To live is to suffer; to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.
Friedrich Nietzsche

To a far greater extent than other animals, we as human beings are distinguished by living not only in a present, physical world, but also in a world populated by long-term memories, long-range anticipations, reflections, goals, interpretations, hopes, regrets, beliefs, metaphors—in a word, meanings. And yet, at times the stubborn realities of life assert themselves, sometimes brutally, stressing or shredding the delicate tissue of meaning on which our all-too-vulnerable life stories depend. Never is this clearer than when we are forced to confront the news of a loved one’s sudden death. At such moments we can feel cast into a world that is alien, unimaginable, uninhabitable, one that radically shakes or severs those taken-for-granted “realities” in which we are rooted, and on which we rely for a sense of secure purpose and connection.

Consider the experience of Mary, struggling in the aftermath of the death of her husband of many years, John, only one month following the diagnosis of the cancer that apparently originated in his back and spread quickly through his once vital body. Unable to take in the impending reality of his death, Mary continued to hold out hope for his cure, grasping at straws in communications from his doctors that might imply a more favourable prognosis. But as hope eroded, and she intimately witnessed his untreated pain, she began to doubt God’s mercy, as well as to feel cast adrift on a raging sea of grief. As Mary said, John had been “her north, her south, her east and her west,” and with his eventual death she lost the primary compass for her living. Neither his death nor her life seemed to make sense, she wept, and many months later she confessed that she remained preoccupied with the story of his dying to such a degree that her work, family and social life seemed at risk of being lost as well.

In the aftermath of life-altering loss, the bereaved are commonly thrust into a search for meaning at levels that range from the practical (How did my loved one die?) through the relational (Who am I, now that I am no longer a spouse?) to the spiritual or existential (Why did God allow this to happen?). How—and whether—we engage these questions and resolve or simply stop asking them shapes how we take on board the loss itself and who we become in light of it. Research tells us that bereavement does not inevitably disrupt the stories of our lives, as many mourners will find consolation in

(continued on page 4)
As Montgomery Hospice grows to meet the needs of our community, we continue to actively participate in local and national partnerships. In these partnerships, we share our expertise with others providing end-of-life and bereavement care to patients and families — and we also learn from the shared knowledge of these other professionals.

Our new program serving pediatric hospice patients is an example of one of these partnerships. Providing care for seriously ill children and teenagers is complex and must be done well. Fortunately, very few children ever need hospice services, but when they do, it is generally after months or years of care at hospitals, and often at specialty hospitals like Children’s National Medical Center or NIH. These patients need an expert team of hospice professionals who understand what they and their families have experienced and how to ensure that their hospice journey is a gentle one. We decided that the best way to provide care to our youngest patients was to work collaboratively with two other large hospices in Maryland. The result was Montgomery Kids, a program that was begun in late 2011 after several years of diligent work with pediatric experts from hospices, hospitals and palliative care services.

Examples of our community partnerships include our work with facilities and group homes within Montgomery County, providing extra help and end-of-life expertise for their residents. (Our collaboration with The Village at Rockville is described in this newsletter.)

Our work with schools through the High School Loss and Grief Education program has been described by a teacher as having “an immediate impact on my students.”

We continue to build relationships through our Center for Learning, inviting nationally known speakers to share their research and professional experience at our conferences and through our newsletter. Researcher Dr. Robert Neimeyer’s introduction for practitioners and families on the importance of finding meaning in grief is printed in this newsletter, as is information about Dr. Ira Byock’s most recent book.

Lastly, our ongoing partnerships with individual donors and corporate partners allow us to treat patients with difficult symptoms at Casey House, to reach out to our neighbors who are grieving and to help pediatric patients through the Montgomery Kids program. We are always grateful for this critical financial support.

We value all of these partnerships and appreciate the opportunity to work together to serve the dying and bereaved members of our community.

Ann Mitchell
President & CEO

A new book by Ira Byock, MD

Dr. Ira Byock (shown here with Dr. Geoff Coleman at our 2011 conference) is one of the foremost palliative-care physicians in the country. He is collaborating with Montgomery Hospice on an online end-of-life education program through the Erickson School.

Dr. Ira Byock announces his new book, *The Best Care Possible: A Physician’s Quest to Transform Care Through the End Of Life.*

Dr. Byock explains that to ensure the best possible care for those we love—and eventually ourselves—we must not only remake our healthcare system, we must also move past our cultural aversion to talking about dying and acknowledge the fact of mortality once and for all. In so doing, we can live emotionally authentic, healthier and more joyful lives.”
I found the shirt hanging on the back of a chair in the cook shed when we came home from the funeral. It had been a beautiful day when he last wore it. We had cut the last of the corn, gathered pumpkins, and picked the last of the green beans. Then he took the kids down the ridge to pick apples, and the warmth of the day combined with the heat from his labor forced him to remove it.

