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# Seasons of Life

A Bereavement Newsletter from the VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care Program

Spring 2022 |

Issue 41 |

## The Arrival of Spring: Renewal and Rebirth

By Willis Partington, M.Div., LCSW-R, FT

The poem *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot begins with the line “April is the cruelest month.” Spring is a time of renewal and rebirth; the land is coming back to life again. While winter may be a more difficult season for someone in grief, it may also be a comfort that at least the darkness and cold days of winter mirror their internal feelings.

In the early days and weeks after the loss of a loved one, life can seem like “going through the motions.” Some group members have told me they felt like everything was a blur and they had little memory of those early days. It can be like having the wind knocked out of you and struggling to breathe. Often there is the fear that they will always feel this way.

Yet the arrival of spring may offer a sense of hope. The natural cycle of the transition from winter to spring can signal the possibility for change in grief as well. This change can be subtle,



such as a shift over time of having one good day in the midst of many bad days.

**“The sadness and the love for the person you lost will always be there, but at the same time may be joined by the realization that a new life is emerging as inexorably as the coming of spring.”**

A person may have a little more energy to accomplish a task that in the early days of grief could have seemed nearly impossible. There may be the ability to laugh when previously even smiling was difficult. Reflecting on their journey, people have said to me, “I feel like I’m in a different place now with my grief.”

In Native American culture, people sometimes change their names after major life transitions. It is a ritual that acknowledges that the person they were before this event no longer exists, and they are now a new person. The death of a loved one is also a major life change and as we allow ourselves to grieve, we may also evolve into a new sense of who we are. Sometimes people find that they are more understanding of the suffering of others or that their priorities have changed.

As a larger society we are also in a period of renewal and rebirth. In the wake of the last surge of the COVID Omicron variant, cases and deaths have dropped off significantly. The number of individuals who have been vaccinated and boosted, or had COVID, is now a substantial majority of the population. A return to a less isolated existence and maybe even a transition from a pandemic to an endemic is becoming a possibility. Our groups and workshops continue to meet via Zoom

Continued on next page

or telephone, yet we are optimistic that there will come a time when we can meet face to face once again. Whenever we do have in-person groups, Zoom will remain as we transition to a hybrid format.



Like the melting of winter snow and ice, there may be a loosening and softening of your grief experience. The sadness and the love for the person you lost will always be there, but at the same time may be joined by the realization that a new life is emerging as inexorably as the coming of spring.

**“The natural cycle of the transition from winter to spring can signal the possibility for change in grief as well ... Reflecting on their journey, people have said to me, ‘I feel like I’m in a different place now with my grief.’”**

This issue has an article about mindfulness, another in Spanish as well as a brief overview of our four-part workshop series on Grief and Dreams. It is my hope that this *Seasons of Life* newsletter and the support of our bereavement program will be helpful to you.



Sincerely,

**M. Div., LCSW-R, FT  
Lead Bereavement Counselor**

**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,

**M**y name is Marissa and it is an honor to share my story with you. Depression, pain and debilitating fear of the unknown ruled our days and lay heavy over our household. After one last terrible night of listening to my husband's hopelessness, we talked about a better way . . . with hospice. I awoke the next morning and called the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. From that moment on, a breath of fresh air entered our lives and lifted the fear and isolation of living with terminal cancer. It turned out to be the best decision we ever made. During those last four months, the home hospice care Denis received made it possible for him to return to the things he loved . . . reading, writing, and photography. We were also able to take memorable walks through our Upper West Side neighborhood where we worked, raised our children and shared our lives together for 35 years. In fact, hospice made such a qualitative difference that Denis was fond of saying, "they gave me my life back."

### **To the Entire Home Hospice Team:**

Thank you all for your intelligent, clear and compassionate ability to guide us through this unique experience called "dying." I never knew there was so much to learn, and you taught us well.

### **To Vanessa (Denis's Nurse):**

I will never forget how much Denis loved and trusted you and looked forward to your visits. Your incredibly honest, natural manner and sensitivity to Denis's personality and needs far surpassed our expectations. Denis died the way he wanted to—pain-free and with dignity in the comfort of his own home and bed.

### **To the Bereavement Counselors:**

You truly are an amazing group of people. Always validating my feelings and creating a safe, supportive environment in which I could process, learn, and work through my grief. I became a bereavement junkie, so to speak, attending various groups, panel discussions, movies, walks and one-on-one counseling throughout the past year. So now I, too, can proclaim as my husband once did, "VNSNY gave me my life back, or rather a way back into life."

