

Living with Grief in a (Mostly) Post-Pandemic World

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

The Fourth of July has always seemed to me like the midpoint of summer. This year, it may also mark the beginning of yet another phase of the pandemic. While not exactly a return to the way things were before, it is a return to some things that are familiar yet strangely new. You probably have experienced the sensation of walking outside without a mask and being able to smell your surroundings. Feeling the sun and the summer breeze on your face are still unfamiliar yet welcome. At the same time, masks may have to go back on if you go inside in a public space. The uncertainty of what the future holds for the pandemic in some ways mirrors the unknowns we often face when we are grieving.

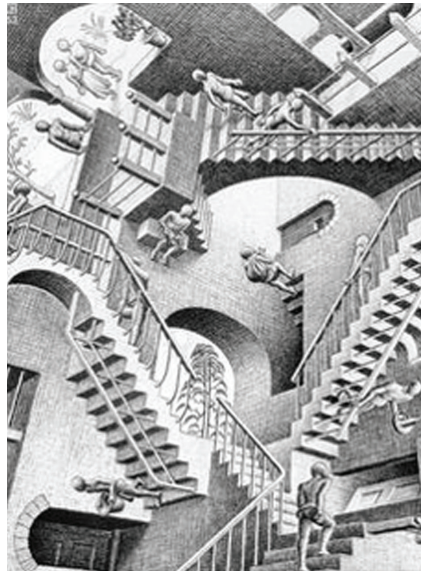
What does it mean to be grieving the loss of a loved one as the world around us is moving again into a time of re-opening, re-uniting and re-starting while the uncertainty of another surge remains? You may be traveling, seeing family and friends, going to places you have not been to in what seems like forever. Yet while there may be joy in these steps to a more normal and free existence, there is pain in the reality that your loved one is not here to experience this with you. Concert venues, stadiums and restaurants are now open to full capacity. What should be a time of celebration, fireworks and summer activities may only accentuate the absence of your loved one and your grief can resurface at unexpected times.

In this season of return to some aspects of life as we knew it before, what can we do to help us cope with our summer grief? As with the heat, one option is to try to get away from it. While it may not be possible, or even wise, to avoid our grief altogether, there may be some activities

that offer a respite from grief or a gentle way to express our feelings. Keeping a journal might be like sipping a cool drink. It is a way to release what is inside you a little bit at a time. It can also be a way to communicate with your loved one in a different manner, perhaps reporting on the events of the day or framing your writing as a letter. If you were to put on some relaxing music or possibly read a poem or something you find inspirational, that might be like the calming effects of being at the beach, feeling the warm sun and smelling the salt air. Attending a support group or workshop via Zoom can be like walking into an air-conditioned space, being together with others who are seeking a respite from the grief that surrounds you on all sides. A healing grief dream, perhaps offering a moment of reunion with your loved one, can be like an unexpected cool breeze. A wave of tears may come and be like a cleans-

ing thunderstorm which breaks the humidity and cools the air. Grief can also have its ups and downs, ebbs and flows, like the way that a blazing hot summer day gives way to a more bearable summer night.

The author T.J. Wray writes that “The key to untying the knot of acute grief is through finding meaning in your loss.” She goes on to provide some examples of what finding



“The key to untying the knot of acute grief is through finding meaning in your loss.”

—T.J. Wray, author

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meaning may look like. It could be outdoor activities like planting a tree or creating a flower garden in memory of your loved one. Other ideas might be putting together a scrapbook with photos and other memorabilia or creating a video memorial, perhaps set to music. Devoting your time and energy to a cause important to your loved one is a way to help others and honor your loved one's life and legacy at the same time.



These are just a few suggestions, and you can use your imagination to come up with other ways to cope that are unique to you and your relationship with your loved one. Whatever works for you, do it. Please know that just as with the summer heat, cooler temperatures will eventually come. Your grief will change just as the seasons change.

