

Calvary in Touch

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**CALVARY
HOSPITAL**

Where Life Continues

Thanking Michael Camara



We are so pleased with the positive comments we have received about this newsletter. The bereavement newsletter has been a long time dream of ours, and it was made possible by a generous bequest from Michael Camara. Michael died on June 28, 2006.

Michael had been an active member of our bereavement support group, helping others as he himself journeyed through his grief process. Even after he was diagnosed with cancer, he continued to come and participate in our groups. His death has left a void, and we remember him as the

compassionate and loving person that he was. Michael's wife, Karen, is an incredible woman who took such amazing care of him. I would like to share her comments:

"Michael was my mate, soulmate, and best friend. We met as teenagers and spent four years together. After separating, we reunited.

"We learned the hard way that sharing dying and death is an intimacy that far exceeds any other. Michael and I treasured every day together, even the bad ones.

"It was a privilege for me to care for him to the end.

Michael would say this was unfair to me, thanking me for all I did every day and always trying to hide his pain. This only reaffirmed everything I was doing. Michael was always taking care of others and he deserved someone to take care of him.

"Friends tell me I was lucky to have had Michael and such an incredible love. Although I will always miss him, I have to admit they are right."

Dr. Sherry R. Schachter,
Director of Bereavement Services

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Sibling Loss: No Small Thing

With smaller and scattered families, our neighbors ignore the importance of a death of a sister or brother (outside their family!). But who knows us longer or better than a sister or brother? Somehow people seem to feel that parents and children are close enough to be deeply hurt by loss, but brothers and sisters should "get over it." Tell that to someone who has lost their lifelong best buddy!

Many things can affect the way a sibling grieves: Was this a "best friendship," a strong competitor, a lost opportunity? Surviving siblings may have a hard time allowing themselves to mourn, especially when their loss began in childhood.

If you watched the movie "*Ordinary People*", you saw a young man ignored by his parents while they mourned the death of his older

brother. In their pain, these parents did not adequately support their surviving son. He felt guilt, depression, powerlessness, and a sense of not belonging.

As children and teens, our identities may be tangled in many family forces:

- Are we too young to speak up and express our grief?
- Are we afraid of who might die next?
- Do we take responsibility for something we can't bear in order to make some sense of it?
- Do we feel abandoned by the deceased or by our grieving family?

Calvary is committed to providing support for anyone grieving a sister or brother:

- Our newest adult group this year is for adult siblings on Wednesdays at 6:15 PM in the Bronx. Call Bruce Page at (718) 518-2196 for more information.
- Precious Moments (children 6-11) and two Teen Bereavement Groups (ages 12-18) meet each week and provide a space in which children and youth can share their loss and love of major life figures like parents, siblings, and grandparents. Speak to Maria Georgopoulos for more information at (718) 518-2370.

Helping Children Grieve



Imagine that you are in a place where almost everyone speaks French and you cannot speak a word of it. You try to find someone who speaks both languages to translate for you, but some are busy with the day while others motion as best they can that they can't help. You're also unfamiliar with the proper etiquette and subtle differences of this world you have somehow entered.

Expressing yourself here is very different from other places you've visited. You eventually grow tired and hungry, annoyed that you don't know where the restaurants are. Somehow you find someone who understands your hand gestures and points you in the right direction. You find the nearest restaurant and realize that the menu is written in French. You realize how difficult it will be for you to get your needs met here, without some help from someone who knows this place, or, at the very least, someone willing to teach you the language so you can navigate your way through.

Children do not know the language of grief. They are often given little information about what is happening as caregivers are often unsure of how to explain death to children or believe it's helpful to protect children from the reality of death.

Be honest without using difficult language that the child won't understand. Focus on what happens to the person's body by saying that the body has stopped working and that when someone dies they no longer feel pain, hunger, or anything else.

Children are often confused when caregivers use the idea of heaven to explain death. Affirm the religious/spiritual beliefs of the family, but

also teach the difference between what happens physically and what you as a caregiver believe happens spiritually.

Don't be afraid to talk to children about death. It isn't selfish for them to ask "who will take care of me now?" As "little" people they are aware of their limitations, and the world looks scary when they imagine that the person who has cared for them will no longer be there. Tell the child who will be caring for them, in the event that their loved one can't or has died.

Children need to find ways to honor their loved ones. They appreciate



adults taking time to explain what a funeral will be like and deciding together about whether or not the child should attend the funeral. Here are some helpful phrases: "There will be something called a casket that's a rectangular box in the front of the room which will have mommy's body inside of it," and "if you need to leave when we get there because it's too much for you, cousin John has volunteered to take you for a walk." Allow them to bring a picture to put out that day or pick the outfit the deceased will have on.

There are many ways to help a child express their grief.

- Simply being with a child who's crying and offering a hug or a stuffed animal is a tremendous help.
- If a child feels angry, teach the child ways to express anger such as scribbling it out, punching a pillow, or using clay.
- Be patient as they struggle with fears of dying, which may make them especially needy. Repeated reassurance should ease this fear in time.

It may be that the language of grief is unfamiliar to you as an adult but a willingness to learn it together with a child would show a tremendous amount of respect for your own as well as their grief journey.

"If you are old enough to love, you are old enough to grieve."



