When Meaning Seems Lost   | By Rex Allen, Grief Support Services Manager

Our world is a world of stories. At any given moment we are steeped in the daily telling of story. Films, plays, television drama and comedy, newspapers, books, magazines and art are but a few of the many places we encounter story each day. Perhaps more importantly, each of us is caught up in an endless telling and re-telling of personal story as we relate the events of the days of our lives to friends, family members or simply anyone who might be willing to listen. The telling of story is an ongoing, never ending process that becomes central to the ‘who’ of who we are.

Why story? Why the need to recount events to ourselves and to those who will listen?

Beginning as children, and throughout our lifespan, we consistently utilize story to create meaning in our lives. Seemingly unrelated events can be placed together to create a sense of meaning from the past, to the present and into the future. It is a place of safety and comfort filled when your world is shattered by the death of someone you love, that secure place of safety, comfort and meaning may seem to vanish as grief ripples through your life. The ache of loss that resides within the brokenness of your world becomes a constant reminder of that which was, and that which is no longer. What made sense yesterday, may no longer make sense in the light of a new world defined by loss. Meaning can simply disappear.

When meaning seems lost, it is in story that you can begin to take the first steps toward what Thomas Attig describes as re-learning the world—“learning again how to be and act in the world without those we love by our sides.” Story not only provides us the opportunity to re-learn, but the opportunity to remember, restore, reclaim and renew.

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How your story of remembering and renewal is lived or told may be reflected in a variety of ways. The telling may come through the spoken word, a visual image, journaling, photography, musical rhythm, life review or ritual. The possibilities for the telling and living of story are endless. It is a process that restores connection both to the self and to others. And in that connection a sense of meaning begins to reawaken.

The great poet Rumi wrote, “Don’t turn away. Keep your gaze on the bandaged place. That’s where the light enters you.” By returning to story, you have the opportunity to reflect upon the “bandaged place” and the wound of loss that lies beneath it. The light entering that wound is the light of meaning and potential growth. It is a place often filled with questions that may have no apparent answers.

Meaning doesn’t necessarily come easy. No matter how much meaning you find, it doesn’t erase your emotions or explain away the death. And meaning isn’t simply something that exists — it’s something to be discovered or created.

In the days to come as you begin to re-learn the world and seek to find meaning in it, I challenge you to find a place where your story may be told, lived and honored. Be grateful for what your story has to teach — both to yourself and others. Remember that all stories have life and that when they are told they shape both the person who hears the story and the one who tells it. It is in that shaping where life is renewed, meaning begins to emerge, and your loved one lives on.

Spring Memorial Service

Wednesday, May 7, 2014, 4:00 p.m.

Location: United Church of Christ
(Formerly: First Congregational)
2624 Rockefeller Avenue Everett, WA 98201
FREE

You, your family and friends are invited to join our interfaith celebration of life. The service includes reflections, readings, music and a reading of loved ones’ names.

Reception to follow.

A Table of Remembrance will be set aside for you to place a small remembrance of your loved one such as a photo or special object representative of that person. We will have nametags for your display. After the reception you may take it home with you.

Please let us know you are coming. To register, call 425-261-4807.

Camp Erin Everett 2014

August 22 -24, 2014

Camp Erin Everett is a FREE 3-day, overnight camp for youth in grades K-12 who have experienced the death of a significant person. The weekend is a traditional, high-energy, fun camp coupled with grief support and education.

Camp Erin is held at Stanwood’s Camp Killoqua, about 20 miles northwest of Everett. Camp is facilitated by professional staff and trained volunteers of Providence Hospice and Home Care of Snohomish County.

Activities include: boating, campfires, music, rock climbing, nature walks, arts & crafts, field sports, swimming.

“At Camp Erin I learned there are others who are going through what I’m going through.” —Teen
How can parents help their children to find meaning in their lives after the death of a loved one?

— Beverly Goldsmith, Kids and Teens Grief Counselor

It is often easy to lose meaning when a significant loved one has died. How does a young child or teen comprehend that “meaning” can be attached to something as painful as the loss of a loved one?

With guidance and love, a parent can provide a framework for a child to have an understanding about the grief they are experiencing, and also how to honor the significance of the impact the death has had on their lives.

