We have entered a season of darkness. Since November 4th when the clocks went back one hour with the return to standard time, there has been less and less light in the daytime. This external darkness, coupled with gray clouds and bleak weather, adds to an internal darkness that can be part of the experience of grief. For some, having the darkness come sooner in the day can be a welcome change. It can mean going to bed even earlier and hoping for some respite while sleeping from the loneliness and yearning for their loved one who is not present. For others, sleep can be a challenge or near impossible. Those who were caregivers may still be living out the rhythms of around the clock caregiving.

We have also passed through the difficult and often painful days of the holiday season, starting with Thanksgiving and building up into a crescendo of “Happy,” “Jolly” and “Merry” through the month of December into Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year’s. The turning of the year can bring its own pain and sadness with the idea of moving into a new era, a new chapter which can be filled with uncertainty and a sense of leaving behind the life that existed before.

Yet on December 21st something happened. It was something not easily perceptible at the time. But as you read these words, you may have noticed that the days are getting slightly longer. It is a paradox I have often enjoyed pondering, that in the midst of darkness, on the darkest day of the year, a subtle shift happens and the movement toward more light begins. Similar to the Taoist symbol of the Yin and Yang, there is a small white dot in the middle of a field of black.

Joseph Campbell once wrote, “The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.” This darkest moment can happen without us even realizing it. Grief is a gradual process where changes can happen so slowly that we may not notice them. One of the things I often say in my role as a bereavement counselor is that our bodies know how to grieve. There is a natural process of healing that is going on, maybe more beneath the surface than as part of our conscious awareness. In the past I have used the example of the gaping hole that was left behind after the loss of the World Trade Center on 9/11. For many years, it seemed as if nothing was happening. But below the ground level, infrastructure work was being done. It took a long time for this work to be complete. But when it was, the new tower rose up very quickly into the sky.

Continued on next page
It is my wish for you as we enter this New Year that the light in your days will gradually grow longer and that you will know that there is a brighter light within you, quietly doing its healing work. This issue has several articles (including one in Spanish) and our calendar of groups and workshops for the first part of 2019. I hope that this issue of Seasons of Life and the services and support of our bereavement program will be helpful to you in some way.

Sincerely,
E. Willis Partington
M. Div., LCSW-R, FT
Lead Bereavement Counselor

HELPFUL RESOURCES
Recommended Reading:
Megan Devine
It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand
Boulder, CO: Sounds True, © 2017

This book provides comforting and helpful perspectives for anyone grieving a loss in the midst of a larger society that often does not know how to respond or relate. Devine writes from her own experience of losing her partner suddenly and the unexpected emotional depth and intensity of her grief. She traces her journey toward greater understanding and finding a community of supportive individuals who have helped to heal her suffering rather than augment it.

To learn more about VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care, go to:
http://www.vnsny.org/how-we-can-help/hospice-palliative-care/our-services/grief-support/

Dear Friend-in-Grief,

It's difficult to know how to begin this letter. Over a year has passed since my husband, Joe, died, and like many who lose a loved one, I was numb at first. I cried a lot. I cried and cried. Everywhere I looked—around the apartment, in the neighborhood, I was reminded of him.

At the time, even though I knew Joe was going to die, I was unprepared for the loss. Nothing, it seems, can prepare you for such a death. Friends and family assured me that one day I would feel better. Time heals, they said. I knew they meant well, but I was sure they could not possibly be right. I was sure that I would never feel better.

At the beginning, I struggled to get back to daily life. Because I had been eating in the hospital cafeteria for those last weeks, there was little food in the apartment and I had to go shopping. In the grocery store produce department, I saw one of Joe's favorite fruits: soft, sweet Comice pears. For a fraction of a second, I said to myself, “I'll buy some pears for Joe.” And then I remembered.

Some say the first year is the worst because there are so many “firsts.” Holidays and birthdays and anniversaries, whether celebrated in the past or not, seemed very different because Joe was no longer here. (Fortunately for me, Joe’s family made sure that I did not have to face a day like Thanksgiving alone.)

The experts say that grieving is “work” and I agree. And I have worked at it, both in bereavement groups and with one-on-one grief counseling. Much to my amazement, I can now say that those well-meaning folks were right. Time does heal.

Oh, from time to time I still cry. On TV a few nights ago, some familiar music came on, and I could hear Joe singing along with it. I had to turn off the TV—I just couldn’t bear it. But that happens less often now.

