

A First Breath and a Last

by Susan Newhof



On a warm summer morning in June, four generations are gathered in Sue Grams' living room giggling at the antics of tiny Cyrus, who is doing his best to stay awake and empty a bottle. His smiling mother Raennah cuddles him while grandma strokes his cheek, and great-grandma Sue beams at all the joy in the room.

This is the home Sue shared with her husband, Bill, for 35 years. It is a comfy ranch, tucked along the shore of North Lake, which, on this fine morning, is sparkling under bright sunshine and a cloudless blue sky.

Bill died here this past spring.

"My father loved to start trouble," says daughter Jennifer, laughing. "He was a prankster. It's one of the things I loved about him — his jokes and his often gruff, inappropriate humor!"

Bill, it seems, could also fix anything, and for this extended family, "fixing" often involved blood and Band-Aids. Jennifer chuckles and says that may be why she got interested in a career in nursing and became an LPN.

As much as this family likes to laugh about the good times, their lives have also been touched by tragedy. On the afternoon of April 15, 1982, Bill and Sue's niece, Lisa, took her first breath in this world. Early the next morning, their 16-year-old daughter Donna died when their house caught fire.

"God's first trade in this family," says Sue.

This spring, their 33-year-old grandson, also named Bill, was killed in a car accident just six weeks after his grandfather passed.

"We get through it all because of our faith and because of the strong bond between us," says Jennifer.

"It was a special thing for me to be involved with this family," says Harbor Hospice nurse Lori Jenkins, who has gathered with the family today, along with Harbor Hospice social worker

Amber Bouwkamp. "Bill and his family will stick with me for a long time," Lori adds.

Bill's family members feel the same way about the Hospice staff.

"They kept my dad comfortable," remembers Jennifer. "And they took care of our family, too. When Harbor Hospice came on board, it took so much off my mom. They brought his medications, they got the equipment he needed, and they cared for him here. He didn't need to be taken to a doctor. Words cannot describe..."

"It was sort of like getting a hug from my mom when they were here," says Sue. "I knew they were here not just in their professional capacity but in their hearts as well. They taught me how to do things like bathe Bill, and I looked forward to their visits."

She turns to Lori and Amber and adds, "It was such a comfort to have you here, especially on that last day."

When they pose together for a photo, Raennah sets baby Cyrus next to a picture of Bill, the great-grandfather he never met, but who he will come to know through family stories — especially the story about his own birth.

Raennah describes how she was in the last stages of labor when a call was placed to Sue, who was at home with Bill, so they could hear Cyrus's first cry.

Sue observed that the more Rae labored, the quieter Bill became.

At 6:04, Cyrus took his first breath.