I continue to get questions about when we will be offering in-person groups and workshops again. This may not happen until sometime in the fall. Our office at 220 East 42nd Street now has several "Zoom Rooms" that will allow for a hybrid group format for both face-to-face and remote participation. Please be patient as we slowly move towards this new way of meeting with each other. I do look forward to a time when we can be together again as we were before. I hope to see you then!



Sincerely,

Willis Partington

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

**To learn more about
VNS Health Hospice Care, go to:**

**[https://www.vnshealth.org/hospice-care/
emotional-support-services/
grief-support-groups/](https://www.vnshealth.org/hospice-care/emotional-support-services/grief-support-groups/)**

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Dear Friend-in-Grief,

It was a pink, plaid, wool coat, with a big shawl collar, that belted at the waist. My mother, Omi, wore it with such flair. Although she was not tall, she gave a tall impression as she carried herself with such erect stature. She had been effortlessly slim and, oh, so graceful. I was there when she bought this coat. My oldest son, A., would take his grandmother shopping before the holidays. His grandmother had been widowed for many years and he lovingly stepped in to fill the void to the best of his abilities. I had joined them for that particular trip to Loehmann's. A. would scan the racks and he would select the items for Omi to try on. She trusted him. It was A. who found this coat and ran over to Omi with his find. Omi loved color, she loved life. She enjoyed this coat and she absolutely adored A.

Omi died six months ago. I'm in the process of cleaning out her apartment. Yesterday, a lovely young woman, a friend of a friend, came over. Like my mother, she, too, is very slim, and would easily fit into my mother's beautiful, elegant clothes. She went through the racks and selected a number of suits. I showed her the coat closet and she selected this pink plaid coat. It was heart wrenching for me. That coat is love personified. I asked her to model the coat for me. She did. She tied the belt jauntily and she looked terrific. With tears rolling down my cheeks, I explained to her what that coat meant to me. I assured her that I was thrilled that she would be wearing it and enjoying it. Why should this coat just sit in the closet and gather dust? Why should it go to a totally anonymous person?

Yet, when I arrived home, I immediately called A. We both cried over the phone. "A.," I asked him, "should I ask for the coat back?" We discussed it and decided that, no, let her wear it in good health and with our blessings. Let others benefit from my mother's (and A.'s!) sense of beauty, and let her extreme generosity live on.

My mother had been ill for 10 years with emphysema. She had been exceedingly ill, on hospice care for almost two years. A dear friend pointed out that upon her death I had been probably relieved that it was over, for her sake and for mine. She was ready to go and told me so repeatedly. At this point, though, the relief has been replaced with the pain of her loss. I do miss her so. Yet, I know she's in a better place. I thank G-d that I had such an incredible mother who bonded with her grandchildren so beautifully, and who taught me so much about life, planting within me with a huge appreciation for beauty and joy.

May her memory be a blessing for all.
M.

Tiempo de Cambio y Claridad Para el Camino del Duelo

Por Rocío Lorena Ruiz, LMHC, Consejera de Duelo*

Indiscutiblemente se avecina un verano con tiempos de cambio. El virus va cediendo y debilitándose. Nos despojamos de las mascarillas con una sensación de triunfo, pues hemos convivido y sobrevivido a esta pandemia que puso en jaque nuestras vidas. Hemos ganado resiliencia y nos corresponde reinventarnos para el futuro.



Con la pandemia hemos desarrollado nuevas estrategias de enfrentamiento y cada uno de nosotros ha moldeado esas estrategias de acuerdo con las situaciones personales. Cada uno ha lidiado con tiempos adversos en el invierno de su corazón, se ha nutrido de coraje para alcanzar una primavera de esperanza y ahora todos anhelamos el confort de las brisas del verano. Nuestro corazón esta afligido porque perdimos a un ser que amábamos mucho. La pérdida parece intolerable y necesitamos ganar claridad y perspectiva para atravesar este duelo.