Thank you,  
*Marissa*

# Primavera: Un destello de esperanza para nuestro acongojado corazón

Por Rocío Lorena Ruiz, LMHC, Consejera de Duelo VNSNY

**H**ace un año reflexionábamos acerca del advenimiento de la Primavera, como una estación que trae claridad, florecimiento y esperanza. Anhelábamos vencer al coronavirus, pero ha pasado un año completo y el virus amenaza quedarse convertido en epidemia. A fuerza de tensión e incertidumbre, hemos replanteado nuestro concepto de la vida y la muerte y desde la fragilidad inicial hemos ganado conocimiento y resiliencia. Al igual que un marinero no se hace experto en un mar de calma, nosotros seguiremos enfrentando nuevos desafíos hasta llegar a puerto seguro.

Usted, con mayor razón se distingue de los demás, porque estuvo cuidando a un ser que amaba mucho y que falleció. Usted, bajo circunstancias extremas, asignó todos los recursos disponibles para hacer la vida de ese ser querido, más comfortable. Usted merece la más alta condecoración por su desempeño valeroso en la dura batalla que le tocó librar. Lo que los demás no saben es que Usted está con el corazón encogido, adolorido, desolado. Usted espera retomar fuerzas para proseguir.

El duelo es la reacción natural ante una pérdida significativa, es una travesía muy singular y personal que requiere equipamiento y decisión adicional. Esta travesía finalmente le proveerá una conexión duradera con el ser amado y con la vida, y le proporcionará un significado enriquecedor a su propia existencia.

**Considere las siguientes sugerencias:**

**1) Desarrolle comprensión de sí mismo y de las situaciones que se le presentan.** Acepte su condición de doliente y empiece lidiando racionalmente con lo más básico para seguir fortaleciéndose. Trate de alimentarse saludablemente, duerma lo suficiente, asista a las citas médicas pendientes y busque momentos que le proporcionen confort y serenidad. Pida apoyo si lo necesita y si puede, apoye a otros. Sea paciente y trátase con cariño a sí mismo y a los demás. Alrededor suyo hay otros sufriendo.

**2) Reconozca sus estados personales.** Un sinnúmero de emociones inesperadas y/o contradictorias son esperables. Permítase sentir tristeza, cólera o alivio. Disminuya los



*“El invierno está en mi cabeza, pero la eterna primavera está en mi corazón.”*

— Víctor Hugo

sentimientos de impotencia y culpabilidad que lo atormentan. Aminore el estrés ocupándose sólo de lo que es indispensable y evite sobrecargarse innecesariamente. Aíslese si necesita meditar, evaluar o descansar. Expresese abiertamente, pero ajuste sus estados, reacciones y conductas para ganar sentido de control, equilibrio y balance.

**3) No se deje invadir por la “languidez”** Esta sensación se ha agudizado durante el tiempo de

pandemia. Languidez es una sensación de estancamiento y vacío, que nos desmotiva, distrae y nos vuelve improductivos. Plantéese objetivos, pequeños pero significativos, cúmplalos y celebre pequeñas victorias con lo que pueda, poco a poco.

**4) Rinda honor a su ser querido.** Su ser querido fue muy importante. Respételo porque él también luchó una batalla y le enseñó a Usted a ser valiente y a desarrollar resiliencia. Ejercer los rituales de su tradición o creencia religiosa, o invente nuevos para mantener vigente su memoria. Canalice ese amor practicando la gratitud, la caridad, y multiplicando todo lo bueno que aprendió de él.

**5) Lidie con las múltiples pérdidas.** Es probable que haya sumado un nuevo duelo cuando todavía el anterior no ha sido procesado o haya perdido a las personas que son su soporte natural. Considere la sugerencia del especialista en duelo Dr. Robert Niemeyer: Hay que “peinar las pérdidas” como una melena enredada, separar cada cabello y desatar los nudos que se forman. Escriba los nombres de cada persona fallecida y debajo de cada nombre agregue frases cortas que describan la especial relación que mantuvo con esa persona. Así cada duelo se irá definiendo y será menos abrumador.



**Recuerde, el equipo profesional de VNSNY está con Usted.**

**Contáctenos al 347-439-2695 o escríbanos al siguiente correo: [Rocio.Ruiz@vnsny.org](mailto:Rocio.Ruiz@vnsny.org).**

# Planting Seeds

By Jean Metzker, Ph.D., VNSNY Bereavement Counselor

## Just Noticing

**Y**esterday, when the sun was shining, I had a revelation—at this time of year I could begin to think about planting seeds—for flowers, maybe daffodils, or vegetables and maybe, spices. I thought about the seedlings that need nurturing and care when they are just beginning to sprout. Then it occurred to me that I could start right now to plant seeds for my intended plants.