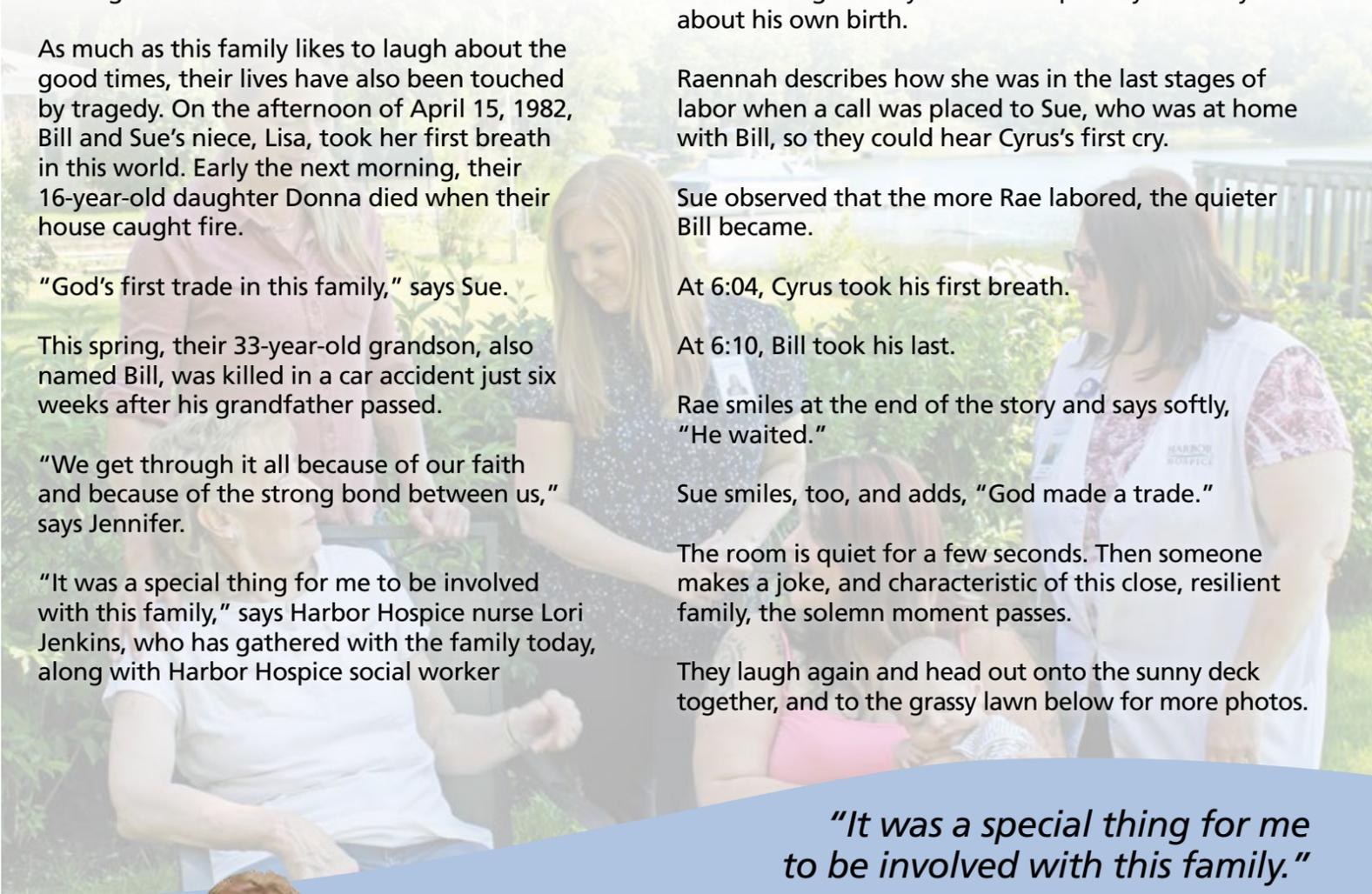
At 6:10, Bill took his last.

Rae smiles at the end of the story and says softly, "He waited."

Sue smiles, too, and adds, "God made a trade."

The room is quiet for a few seconds. Then someone makes a joke, and characteristic of this close, resilient family, the solemn moment passes.

They laugh again and head out onto the sunny deck together, and to the grassy lawn below for more photos.



"It was sort of like getting a hug from my mom when they (Harbor Hospice staff) were here," says Sue. "I knew they were here not just in their professional capacity but in their hearts as well."

Jennifer, Raennah, Baby Cyrus and Sue

"It was a special thing for me to be involved with this family."