Aquí algunas sugerencias útiles:

- **Deje fluir sus emociones.** Usted experimentará una serie de emociones negativas como tristeza, dolor, enojo, frustración, culpa, por mencionar algunas. Tal vez experimente una detrás de otra o varias de ellas a la misma vez. Ocasionalmente, sentirá emociones positivas como serenidad o alegría. Durante el duelo es natural que las emociones se presenten como un torbellino descontrolado y sin dirección fija. Por ello, es importante nombrarlas, reconocerlas y entenderlas. Una vez identificadas, Usted podrá canalizarlas y ajustarlas de la mejor manera. Con la alternancia de emociones, Usted aliviará la intensidad de las emociones negativas y obtendrá más momentos de tranquilidad y descanso. Sea paciente y comprensivo consigo mismo y los demás. Entendamos que hay otros que también están pasando por duelo.
- **Siéntase convencido y satisfecho de lo que hizo por su ser querido.** Usted tuvo la misión y el privilegio de cuidar a esa persona tan querida hasta su final. Usted

se esforzó por atenderlo, a sabiendas que la enfermedad seguía progresando y no había cura posible. Usted lidió simultáneamente con situaciones personales, familiares, laborales además del peso abrumador de la pandemia. Usted demostró un desempeño extraordinario en medio de las circunstancias. Su ser querido debe haberse sentido agradecido, amado y protegido. Siéntase feliz y bendecido de haber conocido, compartido y cuidado a esa persona tan especial. a esa persona tan especial.

- **Reconozca y respete su duelo pero aligere su carga.**

El camino del duelo es sumamente demandante y desafiante. Déjese acariciar por las suaves brisas e hidrátese para sobrevivir al sol abrasador. Adopte una actitud saludable y equilibrada para mantener sentido de control. Cuide su cuerpo y mente, haga ejercicio, coma y duerma lo suficiente. Manténgase vinculado, establezca rituales y actividades que le proporcionen confort y serenidad. Conéctese con su lado espiritual, medite, y fomente nuevas formas de honrar la vida del ser que partió y su significancia en su propia vida. Recuerde, no hay falta de respeto en tener momentos de relax o alegría. Aproveche esas ocasionales brisas y lluvias veraniegas para refrescarse, fortalecerse y reconstruir el sentido de su propia vida.



En VNS Health lo acompañamos por 13 meses contados a partir de la pérdida en su propio idioma. Contáctenos. Estamos aquí para Usted.

- **Rocio Lorena Ruiz, email Rocio.Ruiz@vnsny.org Cel 3474392695**

Living Mindfully

By Jean Metzker, Ph.D., Bereavement Counselor

“When we are open to let go of things that haunt us, we begin to free up space for kindness and curiosity to move into some of the space that the *Letting Go* provides.”

Beginning Anew

Real love includes those who are difficult, unkind and/or hostile and aggressive. If we do not do the work to find love and compassion in ourselves it will be too much of a challenge to us to hold the loving space for others. Practicing harmony of speech and views allows us to breathe when confronted with unpleasant feelings arising toward another person. Deep practice noticing how and when these feelings arise here and now prepares us to meet challenging people with equanimity. How to begin ‘anew’ is the question then, isn’t it?

We use the following skills to help with the practice such as deep listening, meditation, living mindfully, and a rose or pebble to remind us to follow the breath. To unravel the knots of anger, annoyance, sadness, and jealousy we need to understand ourselves and each other.

Deep Listening and Loving Speech

As I was walking down the stairs in the subway there was a young man sitting on the stairs with belongings strewn around him. People were avoiding him, but I needed the railing as I was descending so I stayed closer. He looked up and yelled “the hair! The hair! It’s turquoise!!! It’s turquoise, right?” I laughed and said back to him “Yes, it is—Thank you for noticing.” I stopped and was able to actually see and hear him instead of just keep on walking. I was able to see his joy and whatever else was there in him. It was my opportunity to be present with someone else and briefly connect. The following mantra is the gift I then gave to him from my mind.

Love Meditation

We begin this mindful meditation practice by looking deeply at what feeling arises regarding ourselves until we are able to love ourselves. Then we can be open to people we like, the people with whom we have neutral feelings. Then we can open to people we love. After we have practiced deeply, we finally are able to practice with love on someone that the thought of makes us struggle.



