

J U L Y - S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 1

# CALVARY IN TOUCH



## GREETINGS

We choose our romantic partners to walk alongside us as we face the world. They can be important sources of emotional bonding and wellness; possibly one of the closest, most intimate relationships a person has in their adult life. These relationships may have a particularly intense impact on who we are and how we develop over time. So when a partner dies, it is likely to be one of the most difficult experiences in a lifetime. Although grief due to a death is different from non-death losses, the experience of grief is not only reserved for the death of a partner... but any circumstance where that relationship and its future is lost.

Whatever way you would describe your relationship, it is a huge loss. Adjusting to life after a partner dies means so many different things to different people. It's probably a loss you feel daily with the empty chair at dinner, the increase in family responsibilities or in all the extra room in your bed at night. Give yourself the gift of space to grieve in your own way and at your own pace. Take a closer look at what care for yourself means during the hardest parts of this grief journey and try to make a commitment to increase your compassion for yourself right now. We offer you in this edition, voices of those who have experienced the death of a partner in life, and their experience through it.

Maria Georgopoulos, LMHC, FT  
Director of Bereavement Services



**CALVARY  
HOSPITAL**

*Where Life Continues*

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# DR. SHERRY SCHACHTER TO RETIRE IN AUGUST

After 16 years, Dr. Sherry Schachter, who has led the bereavement department first as director, increasing the capacity and reach of adult and children's programming, and then as executive director emerita, is retiring from Calvary Hospital this August.

Without question, Dr. Schachter has left her imprint on the hospital, whether shaping the Annual Bereavement Course for Clinicians, now in its 29th year, or expanding Calvary's Bereavement Services beyond the Bronx to Manhattan and Brooklyn. She contributed to making Camp Compass® a richer experience for children by incorporating a variety of activities that allowed children to experience their grief while allowing them to just be kids.

Dr. Schachter has contributed to the fields of thanatology and palliative care in multiple and significant ways, including service to the Association of Death Education and Counseling since 1988, serving on nearly 20 committees during her tenure and as president in 2005-2006; 1st Vice President (2004-2005), and 2nd Vice President (2003-2004). She also received ADEC's Service Award in 2010.

A gifted clinician, educator, mentor, and writer, Dr. Schachter has influenced how medical professionals, clinicians, and the bereaved think and talk about grief. Her work has been published internationally, and her latest

chapter "Grief Following Extended Illness," a collaboration with Geok Ling Lee, Ph.D., RSW, FT, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore and Gilbert Fan, DProf, FAPA, RSW, Advisor & Master Medical Social Worker; Psychotherapist (Satir), Department of Psychosocial Oncology, National Cancer Centre Singapore will appear in the latest edition of the *Handbook of Thanatology* (to be published later this year). This latest chapter is just one of her many contributions to the field appearing in among dozens of journals devoted to psycho-oncology, palliative care, and death studies.



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# DR. SHERRY SCHACHTER TO RETIRE IN AUGUST, continued...

She has lectured in Taiwan and Poland, and has shared her expertise at some of New York's most prominent hospitals, including Mount Sinai, Memorial Sloan Kettering, and Columbia Presbyterian. Prior to becoming a leader in the grief and bereavement field, Dr. Schachter began her career as a nurse, and spent much of her nursing career working with patients living with cancer or AIDS.

"Sherry's hard work and dedication show that helping people through their grief is a great illustration of our core value of non-abandonment," said Frank A. Calamari, President and CEO of Calvary Hospital.

A devoted wife, mother, grandmother, sister, and quilter, Dr. Schachter is retiring from Calvary, but not from her research and volunteer activities, which have kept her in the spotlight for decades. We are grateful for her commitment, leadership, and compassion and wish her all the best in this next chapter.



*"Sherry's hard work and dedication show that helping people through their grief is a great illustration of our core value of non-abandonment."*

*- Frank Calamari,  
President and CEO of  
Calvary Hospital*

WRITTEN BY  
R. Abby Spilka, MA, CT, LMHC  
Bereavement Counselor



# FORGING A NEW PATH FORWARD

I was completely unprepared for the sudden and unexpected death of my husband Nick. Losing a spouse strips you of a sense of wholeness; your partner and best friend, the person you always knew would be by your side suddenly isn't, and your whole world is upside-down. As feelings of anger, shock and guilt consumed my thoughts I found it hard to concentrate or think straight. It was sometimes hard to cry and other times hard to stop crying, it was hard to make a decision and at the same time hard to stop moving in a thousand directions at once. I felt like I'd lost all sense of balance and wondered if I'd ever feel secure again. This was the most frightening feeling of all as I had a son just entering his teen years and I knew he needed his only parent to be present.

My son and I both joined Calvary Bereavement Groups very soon after our loss and both recognized the safety of a community where we could express ourselves openly and honestly. For myself, I know that being with others who completely understood the magnitude of emotions I was feeling: sadness, disbelief, loneliness, confusion, (the list goes on and is a very long one) was comforting. With Rashida as our caring facilitator, over time there was a sense of gaining stability and balance in my life.