Calvary Nursing Team Celebrates Our Children's Courage



When one works as a nurse at Calvary, there are many memorable moments. For Veronica Ruffin-Ellis, a Patient Service Manager, one patient's young child had a profound impact on her.

In August 2008, a patient was admitted into the care of Calvary's 6th floor nursing team. The patient, a woman in her mid-20s, had two children, a 7-year old named *Sharona**, and her 2-year old half-sister, *Regina**. The life of the patient's own biological family was chaotic at best and she was not receiving the support she needed from them.

The patient's terminal diagnosis prompted *Tammy**, the female cousin of *Regina*'s father, to obtain custody of both children. *Tammy*, was doing her best to make sure that both children visited their mother during her stay at Calvary.

On one of these visits, Veronica volunteered to take *Sharona* for a walk around the hospital. Children often do not have a clear understanding of their parent's pending death. *Sharona* showed Veronica that she did.

"I was totally unprepared when *Sharona* peppered me with questions that day," recalled Veronica. "She wanted to know who was going to help her get prepared for the beginning of school? Who would buy diapers for her little sister? Did Mommy get sick because she and her sister had been naughty? Mommy had promised her a "Mommy-daughter" day. Who was now going to make that happen?"

Veronica could feel the tears well up in her eyes as she listened to this 7-year-old pour her heart out. Over the next few weeks, Veronica made sure to buy a sturdy schoolbag for *Sharona* and fill it with all the things she would need for school, as well as clothing and "girly essentials."

"At my September staff meeting, I shared *Sharona*'s story with my staff," said Veronica. "I suggested that my entire 6th floor nursing team-in lieu of our annual holiday party-use the money to support the 40 children who attend Calvary's year-round bereavement support groups. Our goal was to host a "Celebration of Courage" party right before the holidays and give each of the 40 children a gift bag.

"Not only did my nursing team unanimously approve this suggestion, we also got the support of other employees who worked on my floor-nurses, social workers, housekeeping, etc."

Over the next three months, the team sold candy, hosted a successful bake sale, and collected straight cash donations in their fundraising drive. The nursing team even decided to set aside \$10 per pay period per person for several months to help fund their efforts.

"By December, my team was able to proudly look at the \$1,300 we had

raised. Now we were ready to go shopping!" said Veronica.

"After obtaining the names, gender, and ages of all the Calvary children, we assembled all of the gift bags. Each contained a winter hat, gloves, scarf, and a gift card either to Toys R Us or Old Navy-depending on the recipients' age."

On December 19, all of the children attended a "Celebration of Courage" in their honor. If one were to acknowledge the success of the event by the smile-meter, there was no question how much joy the 6th floor nursing team brought to the children and their families.

What's next for the 6th floor team? Veronica has her eye on a summer 2009 "Learning is Key" back-to-school drive. The staff is looking forward to buying sturdy schoolbags and filling them with school supplies for all of the Calvary children. Stay tuned for more details!!

**Names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals involved.*

Monthly Calendar (All bereavement groups are free and open to the community)

- **Bronx Day Group for Parents Whose Adult Child Has Died (Sherry Schachter)**
Every Monday from 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM
- **Brooklyn Day Spouse Group (Bruce Page)**
Every Monday from 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
- **Precious Moments (Bronx) (Maria Georgopoulos)**
Groups for children, ages 6-11 years, Monday afternoons. 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
- **Brooklyn Evening Group for Adults Whose Parents Have Died (Bruce Page)**
Every Monday from 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
- **Teen Bereavement (Bronx) (Maria Georgopoulos)**
Group for teens ages 12-18 years, meets Monday evenings. 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM
**New Group*
- **Bronx Spanish-Speaking General Bereavement Group (Yovani Santiago)**
Every other Monday. Please contact Yovani at 718-518-2569
- **Bronx Day Spouse Group (Bruce Page)**
Tuesdays from 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM
- **Next Steps (Bronx) (Sherry Schachter)**
Every other Tuesday from 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM
- **Bronx Young Spouse Group (Bruce Page)**
Every Tuesday from 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
- **Bronx Evening Group for Adults Whose Parents Have Died (Maria Georgopoulos)**
Every Tuesday from 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
- **Teen Bereavement (Bronx) (Maria Georgopoulos)**
Groups for teens ages 12-18 years, meets Wednesday afternoons. 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
- **Bronx Evening Group for Bereaved Adult Siblings (Bruce Page)**
Every Wednesday from 6:15 PM - 7:45 PM
**New group*
- **Monthly Christian Memorial Service**
Bronx--Saturday, March 14 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM
Saturday, April 11 2:30 PM - 4:00 PM
Brooklyn
Sunday, March 29 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
- **Jewish Memorial Services**
Bronx -- Sunday, April 19 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM
- **Friday Matinee (Bronx)**
Friday, March 13 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

“All that Heaven Allows”
This classic movie stars Rock Hudson as a gardener who woos a middle-age widow (Jane Wyman) despite the disapproval of her friends and family. Wyman discovers a new life with his open-armed friends and back-to-nature lifestyle, but struggles with life-changing decisions in the face of social pressure and vicious gossip.
- **Friday Matinee (Bronx)**
There will be no April matinee due to Good Friday.

SAVE THE DATE

Join us on Tuesday, May 5th from 5:00 PM-6:30 PM for a workshop on “Remembering Our Parents.”
Please call (718) 518-2173 for more details.

Key Contacts in Calvary’s Bereavement Department

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