We have entered a season of darkness and at the same time continue to experience the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic with the new variants that have appeared. The 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 earlier and hoping for some respite 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, followed by Chanukah, and building up into a crescendo of “Happy”, “Jolly” and “Merry” through the month of December with Christmas, Kwanzaa 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 bring with it 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 appear so slowly that we may not even 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 towers 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. We are also entering a time when the isolation of the pandemic is continuing to decline due to increased vaccinations and booster shots.

This issue has several articles, including one in Spanish, another about mindfulness, a feature on our Saturday Matinee film series and our calendar of groups and workshops for the first part of 2022. 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,

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

Dear Friend-in-Grief,

I am an old hand at grief now, almost two years after my husband, John, died suddenly. I attend the VNSNY Tuesday bereavement group, no longer weeping, as new people, just bereaved and in shock, cry out in their pain. I have been glad that I’m not crying that way anymore.

But this week it happened suddenly again when my friend Berney died and I am weeping again for a beloved man lost.

John and I met 15 years ago when we were in our mid 60s and, as we became a couple, he met my friends. He met Berney and Sue, people I loved, and he grew to love them, too. For years, outings with them were special times.

Berney had been in independent living in his hometown of Montgomery, Alabama, having moved there a year ago to be close to his sister and brother-in-law. A week ago, he fell and broke a rib. At the hospital they diagnosed pneumonia and soon he began to make no sense when he spoke. Then he stopped speaking. The day before yesterday, he died.

When Berney was admitted to the hospital, he gave his sister my phone number and she sent me more texts until he died.

The thing about Berney was that it was such a treat to be with him, he made a party out of a hot dog and salad lunch. After the television production company where we met about fifty years ago closed, Berney organized a yearly party and people came from everywhere for the big, exciting, loving reunion.

I have been alone with grief and Zoom for many months. Things are tightening up again, and now there are two empty chairs, one in my apartment, and one in Alabama.

But I am lucky because I can take all this grief to the VNSNY Tuesday group. I wasn’t expecting to be bringing a new loss there, along with the loss of John that still hurts so much, but I go there always helped by the fellowship and wisdom that come my way.

Thank you VNSNY bereavement program. You are so skilled and loving you make it possible to bear even terrible times and to be in a process of healing. I couldn’t admire and love you more.

– Elaine
Alcanzando Consuelo Para el Invierno de Nuestro Corazón

Por Rocío Lorena Ruiz, LMHC, Consejera de Duelo VNSNY

Estamos ad portas del segundo invierno de pandemia y este virus se niega a abandonarnos. Nuevamente, las festividades y el final del año emergen con un sabor agridulce. Por un lado, nos puede animar la algarabía de las fiestas y el inicio del nuevo año, pero por otro, nos puede intensificar la aflicción por la pérdida de ese ser tan querido. Nuestra pérdida es una herida profunda, abierta, dolorosa que nos recuerda que la vida puede cambiar en un minuto y nuestro duelo es el reflejo de nuestro desolado corazón.

Hace un año reflexionábamos que la relación entre la estación y aflicción es estrecha, y que el duelo coincide con la estación que se avecina: Frío, con menos luz y más oscuridad. También decíamos que ser cuidador en tiempos particularmente desafiantes y demandantes como los que estamos viviendo por más de dos años no es fácil. Perder un ser querido conlleva una mayor carga emocional. Aún así, la aflicción puede servirle no sólo para reflexionar sino para abastecerse de energía para continuar. Aquí algunas sugerencias para sobrellevar el invierno de su corazón:

- **Deje fluir sus emociones.** Puede que le invada la tristeza o se sienta algunos días enojado, culpable o hasta aliviado. Cualquier expresión es válida, es suya y debe ser respetada. Las emociones, así como los estados de ánimo y los sentimientos, dan color a la conducta humana. No se trata de eliminarlas sino de aceptarlas, y con paciencia, modelar su intensidad y mantenimiento en el tiempo. Siéntase afortunado de haber acompañado y de haber hecho una gran diferencia en la vida de su ser querido. En tiempos difíciles el repertorio emocional debe simplemente fluir. Es como dejar correr el agua en una represa, evitar que se inunde y limpiar todo lo que se encuentra a su paso.