I have fertile soil for the seeds to germinate so I will begin *NOW*, and not wait for the ‘right’ time to begin. I have the seeds, the soil, the water, the space and the time to support and nurture. I visualize the roots each plant will grow to render them stable and solid. Deep in the soil is the basis for nourishment and growth.

## Strengthening Seeds through Mindfulness

As I sat with my strategy of planting, I began to see the universality of seed-planting. I tried to remember the first ‘seed’ planted in my life: It was the seed of love introduced by my parents who had the seed of love watered by their parents, my grandfathers and grandmothers. My parents planted the seed of love in me, and then I planted the seed of love in my own children. *What a garden!* Then, I looked even deeper and mused: “I started as a seed and am their continuation of love and peace. My children manifest seeds of love and are the continuation of all of us.”

There are some seeds from our experiences and our intentions that we water many times each day. The fertile ground of our minds is influenced by the seeds we plant in our family and community. When we plant a seed of generosity, we build generousness. When we plant a seed of calm, we nurture calmness.



**“Every day we are engaged in a miracle we don’t even recognize.”**

**— Moments of Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh**

We plant the seed of joy by looking at a sweet picture that reminds us of a baby, a graduation, a birthday. We water a seed of sadness by realizing the person in this picture is no longer alive. Then we plant a seed of loving kindness in the memory of the life lived in which we were apart.

The soil is the fertile ground of our mind. The sprouting and blooming of the seed result from the emphasis that we place on it. The growth we observe increases the possibility the roots will cultivate and mature to stabilize

our intention to be more aware and solid.

## Mindfulness Waters the Seed’s Potential

Now, we have all the ingredients: The memory, our mindfulness, as the tool used to help us (the soil), the water (our attention), and the seeds (our intention), we want to grow and bloom with awareness and love. What we water grows; what we ignore stagnates and/or lies dormant. The soil and seed remaining have no fertile ground on which to grow a solid root base or foundation to anchor our mindful blossoming.

Mindfulness is the tool that gives us, the gardeners, the ability to water and grow loving kindness and peace. We are able to see clearly how from a tiny seed grows a beautiful flower, a flower that blooms and grows with unlimited potential. Planting seeds through mindfulness lets us quietly attend to what arises in us, pay attention and then allow that awareness to manifest through our words, our actions, then flow into our relationships.

### Comments and Suggestions

E-mail: [Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org](mailto:Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org)

# Bereavement Services Spring/Early Summer 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 phone or Zoom •

### **Special Topic: Art as a Pathway to Healing**

Thursdays • April 14, 21, 28, May 5, 12, and 19  
2:30 p.m.—3:30 p.m.



This spring, the Museum of Modern Art, in Partnership with and 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 is 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](mailto:primetime@moma.org)

### **How Long Does Grief Last?**

Thursdays • May 12  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320  
[Willis.Partington@vnsny.org](mailto:Willis.Partington@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 session will be provided.*

Thursdays • May 12, June 9, and July 14  
11:00 a.m.—12:15 p.m.  
Rosanne Sonatore • 646-276-4399  
[Rosanne.Sonatore@vnsny.org](mailto:Rosanne.Sonatore@vnsny.org)

### **Spring Labyrinth Walk**

Saturday • May 14  
9:30 a.m.  
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929  
[Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org](mailto:Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.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](mailto: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.*

#### **Father Loss Panel**

Monday • June 13  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929  
[Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org](mailto:Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org)

#### **Proceso de luto (The Process of Grief)**

Thursday • July 14  
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.  
Gladys Ortiz-Alvarado • 917-923-6288  
[Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org](mailto:Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org)

#### **Grief Journaling**

Mondays • July 11, 18, 25, August 1  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929  
[Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org](mailto:Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org)

#### **Summer Labyrinth Walk**

Wednesday • July 27  
5:00 p.m. — 6:00 p.m.  
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929  
[Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org](mailto:Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org)



#### **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 Spring/Early Summer 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

### For Adults in the First Year Who Are Grieving the Death of a Loved One

*This is a general loss group with ongoing meetings*

Mondays April 11, 25, May 9, 23, and July 11, 25  
11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.  
Janet King 646-341-0405  
Janet.King@vnsny.org