-Harbor Hospice nurse Lori Jenkins



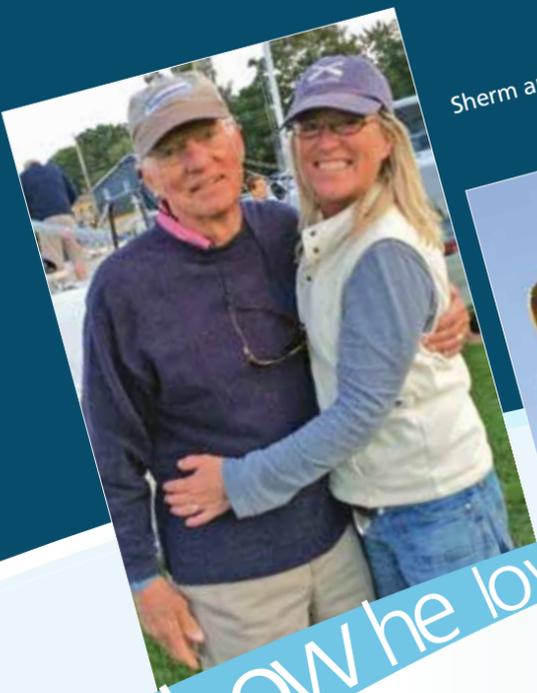
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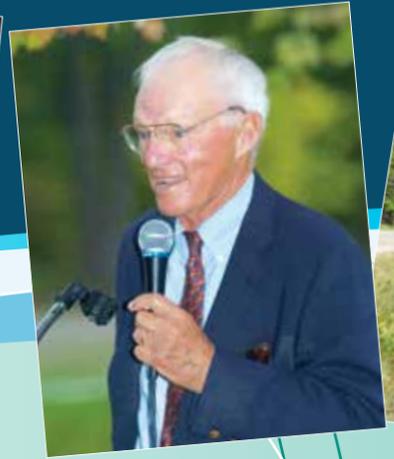




Sherm and daughter Laurie

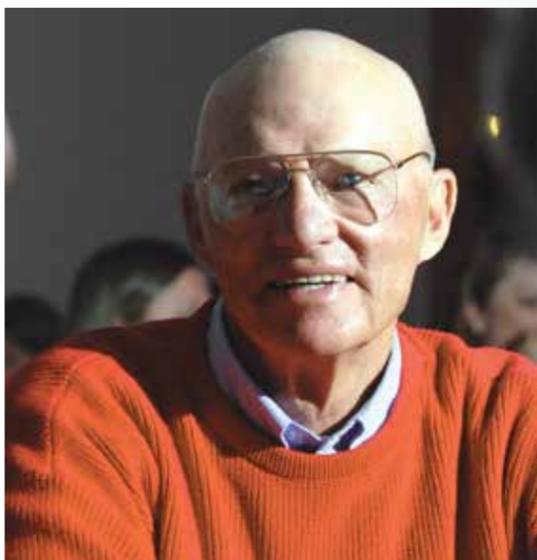


Sherm and his sister Leila



Oh how he loved his hometown

Remembering the much-loved Sherman Poppen



On a cold Christmas Day in 1965, Sherman Poppen joined two 36-inch snow skis and created a board that his daughters could use to "surf" down the snow-covered Lake Michigan dunes behind their house. He hoped it would entice the energetic girls to play outside so their mother Nancy, who was very pregnant with their third child, could get a little quiet time.

The new snow toy was an instant hit and aptly christened a Snurfer. Sherm refined the design, patented it, and sold the idea to the Muskegon-based Brunswick Corporation. The company produced it for national distribution nearly 20 years before winter-loving athletes began embracing the sport of snowboarding.

Today, snowboarding is a highly competitive Olympic sport, and Sherman Poppen, with his hastily created Christmas Day distraction, has been named "Father of the Snowboard."

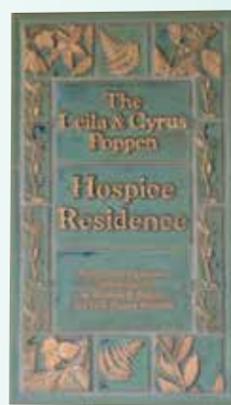
Sherm graduated from Muskegon High School, attended Northwestern University on a full-ride NROTC Naval Scholarship, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce. He served in the U.S Navy as a supply officer on the USS Perry, and when he returned to Muskegon, he began building the Lake Welding Supply Co. into a successful business. In the early 1990s, he was delighted to be able to transfer the company into the hands of his employees before he retired.

Sherm gave back generously in many ways to the community that had nurtured and supported him for decades. He also became a skilled sailor, and passed his love of sailing onto daughter, Laurie, who served as chair of the Harbor Hospice Regatta.