- **Celebre y valore la vida de su ser querido.** Reconozca su dignidad, asignele un lugar de honor y recuerdelo en sus mejores momentos y no en su final. Hable de sus enseñanzas y póngalas en práctica, que su inteligencia, fortaleza y bondad no pasen desapercibidas. Téngalo presente, elabore un álbum de recuerdos, escriba una carta y envíela al cielo, realice una donación en su nombre o siembre una planta en su memoria. Lleve a cabo una ceremonia virtual e invente nuevos rituales. La relación con su ser querido ha cambiado, pero no terminado y esta nueva conexión le ayudará a procesar la pérdida.

- ** Lidie con el estrés.** Ya ha tenido suficiente estrés en los últimos tiempos, reconózcalo y manéjelo. Escuche los mensajes de su cuerpo y mente que piden auto cuidarse. Diferencie y atienda sólo las cosas que puede controlar. Priorice lo que es importante y necesario, anticipé tareas y asigne efectivamente los tiempos para cada tarea. No se cohiba de pedir ayuda si la necesita. Tome descansos breves para mejorar su perspectiva y enfóquese más en las cosas que le provean sosiego, confort y positivismo.

- **No se aísle.** Las restricciones del acercamiento físico se están levantando poco a poco, y podemos disfrutar más de la cercanía y el sentido de comunidad. Mantenga la conexión socio-emocional con los seres queridos. Comuníquese con personas de su confianza, un amigo, un sacerdote o un consejero. Participe de algún blog, grupo de soporte virtual o presencial si hubiera. Aislarse sólo es saludable para meditar, reflexionar y para tomar un nuevo impulso para continuar.

- **Acepte que Usted y su vida han cambiado, y seguirán cambiando.** Ahora tiene una nueva tarea: Procesar su pérdida. Requiere flexibilidad y balance para reconstruir el sentido de su vida y ganar resiliencia. Reconozca sus limitaciones y motívese a seguir creciendo porque las nuevas habilidades lo van a equipar mejor para el futuro. Los momentos de relax no constituyen falta de respeto sino combustible para proseguir. Cada persona, evento o situación tiene una misión que cumplir en la vida y cuando ésta ya ha sido completada llega el momento de partir. Es doloroso pero revelador. Si mira hacia atrás se dará cuenta de los cambios de los últimos tiempos. Verá pequeños y grandes cambios, y se verá a sí mismo diferente pero fortalecido.

Su ser querido le enseñó a Usted a ser una persona valiente y luchadora, y nuestro equipo de consejeros bilingües y latinos lo acompañará en esta parte del camino.

Contáctenos al 347-439-2695 o escribanos al siguiente correo: Rocio.Ruiz@vnsny.org
Mindfulness: Feel Rather than Think

By Jean Metzker, Ph.D., Bereavement Counselor

Awareness of Strong Emotions

As we breathe in, we notice the breath going into our nostrils down into our body. Close your eyes and feel it fully. Feel what is there. Invite it in. Be with the strong body sensations that may arise. Perhaps sadness, despair, anger come into your conscious awareness. Love, kindness, joy and happiness may also manifest. Paying attention to the outbreath, you may wish to smile a gentle smile giving thanks to that awareness. Notice, if you feel more relaxed.

Don't go anywhere; don't do anything, just stay present with yourself. This process is the beginning of learning about the you of you. Perhaps you may find that your feelings or body sensations are myriad, and you are so full of feelings that you are confused. Stay; breathe into the confusion. Focus on that. Whatever arises, focus on that.

The first time I sat quietly and focused on how I felt I didn't have much of an idea of what 'feeling' was supposed to be like. That was over 40 years ago, and I am gratefully still learning.

Finding Peace in the Struggle

Lean into the unbearable. Stay with and identify what is underneath the buzz. What are the patterns that emerge when we are first triggered into action? For instance, anger often mobilizes us. Despair often de-energizes us. With sadness we may feel empty, less energetic and out-of-sorts.

Mindfulness engages us in a process, whereby we become aware of our bodies responses to events, and we do this without judgment, or acting on them, but by simply being aware.