*"It was sometimes hard to cry and other times hard to stop crying, it was hard to make a decision and at the same time hard to stop moving in a thousand directions at once."*

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# FORGING A NEW PATH FORWARD, continued...

My son had a similar experience in his weekly Tween group with Abby. An awareness that similar emotions were felt by the others in our groups gave both of us the strength and confidence we needed to forge ahead on a path that would make Nick proud.

*"Gratitude takes on a whole new meaning after such a devastating loss – now every day is treated as a gift not to be wasted and every friendship is cherished more deeply."*

Friends and family and keeping honored traditions as well as starting new ones have all been a part of the healing process. Gratitude takes on a whole new meaning after such a devastating loss – now every day is treated as a gift not to be wasted and every friendship is cherished more deeply. Even the smallest show of care or concern is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated. The resilience of my son sometimes astonishes me. While I know there will always be quiet moments of missing dad as well as milestones that will never be the same without his presence, school and friends for a teen thankfully overshadow sadness when there is a whole life ahead waiting to be lived. Knowing this is my greatest blessing.

My son and I are fortunate to have a supportive circle and we both feel the powerful guiding purpose of Nick with every step we take. After nearly three years, feelings of overwhelming grief from the loss of my husband will hit me when I least expect them ... except now I understand that this is a part of my grieving "process" and I use this time and space to remember and honor Nick. I am thankful for the 29 years we had together and grateful for the countless ways that he enriched our lives.

WRITTEN BY

Fran M.

Bereavement Group Member

# AN ACROSTIC POEM FOR GORDON

**G**orgeous, gregarious, and super hilarious  
**O**utgoing and showing his knowledge and knowing  
**R**hythmic, a dancer, a true life enhancer  
**D**aring, loved risk, a magical kiss  
**O**nly, solely, dedicating his love to me growing  
**N**everending charm and wit, a generous love that never quit



WRITTEN BY  
Victoria Spadacinni  
Bereavement Group Member

# THOUGHTS ABOUT TIME AND SUPPORT

I now think I am a strong person with a solid mind. It did not feel that way sixteen months ago. Everything happened at once. The world and my freedom shut down in March 2020. My mom had been in a nursing home for eight years. I could not visit her. I lost her in August 2020. I broke up with my boyfriend of three years in May of 2020. I had to deal with three losses at once. With the help of Archcare and my wonderful therapist I was able to calm my emotions down and think more clearly. I came to understand each situation and deal with it. I am feeling better, focusing on staying calm, and knowing time will help.

WRITTEN BY  
Archcare Family Member



# TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Last night I had the strangest dream in the wee hours, the second that moved me to tears since Hope's death in February 2017.

This dream was a nightmare, so unlike that dream I had early on.

The first was a sorely needed gift, reassuring and comforting. Hope was suddenly a presence, sitting beside me on a narrow single bed in a small room, white plaster walls trimmed with rich dark wood so like our college dorm. She queried me, and though I feared that she would be sharply critical that I had failed to follow her marching orders to move ahead, she was remarkably patient and kind at what I shared, nodding somehow knowingly when I mentioned COVID. As the moment drew to a close, she caressed my shoulder, and I awoke, feeling her warmth, as I cried.

Last night's terrified. I was not simply dropped into my desolate desert of mourning, I found myself smack in the middle of a nightmarish mirage. As befits a mirage, everything was a bit blurred, shimmering as heat rising off hot desert sands.

I found myself in an apartment, a patchwork of all the ones we had ever lived in. Our daughters, here toddlers, sat on the leather couch as I stood facing Hope, seated in a tufted armchair.

Everything felt slightly out of kilter as I stood reeling, emotions roiling inside, filled with dread. Something I had done had been unforgivably wrong, but what it was I did not know. Hope glared across at me, so angry that I was certain she was going to leave me.

Dumbstruck, I couldn't think, no less speak an apology. Muscles frozen, I was unable to reach out to her across a divide where she appeared to be quite tangible, while I felt insubstantial, nothing more than a shadow that might pass her in the night.

Suddenly I was ripped from my sleep and dream, awakened, sprawled out across our bed. So lost and adrift, beyond bereft. I cried as waves of tears coursing down my cheeks. ... And I start weeping again even now, as I write these words.

This experience somehow felt familiar. Frantically scrolling through all the memories, I found it. This was an eerie reboot of *The Sixth Sense*. Here I was on the wrong side of the looking glass, alive and trying to reach through and touch the dead. I had been permitted, for an instant, to see but not touch her, and nothing more.

Then it hit me. My Hope was dead and gone. I would never again be allowed to embrace and tell her how much I loved her, not even for an instant.

*Continued on next page...*

# TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM, continued...

I had been sharply reminded that, in my not-too-distant future, all fairy tale fantasies of reunion banished, I would have to take my place in the land of the living.