Love Meditation

May I be peaceful, happy,
and light in body and spirit.

May he/she/they be peaceful, happy,
and light in body and spirit.

May I be safe and free from injury.
May he/she/they be safe and free from injury.

May I be free from anger, afflictions,
fear, and anxiety.

May he/she/they be free from anger, afflictions,
fear, and anxiety.

— Adapted from *Teachings on Love*, 1997
Thich Nhat Hanh (from Visuddhimagga)

The beginning of this practice strongly suggests we look deeply into **form**, which is our **body**, and also, **feelings**, **perceptions**, **thoughts**, and **consciousness**. As we do this, we become more aware of ourselves and who we really are. By learning about ourselves, we can gain such insight into our responses before we act. That is one way to not have to seek forgiveness.

Living Mindfully

I facilitate a Zoom group that includes people who have spouses, mothers and fathers who have died during the past three years. They are an often-marginalized group of people. They are all in the LGBTQ+ community. Together, they have brought joy and peace to each other. Sometimes I see them lean into each other as they are talking and listening to each other. Even from the distances from which they come each has found closeness and comradeship. They mindfully attend to each other, respond with dignity and respect understanding the loss that each holds in their hearts.

Living mindfully is being present at each moment with each person, each species, each object. Lovingly we can wash dishes, eat our food, walk a walk, walk with purpose with our minds on our steps and breath. It is significant to notice the feelings that arise. We are present so that we see amidst anger, aversion, sadness that the other person, even if he/she/they are behaving poorly, is suffering. We forgive so we can carry space within us to not carry in us other’s indiscretions. Our mind in one place with thoughts traveling their own journey unavailable to be present with our body and body sensations, and our body in another is not mindful living. Bringing body and mind into unity is living mindfully.

Comments and Suggestions

E-mail: Jean.Metzker@vnsny.org

Bereavement Services Summer / Early Fall 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** •

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

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

Bereavement Creative Arts Support Group

Each meeting will focus on the grief journey of group members, as told through use of the creative arts (no artistic skills required and a list of suggested art materials for each session will be provided).

Thursdays • July 14, September 22, October 20

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

• **July 16 – Self-Care and Rituals**

• **July 23 – Reiki**

• **July 30 – Mindfulness Meditation and Labyrinth Walk**

10:30 – 11:30 am

6:00 p.m.—7:30 p.m.

Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929

Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org

Saturday Matinee

A monthly film series to support you in the grieving process

Saturdays • Dates TBD

1:30 p.m.—3:00 p.m.

Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929

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



How Long Does Grief Last?

Thursday • October 6

6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

Willis Partington • 718-715-5320

Willis.Partington@vnsny.org

Fall Labyrinth Walk

Saturday • October 15

9:30 a.m.

Debra Oryzysyn • 212-609-1929

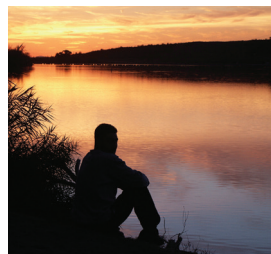
Debra.Oryzysyn@vnsny.org



Workshop Testimonial

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

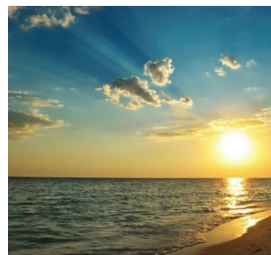
—W.B.



Workshop Testimonial

“Being able to listen and share my deepest feelings with a group of peers was healing.”

—E.G.



Workshop Testimonial

“During this scary pandemic time, the group gave me comfort, understanding, wisdom, and even moments of joy!”

—E.R.

Bereavement Services Summer / Early Fall 2022 Calendar

Support Groups to Join

- Registration is required • Groups 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.

