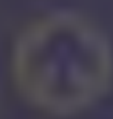
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Remembrance Way Memorial Garden & Pathway

 11/04/2024

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"When I first heard of the Aroostook House of Comfort, I was living downstate, and my sister shared her enthusiasm for the venture. I was grateful that this option, where these hospice services were so badly needed, was going to be available for my home community. My sister was fully engaged in doing what she could to see this become a reality. She took joy and peace in putting together the children's room in the AHOC, stitching together quilts to be used on the patients' beds, and sitting down with Nancy and Rick Duncan to gather the information needed to write the story of the 'Dream to Reality.' This endeavor was important to her, she was a breast cancer survivor and knew there might be a day where she needed hospice care. Once the AHOC was open, she was clear that if/when the time came, her wish was to be cared for within the comfort of the AHOC. She peacefully passed on within the comforting walls of the AHOC in 2020. This happened during the COVID-19 shutdown, and getting into the House to see her meant a different protocol. Still the volunteers and staff somehow made it feel as it should, peaceful, supportive and with complete compassion and empathy for what we were individually were going through. The care they provided to my sister allowed her to exit this earth without her greatest fear, being in pain. On the last day of my sister's life, I brought our 93-year-old mother in to see her; the staff so clearly and compassionately explained to Mom that her firstborn was in her end-of-life stages. I was amazed and so appreciative of how well they explained to Mom what to expect and helped her somehow peacefully accept what she had adamantly been in denial about.

My sister was the first of three significant women in my life to pass away peacefully within the walls of the AHOC. At 95 years old, Mom was ready to move on to the next phase of her journey. Mom also had been very clear that when her time came, she wished for it to occur at the AHOC. Mom spent one night in the hospice room at the hospital over the weekend, but with the expedient attention of the AHOC, she was transported to the House on Monday morning. We were able to get through to her that she was at the AHOC, and the peace that washed over her was physically evident. She did not have one second of discomfort, physically or emotionally, until she took her last breath two days later.

A year later, again, due to the diligence of the AHOC, we were able to move my mother-in-law from a Memory Care unit downstate into the AHOC. She was in the deep clutches of Alzheimer's, and her deepest desire had always been to get back home to The County. The moment they got her out of the transport at the AHOC, I was there to let her know that she was finally home. The sun shone on her, and a smile that melted my heart appeared on her face. Over the next week, the staff of the AHOC carefully tended to her needs, especially those of us who were with her. I strongly believe that because of their ability to make her comfortable and peaceful, we were able to share moments of connection with her, a blessing I will forever be grateful to have had.

I am a family member who gratefully contributed to memorial stones and attended the Remembrance Way celebrations. This program provided me with an honorable way to memorialize these significant, loved ladies. When I learned of Pam and Frank Hallet passing on the torch for the work they have put into this wonderful program, I was grateful to have found the place where I, too, could give back to a mission for which I am so grateful. Though it will sadden me to reach out to families that have lost a loved one, I can only hope that they, too, feel the enormity of what the House and the Staff so compassionately offer during a very challenging time. I hope that the Memorial Way can provide them with a way to memorialize their loved one in an honorable and charitable way."

- Sue Yerxa

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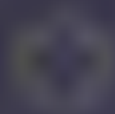
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Grief Notes: Grief Through the Holidays

 11/04/2024

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Grief Through the Holidays by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

Holidays can be a challenging time for people who are grieving. Many of the activities, traditions, and messages associated with the day, such as love, comfort, gratitude, and family togetherness, can feel in direct conflict with a grieving person's particular reality. If you are grieving, you probably know or anticipate that experiencing grief during the holidays is likely to be difficult, even painful. Though you may put on a good front for family and friends, holiday events and gatherings can often cause a deeper sense of grief and loneliness.

After a death, it is common for grieving people to feel apathy toward experiences that previously brought them joy and happiness. This is not a choice one makes; grief profoundly changes the way life looks and feels at these special times. You'd love to feel the familiar and enthusiastic holiday feelings, but instead, it is as if you are standing outside in the cold, watching through a window while everyone else enjoys the warmth of the holiday season together.

As the holidays approach, many people experience heavy thoughts and frustrating emotions of grief that may lead them to consider just skipping the holidays altogether. During these times, there are so many things that can trigger our grief to the point that we are far from feeling joyful or grateful. But it doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to choose between grief or feeling grateful. It's common through the grieving process to have conflicting emotions. Try to have a balanced outlook towards gratitude this holiday season. Look for ways to celebrate with those you love, who are also working hard to navigate this journey and the emotions that go with it.

Be kind and patient with yourself. It is important to allow yourself to experience various emotions without judgment. These emotions will come and go as you navigate through the grieving process but are often magnified during these special times. Take the time you need to process being with family and friends, and then do so when you feel ready. Openly and honestly share with others how you are feeling so you are not pressured to participate in everything.

Perhaps helping others can be a way to stay connected while also bringing new meaning to the holiday season. Try connecting with those who are also experiencing grief and loss or contribute to an organization that helps others. Don't feel guilty for briefly setting aside your feelings of grief. Grieving has periods of highs and lows.