It's taken time and effort, and at times I feel as if I have come back from being in exile, but I am making a new life for myself. Four days a week I go to a Y for a workout and a swim. I enjoy the monthly book discussion group at my local library. I have renewed the political activities that I had to give up in the past. I see friends and family as often as possible. My life will never be what it was while Joe was alive, but I no longer feel the way I did all those months ago right after he died. Despite my expectations, I do feel better. And I hope the same for you. Give yourself time—as much as you need. You will be able to do it.

My best wishes to you,
M.
Our VNSNY Veterans Program has now been fully underway since September 2015 caring for over 1,600 veterans and assisting them and their loved ones who have given so much to our country.

Led by Joseph Vitti, a former Military Intelligence Commissioned Officer in the US Army, Joseph is providing Veteran-centric education for staff and developing relationships with Veterans organizations. The VNSNY Veterans Program also has a Veterans Liaison, Sung Yoon, who served as a Combat Medic. Both Sung and Joe are US Army veterans of the Global War on Terror. The Program aims to help Veterans to access benefits through the VA healthcare system such as: additional hospice home health aide hours, service connected illnesses/injuries, death and survivor benefits, funeral benefits, and many other health service benefits. The Program also helps Veterans and their families expedite the recovery of misplaced military service records (discharge papers) which are critical for any Veteran benefit! Moreover, the program also provides bedside recognition by presenting certificates, blankets, pins, and sometimes even awarded service medals.

As many of you know, Joseph and Sung serve as an “Army of One” developing and operating our veterans program. Sung’s responsibilities are currently focused on the Bronx. The Program will also be hiring another Veterans Liaison dedicated to Manhattan and various other teams with the same objectives Sung has for the Bronx. We look forward to the same success for that position as Sung had in the Bronx!

The Veterans Program has also developed and strengthened their relationships with VA hospitals and facilities like the Bronx VA Medical Center and the NY State St. Albans Veterans Home in St. Albans, Queens.

As part of our Veterans Program, VNSNY is a participant in the national “We Honor Veterans” program. VNSNY has obtained and maintained Level Four status. This is a collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Administration and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO). It was designed to empower hospice professionals to meet the needs of dying Veterans by using respectful inquiry, compassionate listening and grateful acknowledgement to comfort patients with a history of military service and possibly physical or psychological trauma. In December 2018, NHPCO announced a new Level Five and we will be working hard in 2019 to achieve this new status.

Movies often carry the most profound images and messages about grief and loss. They can be a mirror to our own lives and help us get in touch with feelings and thoughts that we might not be able to access in the course of our daily routine.

Those attending the film series watch the movie, enjoy popcorn and other cinema treats, and then talk about what the movie says to them about coping in bereavement. A movie can often break the ice, making it easier for everyone to explore their own grief, said one recent participant. The film series was designed to encourage those grieving to come together in a format outside of a traditional bereavement support group. Providing a variety of grief-related themes allows the participants to explore situations of loss that may parallel or differ greatly from their own. Limiting the workshop to ten people ensures that each person will have adequate opportunity to discuss the movie. A family-friendly film is always included on the schedule.

All films are shown Saturdays at 1:30p.m.

The schedule for the 2019 film series is:

- 1/26: Starman
- 2/9: Saving Grace
- 2/23: Ida
- 3/9: Wonder

Please note that these selections are subject to change.

For more information or to register, please contact: Debra Oryzysyn at 212-609-1929 or Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org
El Duelo: Construir un oasis en el desierto
Rocío Lorena Ruiz, former Bereavement Services Intern

Si Ud. está leyendo estas líneas es porque acaba de perder a la persona que más significaba en su vida. Todo lo que compartía con ese ser querido se ha cortado de golpe y no hay manera de recuperar esa relación con nadie más. Las circunstancias literalmente le dejan en medio de un desierto. Siente que las personas que lo quieren y a quienes Ud. quiere están a millas de distancia y no pueden acercarse más. Este desierto parece no terminar nunca, le congela de noche pero le abrasa de día anulando toda actividad porque hasta caminar en la arena tumbala y no encontrar agua le debilita. La luz evidencia la oscuridad que lleva por dentro. Los espejismos aparecen y algunos días se presentan tolerables pero otros insoportables. Anhelaría encontrar un camello, una brújula o hasta un helicóptero pero sabe que es insuficiente porque el desierto lo lleva por dentro. Y para continuar tendrá que aprender a sobrevivir, ganar espacio al desierto y construir un oasis desde donde poco a poco empezará a recuperar esos sentimientos, capacidades, momentos y experiencias que el ser querido se llevó consigo.

