



GriefConnections

Volume 5, Issue 3

November 2009

Annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance

The holidays are here! For most people, it is a wonderful time of celebration. Family gatherings provide a secure environment for sharing love and warm memories. For those who have lost a loved one, however, it can be one of the most challenging and difficult times. The holidays bring back many good memories, resulting in a feeling of aloneness.



The Annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance is one event that will help the bereaved individual in the grieving process as it allows them to focus on their loved one and share them with others. This Service of Remembrance has been a very important part of many peoples lives during the holiday season.

On Sunday, November 29th at 4 pm, Phillips Funeral Home & Cremation Service, Carpenter's Funeral Home and The Grief Center of the Southern Tier, Inc. will be sponsoring its twelfth annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance. Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post will be hosting this community-wide event. It is free and open to the public.

This special ceremony will be an expression of praise and thankfulness for the life of the deceased, designed to help the bereaved begin to let the joy of their loved one's life take the place of the hurt and pain of their death.

Cindy Baker went to a Service of Remembrance in memory of her brother, David Ames. "It gives some peace and closure", said Baker.

Captain John Merchant of the Corning Salvation Army also attended the service. He said, "Many came here with a feeling of sadness. Bereavement runs the whole gamut of emotions. What a beautiful way to remember those who passed away." The Annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance helps the grieving to realize that they are truly not alone.

Bonnie Kohler attended the service in honor of her husband, Al Kohler, as well as a few other close family members. "The Candle Lighting Service gives me a sense of closeness to my loved ones during the Holiday Season. We take the candles that we light at the service home, and light them during our Christmas dinner. I believe our loved ones are looking down on us and it strengthens my faith in God. The ceremony helps me realize that we are not alone in the journey. I feel that it has helped me in the healing process."

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Jean Wenban attended the service in honor of her son, Alan and husband, Jim. "When watching the flickering flames from the candles, one thinks of all the lives they represent. Our loved ones who have passed from our sight, remain with us in our thoughts and memories. This Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance gives us a way to bring them closer in the Christmas season."

The Annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance utilizes pastors and musicians from several area churches including solos by Vaughn VanSkiver and other special music. A Message of Hope will be given by Pastor Gary DeHaas of North Baptist Church in Corning. Family members of those being remembered will have an opportunity to light a candle in honor of their loved one. A special candle will be lit honoring all men and women who have lost their lives while serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Those who plan to attend and light a memorial candle, should call Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or Carpenter's Funeral Home at 607-936-9927 by Monday, November 23rd.

In-service Programs for Your Organization

Did you know that we can provide an in-service speaker for your organization? Whether you are looking for a group presentation on some aspect of grief counseling or a program on today's funeral options, we have an excellent group of speakers ready to respond. To talk about options for a workshop in your organization, please call Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or email info@phillipsfuneralhome.com.

Do you know someone who would benefit from receiving this newsletter?

Want to receive *GriefConnections* in your email box every month—absolutely free! Simply send an email to: griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com and write SUBSCRIBE TO GRIEF CONNECTIONS in the subject line.

What Value is History? written by Bill Hoy

Early 20th century philosopher, George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In our work with individuals and families in grief, these words ring undeniably true. Understanding the history of a client and being with them as they organize that story, is a vital part of our role as counselors and supporters of bereaved people.

We obviously celebrate the role of stories in grief counseling. As clients tell their recollections of the holidays shared, the places visited, the high points and the not-so-high points of relationships, we help them work through the experience of loss to find healing and a new way to live in a radically-changed world.

But the background clients bring to the loss experience and the meaning they make of that "history" is just as important as the stories themselves. Many clients are not coping with just the loss that brought them to the counseling office. For large numbers of the people we seek to help, this loss is one in a long chain, perhaps getting piled one on top of another like a stack of books, until under the sheer instability of the foundation, topples onto the floor.

So understanding the client's history is vital to good grief counseling. Obviously, one factor we want to investigate fully is how this loss fits into a lifetime of losses. I am always amazed at the numbers of significant losses—both death and otherwise—that people I talk with have experienced. The difficulty of the present loss is usually magnified by the prior experiences. But knowing about this history offers a glimpse into how the client coped in previous loss experiences, providing opportunities to celebrate strengths and when necessary, discover new coping strategies together.

What Value is History con't

Understanding history means taking stock of the **social history**, especially as lived in the context of **family** and other significant relationships. I meet many grieving people who were told, or had modeled for them, in childhood that bereavement is something about which you “bear up” and face alone. Asking a question like, “How was death or big setbacks dealt with when you were growing up?” often provides a fruitful pathway for discussion.

Knowing the client's **physical** history is also extremely important. How recently did he or she have a full physical exam and how has health or physical fitness changed lately? I like to inquire about eating and sleeping habits, medications currently being taken, and how the bereaved person feels physically. Knowing how these have changed during bereavement is essential, since some physical problems have long histories of their own and are completely unrelated to loss.