Several years ago, Mary Anne Gorman, executive director of Harbor Hospice at the time, sent a letter asking donors their interest in providing a major gift toward the development of a hospice residence in Muskegon.

Sherm asked his sister, Leila Reynolds, to check into the request. The siblings liked what they learned and provided the lead gift. They also asked that it be named for their parents, Leila and Cyrus Poppen. (Mother and daughter share the same first name.)

"Our sense of commitment to the community began at home," recalls Leila. "Our mother started the Girl Scouts in Muskegon, and our father chaired the committee for the construction of Jefferson Towers. He was also president of the Muskegon School Board for 12 years and served as attorney for the city of Muskegon for 17 years."



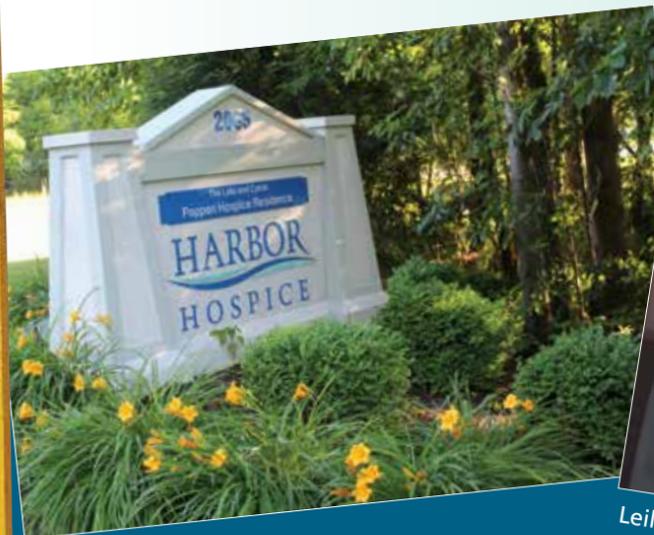
"Sherm always said the Snurfer was a happening, a kind of fluke in his life," adds Leila. "But his commitments to his employees, to the Poppen Arts Program, to Harbor Hospice and other efforts he supported were deliberate. He was proud of them."

Sherm called Leila a few days before he had a stroke.

"His interest was completely focused on the articles I'd sent him about developments in Muskegon, and he asked question after question," she says, smiling. "Oh my, how he loved his hometown!"

And how Muskegon loved him!

Our beloved Sherm Poppen passed away July 31.



Leila Reynolds, Sherm and Louise Poppen



The Leila and Cyrus Poppen





“...the power of grief support...”

When someone comes to the Scolnik Healing Center and asks for help, they often don't know what to expect. What they do know is that they hurt more than they thought possible, more than they were prepared for, and too much to keep shouldering it alone.

“We offer a safe space where they can talk about their grief and the person they lost,” says Amy Geldersma, Harbor Hospice social worker and counseling services manager. “Coming to Harbor Hospice to talk is a huge step, and from that point on they lead the way.”

In group counseling, they meet others also hurting. They tell their stories and share their pain with no guilt, apology, or judgment. In the company of skilled counselors and new friends with similar experiences who understand and encourage, they find healing.

Grief is a quirky thing. Each person experiences it differently, and there's no timetable for when it comes creeping — or crashing — in. Some individuals experience huge loss immediately after the death of someone close, but it can also be months or years before grief hits.

Sometimes the circumstances are complicated.

“I've received calls from people who were unable to be present when their loved one died, or not able to attend a service or be in the comforting company of friends and family,” explains counselor Beth Bolthouse. “They may have been out of the country or in their own medical crisis or in jail, and couldn't get back to say goodbye.”

Unresolved issues such as family conflict, addiction or abuse can trigger guilt and leave loved ones wondering how they could have made a difference. They think, “Why didn't I say something when I saw him?” or “What if I could have gotten her into recovery?” “What if I had driven him home?” “What if I had taken better care of her?”

And there are the anticipated but no less agonizing passings, when death separates aging partners who have been together for decades.