El trabajo de duelo requiere mucha paciencia y comprensión hacia uno mismo porque la vida que conocíamos cambió radicalmente y no se puede volver hacia atrás. Lograr estabilidad, enfoque, sentido de control y significado de la propia vida requiere de un gran esfuerzo. Reacciones inesperadas a nivel fisiológico, cognitivo, conductual y afectivo fluctuarán. Adaptarnos significa avanzar y retroceder, pero cada tropiezo, dificultad o caída aunque no lo percibimos, sirve para tomar impulso y continuar.

Entonces, cómo podemos construir nuestro oasis? Aquí algunas ideas...

1) Vivir de manera honesta y natural nuestro duelo. Permitirnos expresar nuestras emociones y sentimientos aunque sean abrumadores e intensos ya que evitarlos, suprimirlos o negarlos puede ser perjudicial. Estos podrán ser manejados con más eficacia en algún momento. Por eso es necesario llorar para aliviar la pena o la culpa, y permitirse momentos de calma y hasta pequeñas dosis de alegría.

2) Atender nuestra alma. Tal vez somos religiosos y nuestra fe nos conforta. O tal vez somos espirituales y preferimos meditar. Sea cual fuere nuestras creencias o tradiciones, asignemos tiempo para nuestro sosiego y crecimiento, meditando, leyendo, escuchando música, o realizando actividades que nos conforten y brinden paz a nuestro corazón.

3) Atender a los mensajes de nuestro cuerpo. Mientras fuimos cuidadores de nuestro ser querido estuvimos en gran tensión. Aliviemos el estrés comiendo sanamente, evitando el consumo excesivo de alcohol o sustancias no prescritas, durmiendo las horas necesarias, asistiendo a las citas médicas postergadas y haciendo ejercicio necesario. Es hora de que nuestro cuerpo se oxigene y recupere fuerzas.

4) Mantener y mejorar el soporte social. Tal vez no todos comprendan nuestra pena o no sepan cómo ayudarnos. Aprovechemos la oportunidad de alternar en diferentes espacios, y compartir tiempo de calidad con distintas personas. Podamos ayudar si necesitamos, hablemos con las personas que nos generen confianza, sea un religioso, un profesional o asistamos a un grupo de ayuda para fortalecernos.

5) Valorar el tiempo compartido con el fallecido. Nuestro ser querido enfrentó duramente la última etapa de su vida y nosotros hicimos lo posible para aliviar el sufrimiento y proveerle confort. Se valora el amor, la dedicación y la experiencia ganada. Se agradece haber conocido a una persona tan valiente y luchadora. Se le rinde honor por el regalo de su presencia.

6) Comprender que el duelo es un proceso. No se resuelve de la noche a la mañana y sabemos que “olvidar” no es posible. Hagámoslo sólo lo más cómodo e indispensable para mantener sentido de control, conectado y proactivo. Permitanse estar en duelo, dudar, reinventarse a sí mismos. Permitanse establecer una nueva relación con el ser querido, reforzando los lazos de amor y esperanza.

Construir el oasis no es fácil. Nuestro equipo de consejeros bilingües y latinos está disponible para acompañarlos por 13 meses contados a partir de la pérdida. No dude en contactarnos, estamos aquí para Ud.

Rocío Lorena Ruiz
E-mail: Rocío.Ruiz@vnsny.org
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2019 Calendar

The David and June Pelkey Grief Education Series

Presentations designed to support people on their journey of grief
Registration is required • Manhattan location unless specified otherwise

How Long Does Grief Last?
Thursday • January 17
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

Saturday Matinee
A four-part film series supports you in the grieving process
Saturdays • January 26, February 9, 23 and March 9
1:30 p.m.—4:00 p.m.
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

Stress Management and Self-Care in Grief
Thursday • March 21
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

How Long Does Grief Last?
Thursday • April 11
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

Partner Loss Panel Discussion
“Can I Develop a Loving Relationship Again?”
Thursday • April 25
6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

Workshop Testimonial
“The art workshop enabled me to express feelings that I could not put into words.” —B.T.

Workshop Testimonial
“When I started attending the group, I realized I was in the company of others on the same journey.” —R.W.

Workshop Testimonial
“Each time I attend the weekly group meeting, I am reminded of the importance of allowing myself to grieve.” —W.B.