Assessment of the **psychological** history is also vital. When meeting a new client, I like to inquire about what experience he or she has had with counselors in the past. Often, this leads to discoveries of past treatment for depression, anxiety disorders, physical or sexual abuse, or substance addiction. Especially if the deceased was a perpetrator of abuse or otherwise seen as culpable in the client's mental health history will have a significant impact on bereavement. Even if a mood disorder like clinical depression has been under control for many years, it is vital for us to know that history, especially considering that the stress of bereavement may trigger a fresh episode of an old disorder. Knowing about prior experiences in counseling also help me know “what I'm up against” if the client has had a poor prior experience or is antagonistic to the entire counseling profession!

This part of the history also provides important clues to coping styles. When there have been many prior losses, clients might realize they are quite resilient, literally “doing well for what I've been through.” We can join them in celebrating that resilience and help them take stock of exactly what worked before. On the other hand, clients that have suffered significant prior losses might be overwhelmed by the current experience, even saying out loud, “I just don't think I can do this again.” Whichever place—or more likely, somewhere in between—that a client is, we can help most when we understand the history and join them in making sense of it.

Finally, care giving professionals and volunteers help most when we understand a client's **spiritual** history. Both within pastoral care settings and outside of them, understanding where a client has been on their own faith pilgrimage is essential. Some in my experience have been deeply wounded by their faith community's lack of care. Others feel great estrangement from God, sensing they have been forgotten, ignored, or singled out for punishment. Still others have derived strong support from their personal faith and from their faith community, and this spiritual support helps them get through the most difficult experiences of bereavement.

Without question, death-related bereavement raises spiritual issues for clients. While it might very well be possible to face many major life transitions without much thought of spiritual issues, this does not seem to be the case when a loved one has died or is dying. Being aware of what spiritual questions seem most pressing for the client and how he or she is resolving those questions is important work for everyone engaged in care giving and should not be ignored because it is outside one's own professional training. However, just as we would refer a client to competent medical care for physical issues and to a specialist colleague with some kinds of mental health issues, we should not hesitate to refer clients to competent spiritual professionals to help sort out the spiritual issues.

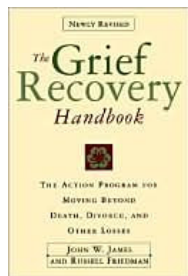
Santayana was correct: history can have a strong teaching property for us, and if ignored, might sentence us to living through the same story again! Learning from our patients and clients and discovering with them how their past influences their present, we can assist immeasurably as they write, or rewrite, their future.

The Author: William G. (Bill) Hoy is an educator and counselor specializing in death, bereavement, and end-of-life issues. For more than 25 years, Dr. Hoy has counseled with bereaved individuals and families, and over the last several years, has been primarily involved in writing and presenting continuing education workshops for care giving professionals. He is the author of *Guiding People through Grief*, and his newest book, *Road to Emmaus: Pastoral Care with the Dying and Bereaved*. This fall, he is teaching the bereavement and spirituality course in the graduate program in bereavement and leadership at Marian University.

For a comprehensive listing of Grief Resources go to our website:
www.phillipsfuneralhome.com
 Then click on:
 -Resource Center
 -Grief Resources

Or visit our Grief Resource Center at:
 Phillips Funeral Home
 17 West Pulteney Street
 Corning
 Monday through Friday
 9 am to 5 pm

Library Notes



James, John W., Friedman, Russell. *The Grief Recovery Handbook. The action program for moving beyond death, divorce and other losses.*

From the publisher, "Incomplete recovery from grief can have a life-long negative effect on your capacity for happiness. Drawing from their own histories, as well as from others, the authors illustrate what grief is and how it is possible to recover and regain energy and spontaneity. Based on a proven program, now extensively revised, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* offers grievers the specific actions needed to complete the grieving process and accept loss. For those ready to regain a sense of aliveness, the principles outlined here make this a life-changing handbook."

To purchase a copy of *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, stop in or call the Special Memories Card & Gift Shop located at Phillips Funeral Home, 17 West Pulteney Street, Corning, 607-936-9212.

Upcoming Events

Annual Candle Lighting Service of Remembrance

Sunday, November 29th at 4 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post.

Loss of a Spouse Support Group

Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of The Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

First and third Thursdays of each month at 7 pm at the Hand in Hand Methodist Church on Wardell Street, Elmira. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at The Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Compassionate Friends Support Group

Last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 2872 Westinghouse Road, Horseheads. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Joann at 562-8090 or by email at jmorgan55@stny.rr.com.

Infant Loss

Empty Arms, Healing Hearts is a support group centered around infant loss through miscarriage. For more information, contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

Abortion

Forgiven and Set Free—a post-abortion class. For more information contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

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