### For Adults Whose Loved One Died on Hospice

*This is a general loss group with ongoing meetings*

Wednesdays • April 6, 20, May 4, 18, and July 6, 20  
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.  
Janet King 646-341-0405  
Janet.King@vnsny.org

## Bi-Weekly Groups (continued)

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

Tuesdays • April 5, 19, May 3, 17, June 7, 21, and July 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 • April 7, 21, May 5, 19, June 9, 23, and July 21  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Gladys Ortiz-Alvarado • 917-923-6288  
Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org

### Men Coping With Grief

Mondays • April 4, 18, May 2, 16, June 6, 20, and July 11, 25  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320  
Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

### *Grupo de Soporte para Hispanos*

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

Thursdays • April 7, 21, May 5, 19, and June 2, 16  
1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.  
Liz Santana • 917-608-7220  
Elizabeth.Santana@vnsny.org

### *Special Topic (see back panel)*

### Grief and Dreams

Wednesdays • June 8, 22, July 6, 20  
6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.  
Willis Partington • 718-715-5320  
Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

# Bereavement Services Spring/Early Summer 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 • April 25, May 23, June 27, July 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

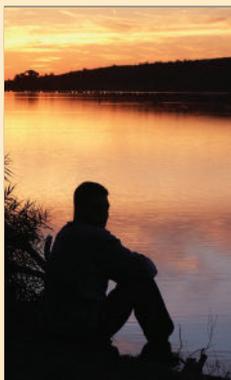
Wednesdays • April 13, May 11, June 8, July 13  
1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.  
Pamela Yew Schwartz • 347-831-1811  
Pamela.Schwartz@vnsny.org



#### Workshop Testimonial

"The group lets me express myself and reminds me that I am not alone in my grieving."

—P.G.



#### Workshop Testimonial

"I didn't know I could survive the grief I felt until I found the wisdom and caring of the group."

— E. G.

## Focused Groups

### LGBTQ+ and Allies Bereavement Group

Thursdays • TBD  
4:00 p.m.—5:00 p.m..  
Jean Metzker • 917-331-7819  
Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org  
Text or email preferred

### For Adults Grieving the Death of a Parent

Tuesdays • TBD  
2:00 p.m.—3:30 p.m.  
Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929  
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

### For Adults Grieving the Death of a Spouse or Partner

Mondays • May 9, 16, 23, and June 6, 13, 20  
5:30 p.m.—7:00 p.m.  
Mary Kay King • 646-627-4618  
MaryKay.King@vnsny.org



#### Workshop Testimonial

"Even with Zoom we can speak freely, safely, and from our hearts."

— N.D.



#### Workshop Testimonial

"The group gives me a safe place to tell my story and learn from others."

—W.B.



VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care  
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 7th Floor  
 New York, NY 10017

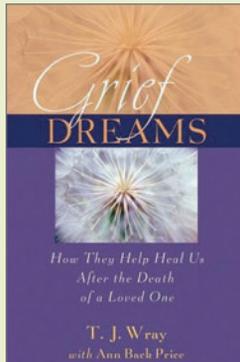
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**LOOK INSIDE FOR:**  
**Spring/Early Summer 2022**  
**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**— Grief and Dreams Workshop Series —**

**I**t is not unusual to have dreams about loved ones who have died. Sometimes the dreams are comforting and reassuring. Other dreams may be puzzling or even have content that is frightening or traumatic. While the meaning of some dreams may be quite clear, many dreams are seemingly haphazard or random.

Over four Zoom sessions this spring and summer, there will be the opportunity for you to learn more about dreams and their unique visual and symbolic language. Together we will read the book *Grief Dreams: How They Help Heal Us After the Death of a Loved One*. In addition to learning about dreams, we will also learn about other ways to harness the power of the unconscious in healing from loss.



The only requirements for participating in this workshop series are purchasing a copy of the book and reading it over the course of eight weeks. Written for people who are grieving, the language of the book is simple and easy to absorb. There is no requirement to have any dreams either before, during, or after the workshop sessions. However, many people find that reading about dreams and talking about dreams does tend to stimulate dreaming.

**If you are interested in registering or have questions, you can e-mail me at [Willis.Partington@vnsny.org](mailto:Willis.Partington@vnsny.org) or call me at 718-715-5320.**



**Seasons of Life**

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

For more information, please contact me:

[Willis.Partington@vnsny.org](mailto:Willis.Partington@vnsny.org) or call me at 718-715-5320