Workshop Testimonial
“When one door closes, another one opens… changes bring sadness as well as excitement for what comes next.” —E.P.
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2019 Calendar

Registration is required • Manhattan location unless specified otherwise

**Weekly (Ongoing) Groups**

**First Year of Grief**
*A daytime group for those mourning the death of a hospice patient*

*Manhattan*
Mondays 11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Janet King • 212-609-1907
Janet.King@vnsny.org

**Chinese-Language Bereavement Support**
*Manhattan*
Tuesdays • 2:30 p.m.—4:00 p.m.
Pamela Yew Schwartz • 347-831-1811
Pamela.Schwartz@vnsny.org

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Loved One**

*Manhattan*
Tuesdays • 6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

**Bi-Weekly Groups**

**Daytime General Loss Group on the Upper East Side**

*For Adults Whose Loved One Died on Hospice*

Wednesdays • January 2, 16, February 6, 20, March 6, 20, and April 3, 17
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.
Janet King 212-609-1907 • Janet.King@vnsny.org

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Loved One**

*Brooklyn*
Tuesdays • January 8, 22, February 5, 19, March 5, 19, April 2, 16
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.
Dianna Sandiford • 718-787-3155
Cell: 646-430-4125
Dianna.Sandiford@vnsny.org

**Men Coping With Grief • Manhattan**

Mondays • January 7, 28, February 11, 25, March 11, 25 and April 8, 22
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 212-609-7992
E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

**Grupo de Soporte para Hispanos**

*“Construyendo un Puente hacia una Vida Nueva” (Spanish Bereavement Group)*

*Manhattan*
Thursdays • January 3, 17, February 7, 21, March 7, 21 and April 4, 18
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.
Liz Santana • 917-608-7220
Elizabeth.Santana@vnsny.org

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**Special Topic: Art as a Pathway to Healing**
The Museum of Modern Art and VNSNY Hospice, invite you to join regularly-scheduled programs this spring to learn about art and meet new people through interactive sessions and hands-on exploration of artists and themes in modern and contemporary art. No prior experience necessary! Family members who have had loved ones on VNSNY Hospice will be given priority. Contact MoMA Prime Time at (212) 333-1265 or primetime@moma.org for more information.
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2019 Calendar

Registration is required • Manhattan location unless specified otherwise

Monthly Groups

**General Loss**

**Bereavement Creative Arts Support Group • Staten Island**

Thursdays: January 24, February 14, March 14, and April 18
10:30 a.m.—12:00 p.m.
Rosanne Sonatore • 646-276-4399
Rosanne.Sonatore@vnsny.org

*The VNSNY Hospice & Palliative Guide to Staten Island Community Bereavement Support Groups can also be provided to you upon request*

**General Loss**

**Managing Grief in the Second Year • Manhattan**

Fridays • January 18, February 15, March 15, and April 26
11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Mary Kay King – 212-760-3138
MaryKay.King@vnsny.org

**Focused Groups**

**Parent Loss**

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Parent • Manhattan**

Mondays • January 28, February 4, 11, 25 and March 4, 11
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Mary Kay King • 212-760-3138
MaryKay.King@vnsny.org

**Spouse or Partner Loss**

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Spouse or Partner • Manhattan**

Mondays • April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 and May 6
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Mary Kay King • 212-760-3138
MaryKay.King@vnsny.org

**Special Service:**

**Reiki Therapy • Manhattan**

*By appointment (not available until March 2019)*

Jean Metzker • 718-888-6966
Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org

*Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing. It is administered by ‘laying on hands’ and is based on the idea that an unseen ‘life force energy’ flows through us and is what causes us to be alive.*

**Loss of an Adult Child**

**For Parents Grieving the Death of an Adult Child • Manhattan**

Wednesdays – January 9, February 13, March 13 and April 10
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.
Pamela Yew Schwartz • 347-831-1811
Pamela.Schwartz@vnsny.org

Workshop Testimonial

“I am able to process my thoughts as they come up and I know I am not alone.”

—W.B.
Coming April 25th
Partner Loss Panel: “Can I Develop a Loving Relationship Again?”

This panel discussion is presented in an effort to support grieving partners/spouses who may have conflicting feelings when they contemplate the possibility of reinvesting themselves in another relationship. Questions may have come to mind such as: “Will I always feel married even though my partner has died?” “No one could ever replace my loved one but is it okay to seek companionship?” “It’s been a long time since I wasn’t a part of a couple and I feel awkward around other ‘singles.’” “Is it in the best interest of my children for me to consider having other relationships?” Even though we may know intellectually that love is boundless, it may be difficult to move forward. We recognize that grief can be an isolating experience, however, it’s important to know that you are not alone with these conflicting feelings. Please join Willis Partington and the panel of experts who have travelled this path. Willis can be reached at 212-609-7992 or email him at E.Willis.Partington@vnsny.org