Make these special days your own. It is okay to experience the holiday in whatever manner you feel best. You might celebrate with traditions, not celebrate at all, or create new traditions and memories. Remember, while holiday movies and greeting cards render images of blissfulness, the reality is that the holidays are difficult for many. You are not alone and can create your own holiday experience as you continue your journey toward healing and wholeness.

Grief and the Holidays – Healthy Ways to Grieve Well During the Holidays

Most people do not look forward to the holidays despite what most people say. Having lost someone through death, you may dread this holiday season. You may wish to snap your fingers, and it would be over. Holidays often magnify the feelings of loss of a loved one. This one-evening seminar will address those things that usually trigger our grief but also provide helpful ideas and suggestions as you prepare for the holidays after a significant loss. This seminar is open to the public and is free of charge. For more information, contact George McLaughlin at (207) 498-9039 or via email gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

Tuesday, November 12th, 6-7 pm

Northern Light AR Gould Hospital,
140 Academy Street
Presque Isle, 2nd Floor Conference Room (East Entrance, Door #2)

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This group is free of charge and open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one, but registration is required, and participants are encouraged to attend all group sessions. This group will be limited to 12 participants per location, so please register.

WHEN: Six consecutive Wednesdays beginning January 15th and concluding February 19th from 6:00-7:30 pm.

WHERE: Northern Light AR Gould Hospital, 140 Academy Street, Presque Isle, East Annex, Door 2-Conference Room

For more information and registration, please contact George McLaughlin, Northern Light Home Care & Hospice, at (207) 498-9039 or email at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

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Grief Notes: Grief In the New Year

12/03/2024

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Grief In the New Year by Tim Soucy, Bereavement Coordinator

During the Holiday Season there are a number of firsts that we experience after the death of a loved one such as the first family gathering, the first social event, and the first faith tradition gathering. The loved one's absence coupled with well-meaning people asking questions, sharing their grief experiences, telling us how we should think, feel, or do will trigger responses in us. Our encounters with others may be helpful or unhelpful. Most likely we will experience feelings and thoughts benefiting from conversations with others and at the same time find some parts of the conversations were not helpful at all. Many of us will wonder if our grief changes in the New Year. Will it be different? Will it be more or less intense? Is there hope?

The truth of the matter is that our grieving and other life events do not change just because we enter a new year. We do not get to start over our grief journey, but we may be very aware of approaching a new year in which our loved one will not be present except in memory. How can we prepare for this? We might start by reflecting on questions like:

- > What am I feeling?
- > What would I like to feel?
- > What would I like to change in the coming year?
- > What steps do I need to take to begin to make desired changes?
- > Am I ready to change or do I need more time where I'm presently at?

Your thoughts on the questions above can help you decide how you are going to care for your grief in the coming year. If you are looking ahead to the new year with hope that it will not be as painful as the past year, it is not a betrayal of your loved one. We grieve because we cared for and loved the deceased. While our loved ones are not physically with us, they continue to be part of us. They remain in our thoughts and in the many ways they shaped our lives. In this way they are carried with us into the coming year.

Making New Year's resolutions may have been part of welcoming in a New Year for you or resolutions may have been something you shunned. I would like to propose the following resolutions for us to consider:

- > I will place no time limits on my grief.
- > I will be kind to myself when I'm not being as productive as I would desire.
- > I will make no apologies for my tears physically shed or felt silently in my heart.
- > I will place realistic expectations on myself and others.
- > I will have old ways and new ways to invest in myself and possibly others.

January 1, 2025 will be just another day with no particular meaning other than what we choose to give it.

If you are unsure what to do or how to move forward with your grief or have questions and/or concerns, consider contacting one of Northern Light's bereavement coordinators for support. Your local bereavement coordinator's name and contact information is on the other side of this Grief Note.

Losing a loved one is one of life's most difficult challenges. The pain can feel overwhelming, leaving you feeling isolated and misunderstood. However, you are not alone. Many others are walking a similar path, and we invite you to join a space where you can share, grieve, and find support with others who understand.

Countywide Grief Support Groups

Grief support groups will be offered throughout Aroostook County, including the Houlton area and the St. John Valley. These groups will be scheduled based on need, with a minimum of five participants required to start. If you're interested, please call or email us as soon as possible.

Six-Week Grief Support Group

When: Wednesdays, January 15 – February 19
Time: 6:00 – 7:30 PM
Where: AR Gould Hospital, Presque Isle
Cost: Free (registration required)

This group is open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. Space is limited to 12 participants, so RSVP early to secure your spot. To register or learn more, contact George McLaughlin at 207-498-9039 or gmclaughlin@northernlight.org.

One-on-One Grief Support

As your Bereavement Coordinator, I am available for individual grief support by phone or in person. To schedule a time to talk or meet, email George McLaughlin at gmclaughlin@northernlight.org or call 207-498-9039. I will respond as soon as possible.

For immediate assistance, you can also reach out to our toll-free number: 1-800-757-3326.

You don't have to navigate this journey alone. We are here to support you.

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