One very simple family activity utilizes natural and readily accessible materials; rocks and stones. In the Safe Crossings program, counselors use rocks to symbolize the many, varied and often intense feelings which make up a grief response. Rough-surfaced or sharp-edged rocks can represent feelings that are big, hard or painful. Rocks that are smoothed and rounded, with softened edges that have been tumbled through time, can suggest that, with time and processing of experiences and feelings, intense or painful feelings can be softened.

Some rocks are toned with various colors which might symbolize the many people and things in the child’s life which are supportive to them along their grief journey.

Some rocks have an inherent beauty – shiny, glittery particles that might represent the joy and happiness that still exists in the world for each child, despite the pain of the death of a loved one. This beauty encompasses hope and dreams for a happy and healthy future.

Children can be invited to collect rocks, given the above information. They and their family can identify a small box, vase or other container to hold the rocks they have gathered. If the rocks are gathered with intention, no words need to be said. Each child or family member might have their own separate container, where each is invited to privately place rocks and keep the container wherever they choose.

This simple activity can carry tremendous meaning in terms of the acknowledgement of the significance of each individual’s relationship with the loved one who has died, and the impact and feelings attached to the death.

the reading room

**Courage** by Bernard Waber | Recommended ages 4-8

There are many kinds of courage. Everyday kinds that normal, ordinary people exhibit all the time, like “being the first to make up after an argument,” or “going to bed without a nightlight.” Bernard Waber explores the many varied kinds of courage and celebrates the moments, big and small, that bring out the hero in each of us.

**Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas** by Alan D. Wolfe

Age appropriate activities that teach younger people that their thoughts are not only normal but necessary.
Standing Together is a free grief support group for youth in grades K-12 facilitated by trained staff and volunteers of Providence Hospice of Snohomish County.

Meetings are held on the 2nd Saturday of each month, October-June, from noon to 2:00 p.m. Pizza lunch is provided.

**April 12, May 10, June 14**

First Presbyterian Church
2936 Rockefeller Avenue
Everett, WA 98201

For more information and to receive an application, please call 425-261-4783.
support groups

Spring Quarter

Registration required for the following:

Mother loss group; for women who have lost their mothers
Beginning mid-April.
2731 Wetmore Ave, Everett 98201
Please call for details

Spouse Loss Group - 6 week series
Fridays, May 2 - June 6
3:30 to 5 p.m.
Please call to register

Registration required for the following:

Standing Together, for Kids and Teens
April 12, May 10 and June 14
Downtown Everett
Please call to register

Ongoing Drop in Groups

Registration NOT required for the following:

General Loss Drop-In Group - Marysville
2nd & 4th Wednesdays
1 to 2:30 p.m.
Ken Baxter Community Center,
514 Delta Avenue, Marysville 98270

Soul Survivors (Spouse Loss) Drop-In Group
2nd & 4th Thursdays
2 to 3:30 p.m.
Providence Hospice
2731 Wetmore Ave, Everett 98201

Newly Bereaved Workshop for Adults
3rd Thursday
6 to 7:30 p.m.
Providence Hospice
2731 Wetmore Ave, Everett 98201

Individual/Family Grief Support

Individual and/or family grief support and education is available to those who are grieving the death of a significant person within the past 13 months. Feel free to call 425-261-4807 to make an appointment with one of our counselors.

For any additional information please call: 425-261-4807.

All services are offered free of charge.

Help us go GREEN. Have your newsletter delivered via email. To sign up, please call the Bereavement Department at: 425-261-4807
Would You Like A Call or Visit?

If you would like to talk to someone about your grief, please call us at 425-261-4807. We would like to work with you to meet your needs.

Our staff include:

Rex Allen, MA, Grief Services Manager
Heather Sessions LICSW, Grief Support Services Coordinator
Jeff Smith, MA, Grief Support Services Counselor
Kim Finer, Grief Support Services Assistant

If we are on the phone or away from our desks when you call, please leave us a message, and we will return your call as soon as possible.

Thank you!

Providence Hospice and Home Care of Snohomish County is a non-profit organization that relies on philanthropic support to continue providing critical programs and services that are vital to our community. If you would like to make a contribution, please send your tax deductible donation to:

By Mail:
Providence Hospice and Home Care Foundation
2731 Wetmore Avenue, Suite 500
Everett, WA 98201

By Phone: (425) 261-4822

Online: www.providence.org/phhc

You can donate online or download a donation form and mail.