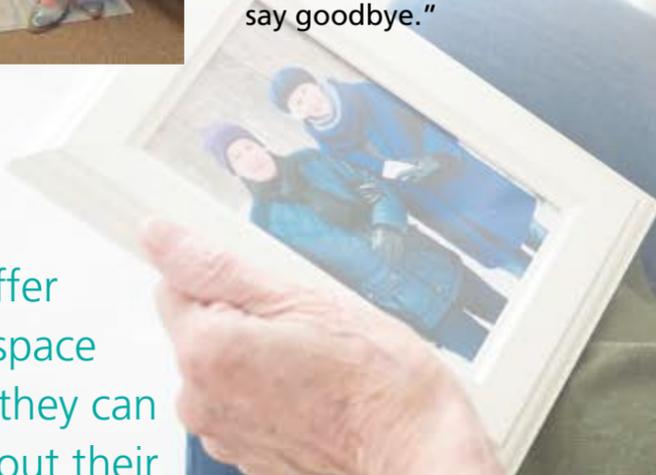
“Everyone has a story,” says Amy. “We listen, no matter how many times they need to tell their story. Listening is vital. We get to know each individual and learn what is important to them. We help them discover coping tools that are meaningful to them and to find a sense of hope in adjusting to their life with loss.”

Because we believe so strongly in the power of grief support, there is no charge for our counseling or for any of the helpful materials we make available. That can be especially important because after a death, people often find themselves in a difficult financial position. They may have taken extra time off work to care for their loved one, or are saddled with big medical expenses. Because all our grief support is free, no one has to make a choice between paying bills and getting the help they need.

That's why we ask for your support. Your gift this year makes it possible for us to continue to offer help and hope to anyone who asks for it. ***Thank you for being alongside us in this life-changing mission.***



“We offer a safe space where they can talk about their grief and the person they lost...”



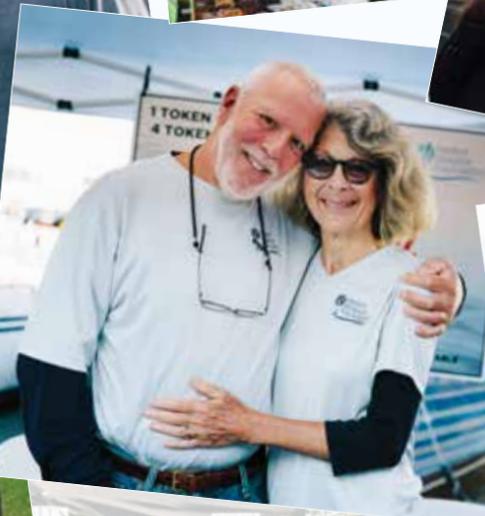
The Bob & Merle Scolnik
HEALING CENTER



Our Corporate Partners

The Harbor Hospice Foundation is profoundly grateful to the following West Michigan businesses and organizations that provide annual financial support for our programs and services through our Corporate Partner Program.

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Our Compassionate Givers

Compassionate Givers was created by individuals wishing to harness the power of giving as one of many to support the work of Harbor Hospice and make a significant impact on a specific program or project.

The group meets quarterly to engage with staff and gain an in-depth understanding of the organization and the community. Once a year, they vote on how they will award their combined funds.

Our deepest gratitude to the following charter members for establishing this generous initiative. If you would like more information, contact Ammy Seymour, Harbor Hospice Foundation Director of Development 231.728.6836

Ammy Seymour
 Amy Geldersma
 Bonnie Kay Adamczak-Brown
 Connie Learman
 Darlene Collet
 Dee Kwecien
 Heather Brolick
 Irene Pierson
 Juwana Jackson
 Kathy Moore
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 Marilyn Rottschäfer Andriese
 Mary Anne Gorman
 Michelle Morgenstern
 Pam Babbitt
 Pamela Wingard
 Peggy Jacobs
 Mhairi Blacklock
 Shari Simon
 Stacy Mellema
 Susan Crain
 Susan Houseman



Thank you, Whitehall Products for creating tree plaques at the Poppen Residence. The attractive, quality plaques can be viewed around the wooded trail and front lawn at the residence.





