

# Calvary in Touch

## Greetings

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Now that the winter holidays are behind us, we may be able to breathe a sigh of relief. The holidays were hard. They may have been harder than you thought they would be or perhaps you found that the anticipation was actually harder than the actual holiday. As with all holidays and events, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Each of us travels through this journey in our own way. It is important that we be respectful of other family members who may be grieving differently than the way we are.

As we begin to face the New Year without our loved one the reality becomes sharper. This will be a year of firsts. *How could it be that they were not be at our side on New Year's Eve?* As the rest of the world celebrates the arrival of 2018 you may not feel like celebrating. This certainly is not unusual; of course we don't feel like celebrating.

While this is a time to look ahead and not behind us, we cannot help remembering past events. We may recognize that our focus is not on celebrating but rather on recognizing the need for us to continue. We have choices and it is important for us to take control. We can choose to continue our healing recognizing that although painful, we *will* heal. We can choose to allow ourselves to cry or to feel whatever emotions we are feeling – anger, guilt, loneliness. Working through our grief brings healing. The best way to honor your loved one's memory is to live. To live fully and to appreciate the blessings that you have and the love that you've shared.

*Sherry Schachter, PhD., FT*  
*Director of Bereavement Services*

## Spotlight On: Sherry Schachter, PhD, FT, RN

When I was a child I had an older cousin, Shirley, who suffered from scleroderma – an incurable, rare, auto-immune disease that leads to hardening of the skin and connective tissue. Shirley was 21 when she died, I was 8. Watching her live with and die from that disease left an imprint on me. At a young age I saw just how painful living could be when you watch someone you love suffer. I also witnessed the grief that is every parent's nightmare.



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## *Spotlight On: Sherry Schachter, PhD, FT, RN*

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I knew I wanted to help people through their grief process.

I began my career late in life, finishing my Baccalaureate in Science of Nursing at 39 years old after one child was off to college and the others were all in school fulltime. While at John's Hopkins, on my internship, I had a patient who was dying from breast cancer. She was a poor inner city woman in her early 50s; a proud woman who never sought care for herself. I watched her and her family suffer. She couldn't engage with anyone including talking to her own children. She would just stare stoically at her hospital wall.

My first job was at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center as a staff nurse on a medical/surgical floor and within a few years I moved to head and neck oncology as a nursing manager. The nursing manager role became more administrative than I desired, and I found myself missing clinical care and I realized I wanted more patient and family contact. The Chief of Psychiatry, Dr Jimmie Holland, had become a mentor to me and she encouraged me to go for my masters and to switch from Nursing into the Department of Psychiatry. While going for my masters she named me a Fellow in Psychiatry where I was able to work with the medical team, going on patient rounds, facilitating bereavement groups and ultimately I co-founded the Psychiatry Home Care Program with Dr William Breitbart. This program provided psychological care for dying patients at home and their family members. Through continued support and mentoring from Dr Holland, I then went on for my PhD and eventually became the first Assistant Attending Grief Therapist.

In 2005 fate brought me to Calvary Hospital/Hospice. I was born and raised in the Bronx and always knew of Calvary but as a young Jewish girl, the daughter of a Polish immigrant, working at Calvary wasn't even a passing thought. I came to Calvary as the Director of Bereavement and soon learned that one of the core values of Calvary is non-abandonment.

This concept is important for dying patients who often express great concern about who will be there for their loved ones once they were gone and who would support them through their grieving. Calvary makes it clear that the care that Calvary provides is for the whole family and does not cease when the patient dies. We follow our families for 18 months.

In the past 13 years, we have developed new programs (including a young adult bereavement group for those between 18 and 25 years of age; a tween group for 10-12 year olds; meaning centered psychotherapy groups; and men's discussion groups). We have expanded our bereavement services to include our Calvary Hospital and Hospice families, as well as individuals in the larger community, in Brooklyn and Manhattan. All our groups are free and available to anyone in the community who has had a recent death. Camp Compass®, our annual weeklong summer camp for bereaved children, tweens, and teens continues to grow each summer. Additionally, we provide educational programs for clinicians (psychologists, social workers, therapists, educators, funeral directors etc.) working with bereaved children and adults.

What I have learned in my 13 years at Calvary is that grief cannot be met with a cookbook method. Each person is unique and requires a tailored approach whether they are dying or grieving. I have learned that empowering families in making end-of-life decisions can directly and positively impact their bereavement process by providing them with a sense of control during a period that is often out of control. I have learned the power of mentoring clinicians as I was once mentored; that guiding others to find the path that is right for them, and the opportunities that will lead them to be the most effective clinicians that they can be, benefits all.

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## *Spotlight On: Sherry Schachter, PhD, FT, RN*

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Above all, I have learned that the key to helping the dying and the bereaved has been having an Administration and Board that prioritizes bereavement in spite of living a world where cost centers rule and profitability governs what services are funded.

As I step down from my position as Director, I look forward to continuing my bereavement work at Calvary, focusing on special projects, research, writing and publishing, and of course, continuing to be a

mentor to our talented, professional, bereavement Counselors.

I thank the Calvary Administration and Board for recognizing my expertise and allowing me to flourish professionally by supporting my engagement in professional organizations such as the Association for Death Education, the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement and the National Widowers Organization.