This process of mindfully being aware is very simple:

SOB:

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
  - In breath
  - Out-breath, over and over, and over

Stop whatever you are doing. Find a quiet spot that you like, maybe the couch, a chair, a cushion, a tree, a plant... Observe thoughts and feelings that arise.

Do this as you sit quietly. Don't get busy to distract yourself from feeling. Stay still; stay focused; and notice with concentration. This skill allows us to become aware of greater detail and nuance, of changes and second thoughts. We become more familiar with ourselves in more and more ways. There is always more to be discovered beyond initial surface assumptions and first impressions.

As we probe, we may detect pain under the mask we wear. Maybe we will be able to see things as they really are rather than as we want them to be or as they appear through our lenses.

Building Mindfulness Strength

The more you practice, the stronger your mindfulness becomes. Sitting quietly, paying attention to the sensations that arise, you can develop awareness of things that drive you to react rather than respond. Reread this short tutorial that could contribute to your peacefulness. Begin by being present, as above, with the rhythm of your own breathing pattern.

Notice the end of the outbreath. Here, simply rest your mind until the next inbreath naturally occurs. Try that for some breaths until you find your mind and body calming.

To strengthen your awareness, place your attention on the inbreath until the next outbreath. Notice the tiny space, the pause at the end of each outbreath and each inbreath—a place of rest as a ‘rest’ in music.

Collective Energy of a Supportive Community

To find your place of comfort and peace, even if the pain of loss and sadness begins and sustains for a period, practicing this skill will be helpful. You will find these moments of quiet respite to begin to get longer. A community of like-minded people will give you encouragement. Tell people that you are experimenting with a practice of Mindfulness that helps to quiet your mind and body and begin the journey of healing through focus and concentration. Encourage people to support you and try it for themselves. You are the model for your change, and who knows, over time, theirs.
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2022 Calendar

The David and June Pelkey Grief Education Series

Presentations designed to support people on their journey of grief
• Registration is required • Workshops take place via Zoom •

How Long Does Grief Last?
Thursday • January 20, 2022
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320
Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

Saturday Matinee
A four-part film series to support you in the grieving process
Saturdays • January 22, February 5 and 12, and March 5
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

Bereavement Creative Arts Support Group
Each meeting will focus on the grief journey of group members, as told through the creative arts. No artistic skills required and a list of suggested art materials for each suggestion will be provided
Thursdays • February 10, March 10, April 7
11:00 a.m.—12:15 p.m.
Rosanne Sonatore • 646-276-4399
Rosanne.Sonatore@vnsny.org

Paths to Peace – A Healing Modality Series
Saturdays • February 26 —Self-Care and Rituals; March 5—Reiki; March 12—Mindfulness Meditation and the Labyrinth Walk
10:30 a.m.—11:30 a.m.
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

Stress Management and Self-Care in Grief
Tuesday • March 15
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

Special Topic: Art as a Pathway to Healing
Thursdays • April 14, 21, 28, May 5, 12, 19
2:00 p.m.—3:30 p.m.
This spring, the Museum of Modern Art, in Partnership with VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care, invites you to join regularly scheduled virtual programs. Learn about art and meet new people through interactive sessions that will explore different artists and themes in modern and contemporary art. No prior experience necessary. Space is limited and preregistration required. This program is open to individuals who have had loved ones in VNSNY Hospice and participated in the bereavement program. First time participants will be given priority. For more information or to register e-mail primetime@moma.org.

Mindfulness Based Grief Reduction: A Full Day Silent Retreat
Finding Peace • 16 Breathing Exercises
Sunday • May 15
1:30 p.m.—5:00 p.m.
Jean Metzker • 917-331-7819
Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org
(Text or email preferred)
Learning to meditate and to find peace and calmness in the process often results in grieving that lets go of anxiety helping the grieving process have purpose.