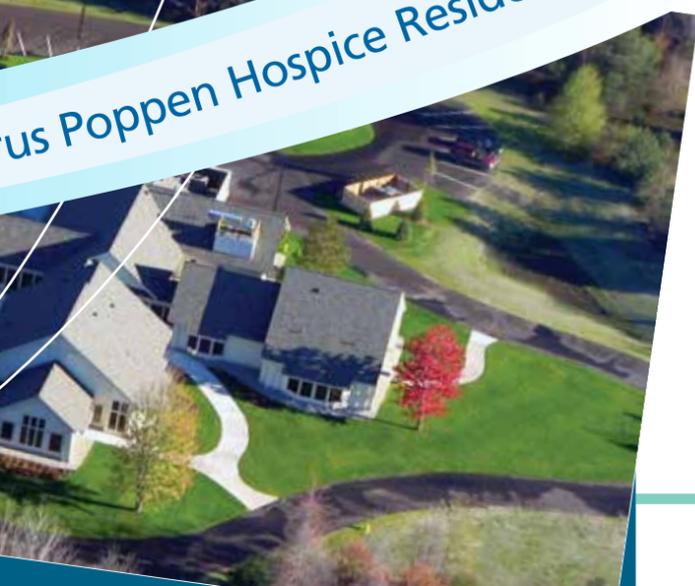
The View from the Pillow

The Leila and Cyrus Poppen Hospice Residence is a home for terminally ill patients in the final stages of their lives. With the limitations of its residents in mind, the 14 private patient rooms were designed around the views from the bed pillows.

Each room is furnished to feel fresh, inviting, and homelike. Family members are welcome to spend the night on the comfortable sofa-sleeper included in each patient's room so they can have round-the-clock time with their loved one.

Walking paths outside can accommodate the patients' beds so they can enjoy being in the fresh air when the weather is warm. Colorful gardens, bird feeders, and seating areas offer a sense of relaxation and peace.

Leila and Cyrus Poppen Hospice Residence



Welcome to our new members of the Harbor Hospice Board of Directors

Angelita Valdez, CEO, Owner and Social Worker
Servicios de Esperanza (Services of Hope Counseling)

"I joined the Harbor Hospice Board as what better way to give back to such an amazing organization that is creating change for continued blessings to other families. As a community leader in the field of social work and substance abuse services and the owner of Servicios de Esperanza, I value the importance of the healing that Camp Courage has and continues to give children and families. I have also had two family members reside at the Poppen Hospice Residence."



Curt Babcock, Ph.D., Superintendent
North Muskegon Public Schools

"It is an honor and privilege for me to serve on the Harbor Hospice Board. The passionate staff and volunteers of Harbor Hospice are an exemplary example of the caring work accomplished for our families and community as a whole. It is with pride that I say I am fortunate to serve our community through this incredible organization."



Joyce Walker-Tyson, Managing Principal
Diversity Communications Associates

"I have been the beneficiary of hospice support on more than one occasion. I believe too many people in this community are unaware of all the services offered. I hope I can be part of a communications/education effort to change that."



Welcome to our new member of the Harbor Hospice Foundation Board of Directors

Mishelle M. Comstock, CPA,
President & CEO Shelby State Bank

"I am honored to be serving on the Harbor Hospice Foundation Board and be involved with the good work done within our communities. We all know someone who has been impacted by this organization and see first-hand the positive influence in the lives of patients and their families."

Congratulations to our 2018 Volunteer of the Year, and thank you to all our hospice volunteers



"Every person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. Volunteering for Harbor Hospice gives me the opportunity to let those who are in need feel that someone cares about them."

—Bob Harter
 Harbor Hospice Volunteer since August 2009

Become an essential part of our team. Training is offered every fall and spring.