## *Spotlight On: Grief and the New Year*

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### **So What Does a New Year Mean?**

When we are grieving, our tendency is to stand at the threshold of a new year looking back rather than forward. We fear that to walk through the door into a New Year means leaving our lost loved one behind. To move on seems like an act of betrayal or abandonment of the one we love. There may also be a fear of forgetting, or maybe a fear of letting go. We experience a contradiction: we want to feel better, but at what cost?

Remember, January 1<sup>st</sup> is just another day. It has no meaning or power except the meaning we choose to give to it. Acknowledging our special needs as grieving persons, we can choose to make softer resolutions for the New Year. Why not frame the New Year's resolutions in terms of hope for a gentler year; for gaining control of your emotions, for a better understanding of the grief process and what we can learn about ourselves as we journey through it? Why not resolve to enter into a future that can be good, even though it lacks all that we might desire, and offers a hope that we will be at peace with sorrow and enjoy life even though we grieve.

We've learned a lot this past year. We have

experienced personal grief. We know we are not the only ones who grieve, though sometimes we have felt all alone. And still we survive, even though at times we questioned if the struggle was worth it. We have tasted the bitterness of loss but have not allowed it to destroy us. And together we will rise out of the ashes of grief and say Yes to life. None of us can do it alone. We need each other to lean on and celebrate our newness.

Our hope for those in the throes of fresh grief is that someday your days will again bring you more joy, more music, more laughter, more gratitude, more friends, more surprises, more memories

***By Pat Schwiebert, R.N***

With more than thirty years of experience working with grieving individuals and groups, Pat is proud to be the founder and executive director of Grief Watch.

She also the author of many books, including *Tear Soup*, a recipe for healing after loss, *We Were Gonna Have a Baby...But Had An Angel Instead*, *When Hello Means Goodbye*, and has created a number of other resources to help those who are grieving.

## Events: *Holiday Party*

On Sunday, December 3rd our children and teens, along with their loved ones, traveled from Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx to gather at Calvary Hospital to celebrate the holidays together and with their favorite counselors!

The afternoon opened with the twinkling lights, wreaths, and trees strewn about the hospital as everyone was gathering to a greeting that read "Winter Wonderland!" Here, the families were given a cheerful "hello!" by counselors donning reindeer antlers. Throughout the room one could see all the activities that would fill the party: from gingerbread people decorations, to the human tree, and even a cocoa making station.



The wonder of this space was that it gave a chance for parents and guardians to connect with one another freely over their shared experiences, to converse, and bond over what it means to be in such a unique place.

While the children and teens rushed to play games, to meet new faces, and to simply be themselves: gobbling down cookies, laughing at silly adults who are covered from head to toe in toilet paper wreaths, and to relax with a good movie.



All in all, the day was filled with love, warmth, and a great deal of laughter which followed us all the way home.

*Brittany Dalbow, MHC-LP  
Bereavement Counselor*

# Monthly Calendar

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## BRONX GROUPS

Adult Death of a Child  
Wednesday: Rashida  
Every other Thursday: Sherry  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

Precious Moments  
for Children Ages 6-11  
Thursday: Rashida  
4:30pm - 5:45 pm  
6:00 pm - 7:15 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Tuesday: Raman  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm  
Tuesday: Andrew  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm  
Thursday: Amy  
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Spanish Speaking Group  
Monday: Yvette  
2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Young Adult Group  
Monday: Rashida  
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Teen Group Ages 12-17  
Tuesday: Rashida  
4:45 pm - 6:15 pm

Adult Death of a Parent  
Wednesday: Stephanie  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm  
Thursday: Raman  
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Death of a Sibling  
Tuesday: Raman  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Men's Discussion Group  
Every other Thursday: Sherry  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

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Calvary Hospital  
1740 Eastchester Road  
Bronx, NY 10461

## BROOKLYN GROUPS

Precious Moments  
for Children 6-9  
Monday: Lily  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm  
Tuesday: Maria  
4:00 p.m. - 5:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Tuesday: Maria  
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner  
Tuesday: Maria  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Young Adult Group  
Wednesday: Joanne  
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Adult Death of a Parent  
Monday: Joanne  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Sibling  
Tuesday: Joanne  
6:45 pm - 8:00 pm

Death of a Child  
Wednesday: Maria  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 12-17  
Wednesday: Maria  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm  
Thursday: Lily

In-Betweens Group Ages 10-12  
Thursday: Lily  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

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St. Joseph High School  
80 Willoughby Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

## MANHATTAN GROUPS

Precious Moments  
for Children 6-11  
Tuesday: Brittany  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Adult Death of a Parent  
Wednesday: Brittany  
5:30 pm - 6:45 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner  
Wednesday: Brittany  
7:00 pm - 8:15 pm  
Thursday: Brittany  
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 12-17  
Thursday: Brittany  
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

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St. Jean Baptiste High School  
173 East 75th Street  
New York, NY 10021

## MEMORIAL SERVICES

Bronx Christian  
January 13  
February 10

Bronx Jewish  
January 7

Brooklyn Christian  
TBA in the next issue

Brooklyn Jewish  
February 4

Manhattan Non-Denominational  
TBA in the next issue

*All groups are free & open to the community. Please call to schedule an appointment*

## Contacts

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Rashida Sanchez, MA	(718) 518-2370	rsanchez@calvaryhospital.org

## Tree of Life

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Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your loved one's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital.

This a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information on the Tree of Life, contact Sandrina Fernandez at **718-518-2039**.

*Calvary In Touch has been made possible by a generous bequest from Michael Camara*