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/

Workshop Testimonial
“...the bereavement services offered by VNSNY are like an oasis in a desert...When the group was over, I felt refreshed and on the path to healing.”
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2022 Calendar

• Registration is required • Workshops take place via phone or Zoom •

**Weekly (Ongoing) Groups**

**Chinese-Language Bereavement Support**
善別輔導小組

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**

Tuesdays • 6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320
Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

**Bi-Weekly Groups (continued)**

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

Tuesdays • January 4, 18, February 1, 15, March 1, 15, April 5, 19
12:00 p.m.—1:30 p.m.
Dianna Sandiford • 646-430-4125
Dianna.Sandiford@vnsny.org

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

Thursdays • January 6, 20, February 3, 17, March 3, 17, April 7, 21
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Gladys Ortiz-Alvarado • 917-923-6288
Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org

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

Thursdays • January 13, 27, February 10, 24, March 10, 24, and April 7, 21
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.
Liz Santana • 917-608-7220
Elizabeth.Santanta@vnsny.org

**Men Coping with Grief**

Mondays • January 10, 24, February 7, March 7, 21, and April 4, 18
6:00 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320
Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

**For Adults in the First Year Who Are Grieving the Death of a Hospice Patient**

This is a general loss, ongoing group. New members are welcome at any time.
Mondays • January 10, 24, February 7, March 7, 21, and April 4, 18
11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.
Janet King 646-341-0405 • Janet.King@vnsny.org

**General Loss**

**For Adults Whose Loved One Died on Hospice**

Wednesdays • January 5, 19, February 2, 16, March 2, 16, April 6, 20
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.
Janet King 646-341-0405 • Janet.King@vnsny.org

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**Workshop Testimonial**

“The group gives me a safe place to tell my story and learn from others.”
—W.B.

**Workshop Testimonial**

“Each time I attend the weekly group meeting, I am reminded of the importance of allowing myself to grieve.”
—W.B.
Bereavement Services Winter/Early Spring 2022 Calendar

- Registration is required • Workshops take place via phone or Zoom •

## Monthly Groups

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Brother or Sister**
Mondays • January 24, February 28, March 28, and April 25
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Gladys Ortiz-Alvarado • 917-923-6288
Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org

**Loss of an Adult Child**
For Parents Grieving the Death of an Adult Child
Wednesdays • January 12, February 9, March 9, and April 13
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.
Pamela Yew Schwartz • 347-831-1811
Pamela.Schwartz@vnsny.org

## Focused Groups

**LGBTQ+ and Allies Bereavement Group**
Thursdays • January 13, 20, 27 and February 3, 10, 17
4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m.
Jean Metzker • 917-331-7819
Text or email preferred • Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Parent**
Tuesdays • January 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15, 22
2:00 p.m.—3:30 p.m.
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

**For Adults Grieving the Death of a Parent**
Mondays • March 21, 28, April 4, 11, 18, 25
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
Mary Kay King • 646-627-4618
MaryKay.King@vnsny.org

**Focused Groups**

**Workshop Testimonial**
“I was able to be strong because I had your support and knew I wasn’t alone.”
—A.K.

**Excerpt from Presence**
“Grief is the process of healing loss. It is a holistic process, with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions interconnecting. We don’t just grieve for a loss, but for all the meanings and implications of that loss.”
—Nancy Reeves, Presence (Vol. 13, No. 4., December 2007)

**Workshop Testimonial**
“When one door closes, another one opens… changes bring sadness as well as excitement for what comes next.”
—E.P.

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

VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care
220 East 42nd Street
7th Floor
New York, NY 10017

LOOK INSIDE FOR:

Winter/Early Spring 2022

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday Matinee: Fifteenth Season of Movies from VNSNY

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.

We usually watch the films together, but this year you will need to watch it on your own and then we will gather via Zoom to talk about what the movie says to you about coping in bereavement. Think of this as a sort of book club format. You can view the film at your convenience and join us for the discussion. 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.

The schedule for the 2022 film series is:

• 1/22: Muriel’s Wedding, on Hulu, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime for $5.99
• 2/5: Field of Dreams, on Peacock for free, and Amazon Prime for $3.99
• 2/12: I Am Legend, on HBO Max, Hulu, and free with cable TV – TBS & TNT
• 3/5: Coco, on Disney+ and Amazon Prime for $3.99

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

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Lead Bereavement Counselor
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