Spring 2020 Volunteer Trainings

Basic Orientation Training
Wednesday

May 20 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Patient Care Training (2nd Step)
Wednesday

June 3 9:00 am to 3:00 pm

There are several steps prior to basic orientation so please contact us for more information at 231.728.3442 or 1.800.497.9559, email info@HarborHospiceMI.org or visit our website at HarborHospiceMI.org

NEWSLETTER STAFF

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Visit us at HarborHospiceMI.org

Look for the latest edition of *Harbor Hospice Touching Lives* magazine in your physician's office. Within its cover, you will find national story, *5 Ways to Support Loved Ones*, as well as local articles from *Wakes to Tattoos*, and Grief Support group - *My tribe that listens, cares and gets it*.

If you would like copies for your church, organization or business, please email or call us today.



Continuing Bonds with our loved ones

by Laura Ecker, LPC, Bereavement Counselor

When we talk in grief counseling about continuing bonds, we describe the process of having an ongoing inner relationship with someone we love who has passed away. That connection can be as simple as displaying photos of our loved one, talking to them, keeping their personal items, and visiting places that were special to them. It can include celebrating their birthday and adding a remembrance of them at holidays, or living in a way that would make them proud. The options are endless!

Continuing bonds can be an important and healthy part of the grief process and can help a person cope with their loss. However, it is frequently misunderstood. Well-meaning but misguided family and friends, concerned that the bereaved person might get "stuck in their grief," often encourage them to "move on" or "get closure."

Many people who attend my weekly grief support group SOLOS (Spouses Overcoming Loss with Ongoing Support) were with their spouse or partner for their entire adult life and feel as though they became, in essence, one person. When their spouse died, it felt like they lost half of themselves. The feeling is so common that author C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *A Grief Observed*, "The death of a beloved is an amputation."

Someone who lost a limb would probably never hear things like, "...don't you think it's time you get over this?" or "Don't worry... you'll find another arm."

Last fall in our SOLOS group, I suggested we make a Thankfulness Tree. At several sessions, members spent a few minutes writing things they were thankful for about their spouse on leaf cutouts. Those leaves became a tree. That simple exercise offered a meaningful time for each person to reflect and share their continuing bonds.



I recently asked everyone, "If you could write a message in the sky to your loved one, what would you say?" Our wall is now filled with heart-shaped clouds representing messages of love, grief, memories, and even inside jokes.

If you would like more information about grief support, contact our counselors at the Bob & Merle Scolnik Healing Center of Harbor Hospice at 231.728.3442 or 1.800.497.9559.

HARBOR HOSPICE

Your Journey. Your Terms. Our Expertise.

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Coping through the Holidays

If you don't know where to start

- *It's impossible to know exactly how you'll feel.* Take care of your health, get adequate sleep, and find ways to be active.
- *Approach the holidays with curiosity rather than expectancy.* It may surprise you how you cope with important days. There is no right or wrong way.

If it all seems too overwhelming

- *Set limits.* Only do things that are important to you.
- *Avoid overdoing it.* Sometimes we keep busy to stay distracted from pain. Remember pain in grief serves a purpose.
- *Recruit help.* Be kind to yourself and allow loved ones to help.

If you're worried about facing others

- *Be prepared with a canned answer.* "I'm doing OK" or "some days are better than others" is completely acceptable.
- *Don't be afraid to cry in public.* Surround yourself with people who are good listeners, people who will be understanding.
- *Prepare an exit strategy.* Only commit to certain times after events begin. Create a reason to leave if you need to, even to go home.

If you know children who are grieving

- *Involve them in making a decoration in honor of their loved one.* This encourages them to share memories and express feelings freely.
- *Make a memory box or scrapbook together.* Decorate it for the season and fill it with pictures and special items.
- *Ask children and others what they miss about their loved one.* This gives everyone an opportunity to share a memory and acknowledges that this special person is not here.

Facing the years ahead

- *What you choose to do the first year can always change.* Experiment with new family rituals. There are many ways to honor your loved one on special days.