Now, as to our dreams, let us know that we are not in charge. Our dreams' agency is a sprite, a personal 'Puck,' mischievous, id-ridden and cruel, who, at his whim, magically transports us where he will as we sleep, but then unceremoniously rips us away, dropping us back in our beds. And make no mistake, our Pucks use the utter paralysis of dream-stage sleep with a vengeance, with teeth-bared glee.

My Puck, your afterthought declaimed from life's stage, repairs not my shredded heart.

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended--  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend.  
If you pardon, we will mend.  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearned luck  
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,  
We will make amends ere long.  
Else the Puck a liar call.  
So good night unto you all.  
Give me your hands if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

*Midsummer Night's Dream*  
William Shakespeare

## POSTSCRIPT

All has unfolded just as it should, the two dreams bookending my first year of bereavement.

As per Jewish tradition, the souls of the dead are lights, like the flickering flames of candles. "The soul of man is the candle of G-d" (Proverbs, 20 verse 27).

The newly dead are said to hover near through the better part of the first year, and may briefly make themselves known to us, and perhaps offer warmth and solace, as Hope did with me. It is only as the first anniversary of their deaths approach that they truly depart, souls ascending, no longer accessible to us...

Later, at certain times, these souls may be given special dispensation to descend, their light drawn to the flickering lights of their Memorial Candles (and perhaps candles lit at other times), hovering by their beloved families.



WRITTEN BY  
Charlie E. Schwartz, M.D.  
Bereavement Group Member

# BRONX GROUPS

Resuming in September

## **Death of an Adult Child**

2nd, 3rd, & 4th Thursday: Joanne  
12:30PM - 2:00PM

## **Death of a Child**

Monday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM  
Wednesday: Jacqueline 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## **Adult Death of a Parent**

Thursday: Melanie 6:00PM - 7:30PM  
Thursday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## **Death of a Sibling**

Tuesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## **Death of a Spouse/Partner**

Tuesday: Joanne 1:00PM - 2:30PM

## **Death of a Young Spouse/Partner**

Wednesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## **Spanish Speaking Group**

Wednesday: Yvette 12:30PM - 2:00PM

## **Precious Moments (6-9 year-olds)**

Tuesday: Jacqueline 3:45PM - 5:00PM

## **Tweens (10-12 year-olds)**

Thursday: Jacqueline 5:30PM - 6:30PM

## **Teens (13-17 year-olds)**

Thursday: Jacqueline 4:30PM - 5:30PM

## **Men's Discussion Group**

1st Thursday: Samantha 12:30PM - 2:00PM



## CONTACT US

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# BROOKLYN GROUPS

Resuming in September

## Precious Moments (6-9 year-olds)

Tuesday: Rashida 4:00PM - 5:00PM

## Tweens (10-12 year-olds)

Tuesday: Samantha 4:00PM - 5:30PM

Thursday: Abby 4:00PM - 5:30PM

## Teens (13-17 year olds)

Wednesday: Rashida 4:00PM - 5:30PM

## Death of a Spouse/Partner

Thursday: Rashida 4:00PM - 5:30PM

## Death of a Young Spouse/Partner

Thursday: Abby 6:00pm - 7:30PM

## Adult Death of a Parent

Tuesday: Rashida 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## Death of a Child

Monday: Rashida 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Tuesday: Abby 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## Young Adult Group

Wednesday: Abby 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## Mindfulness & Movement for Grief

Wednesday: Samantha 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## Living with Spouse/Partner Loss: Grief 2 Years and Beyond

1st Monday: Abby 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## What Now? Adults Grieving the Death of a Parent 2 Years and Beyond

2nd Monday: Abby 5:30PM - 7:00PM

## Supportive Connections

### Brooklyn/Queens: Parents/Guardians of Bereaved Children

Thursday: Samantha 6:00PM - 7:30PM



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# MANHATTAN GROUPS

Resuming in September

## **Precious Moments (6-9 year-olds)**

Wednesday: Stephanie 4:00PM - 5:00PM

## **Teens (13-17 year-olds)**

Thursday: Stephanie 4:00PM - 5:30PM

## **Death of a Parent**

Wednesday: Melanie 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## **Death of a Young Spouse/Partner**

Tuesday: Stephanie 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## **Death of a Spouse/Partner**

Monday: Stephanie 11:00AM - 12:30PM

Thursday: Stephanie 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## **ArchCare Employee Support Group**

Tuesday: Melanie 5:00PM - 6:00PM

## **Death of a Spouse/Partner to COVID19**

Tuesday: Samantha 6:00PM - 7:30PM

## **Death of a Parent to COVID19**

Tuesday: Maria 5:00PM - 6:30PM



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# INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

Calvary Hospital's Bereavement Department would like to acknowledge how challenging this past year and a half has been, especially when grieving. As a way to extend our support, we are now offering individual bereavement counseling for a nominal fee. If you would like more information, please contact Pamela or Jackie.

## **SECRETARY, BEREAVEMENT SERVICES**

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# TREE OF LIFE



Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your significant person's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital. This is 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, please call 718-518-2039.

## THANK YOU FOR READING!

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