5:00 p.m.—6:00 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 Hospice Patient

This is a general loss group with meetings ongoing

Mondays July 11, 25, August 8, 22, September 12, 26, and October 10, 24

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 meetings ongoing

Wednesdays • July 6, 20, August 3, 17, September 7, 21, and October 5, 19

1:00 p.m.—2:30 p.m.

Janet King 646-341-0405

Janet.King@vnsny.org

For Adults Grieving the Death of a Loved One

Tuesdays • July 5, 19, August 2, 16, September 6, 20, and October 4, 18

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 • July 21, August 4, 18, September 1, 15, and October 6, 20

6:00 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.

Gladys Ortiz-Alvarado • 917-923-6288

Gladys.Ortiz-Alvarado@vnsny.org

Men Coping with Grief

Mondays • July 11, 25, August 15, 29, September 12, 19, and October 10, 24

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 • September 8, 22, October 6, 20

1:30 P.M. — 3:00 P.M.

Liz Santana • 917-608-7220

Elizabeth.Santana@vnsny.org



Workshop Testimonial

“When I was knocked out by grief the group got me back on my feet.”

—E.G.



Workshop Testimonial

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

—N.D.

Bereavement Services Summer / Early Fall 2022 Calendar

Support Groups to Join

- **Registration is required • Groups take place via phone or Zoom •**

Monthly Groups

For Adults Grieving the Death of a Brother or Sister

Mondays • July 25, August 22, September 26,
and October 24

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

Wednesdays July 13, August 10, September 14,
and October 12

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 • TBD

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 • 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 • October 17, 24, 31 and November 7, 14, 21

5:30 p.m.—7:00 p.m.

Mary Kay King • 646-627-4618

MaryKay.King@vnsny.org

Special Topic

Art as a Pathway to Healing

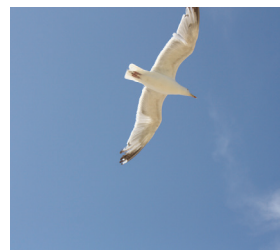
Thursdays • TBD

11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.



This fall, the Museum of Modern Art, in Partnership with **VNS Health Hospice 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 **VNS Health Hospice Care** and participated in the bereavement program. First time participants will be given priority. For more information or **to register e-mail primetime@moma.org**.



Workshop Testimonial

“My journey through the grieving process is evolving with the help and support of our Men’s Group.” —E.G.



Workshop Testimonial

“The professional group leaders do their work with great wisdom and caring.” —E.G.

LOOK INSIDE FOR: Summer-Early Fall 2022 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

A Memorial Weaving

Woven from pieces of fabric cut from shirts, blouses, scarves, dresses or other personal items of individuals who died, **A Memorial Weaving** was begun at **VNS Health Hospice Care** in September 2007. Inspired by a similar endeavor of the Hynes Hospice in Wichita, Kansas and developed locally by Janet King, **VNS Health Hospice Care** Bereavement

Counselor, the **Weaving** is designed as a continuous memorial with new additions each year. As an expressive arts therapist, Ms. King is keenly aware of the power of a weaving which brings torn cloth together to make something new—it symbolizes and joins the love and loss of so many families. Bereaved family members are welcome to send fabric cuttings any time of the year to Ms. King, so



A special weaving that's become a continuous memorial

they can be incorporated into the **Weaving**. A strip of fabric is ideal, but you are welcome to send whatever you have. Buttons, gloves, patches and other items have been added to the **Weaving** in the past. To contact Janet King, especially if you have questions about what to send, please call her: 646-341-0405 or email her: Janet.

King@vnshealth.org or write to her at: **VNS Health Hospice Care**, 220 East 42nd Street, 7th floor, New York, NY 10017. We hope to be able to offer our annual memorial service both in person and via Zoom this year. Ms. King will continue work on the Weaving this fall as circumstances allow. Photos and finished versions of **The Memorial Weaving** will be shown as part of the **VNS Health Hospice Care Memorial Service, scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 23, 2022**. It will be displayed during the rest of the year at the VNS Health Hospice Care administrative offices in Manhattan.