There it hung on that old, straight-back chair, mocking me with its emptiness. With a cry, I snatched it up. It smelled of sunshine and fresh air, that wonderful outdoorsy scent of my husband emanating from this final source. I buried my head in it and cried, as I had been unable to cry before.

My children gathered around me, their small hands patting, trying to comfort me. These four beautiful children were now my only reason to go on, and from them I drew the strength to dry my tears.

My husband, Dusty, had had a heart condition, one that could be controlled with medication, the doctors told us. “He should live to be an old man.” When he lay down in the yard that lovely fall day, he was only forty-one years old. Our idyllic mountain home became a lonely, haunted place.

Days passed slowly without Dusty there to laugh with me, read to me while I cooked supper, and rub my back until I fell asleep at night. When things got really rough, I would slip out to the cook shed, bury my face in his shirt, and cry out my sorrow and frustration. That was as close as I could get to the lost half of me.

Then the day came when we had to go out for groceries. It stormed while we were out and delayed our trip home, so we went to bed right after our return.

The next morning, I went out to the cook shed for a few moments of meditation before the children woke up. Some of our goats and sheep had taken shelter in the shed from the previous day’s storm, and they had knocked Dusty’s shirt off the chair and trampled it underfoot. I grabbed it up, but its wonderful, comforting smell was gone.

Fifteen years have passed since my husband’s death. My children are grown, and I have to admit that they turned out pretty well. I still catch myself thinking, “We didn’t do half bad, did we, Honey?”

I heard someone say of a departed husband, “I loved him.” How do you get to the point where you can speak of that love in the past tense? If that love is past, why does the memory still have such power to invoke both happiness and sadness?

I believe that as long as I am alive, Dusty’s memory will live in me. I see his eyes peeking out at me from my grandson’s face. I find something of his spirit in each of our children.

My husband’s death affected our family greatly, but his life impacted it more. He will live as long as one of us is alive to remember and to love him.

And sometimes on a warm fall day, I catch that outdoorsy scent of fresh air and sunshine, and my face is buried in Dusty’s shirt once more. Although I know he sleeps, I hear his shout of laughter somewhere just ahead, and I think he waits for me.

I believe that love is stronger than death.

Opal Ruth Prater and her late husband, Dusty, raised their four children on several hundred acres of land about three miles from the nearest blacktop, with no electricity or running water. Ms. Prater still lives among her beautiful southwest Virginia mountains, with her children and grandchildren close by.

Collaboration with The Village at Rockville

For the last several years, Montgomery Hospice has worked closely with The Village at Rockville to support their residents who are living with advanced illnesses. Montgomery Hospice provides hospice services for people who reside in their skilled nursing facility, supplementing the care already being provided by the staff at The Village.

The Village at Rockville is a National Lutheran Community, part of an organization that has been supporting seniors for over 120 years. Their mission is to help seniors and their families, including people of all faiths. (Over half of the people they serve are non-Lutheran.) The Village at Rockville opened in 1980, expanding further in 1986 to include independent living cottages. Along with their skilled nursing program, they offer rehabilitation services (in their newly renovated rehabilitation wing) and plan to provide assisted living in the near future.

When a resident at The Village has a serious illness, or perhaps has been hospitalized multiple times or lost a large amount of weight, a staff member may suggest that Montgomery Hospice visit and explain the benefits of hospice. The resident—and his or her family—hear about the medications, medical equipment and visits provided by the Montgomery Hospice team (with costs covered by Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance).

After the patient enrolls in hospice, a meeting is held with the team of Montgomery Hospice professionals that will be providing expert end-of-life care. This team consists of a nurse (RN), a social worker, a chaplain and a hospice aide. The nurse visits at least once a week, more frequently if the need arises, to handle physical symptoms. The social worker visits at least once or twice a month to assist with practical issues and difficult conversations about advance directives and life sustaining treatment options at the end of life, funeral planning and grief work, and life review and legacy work. The chaplain also visits once a month to talk with interested patients about spiritual topics (which may or may not be religious). The Montgomery Hospice aide helps with bathing, grooming, and feeding. A Montgomery Hospice volunteer may come to provide a friendly visitor. The Montgomery Hospice team also works to support the patient families (and follows up with grief support later).

Montgomery Hospice staff members are in constant communication with the staff at The Village, coordinating care with their skilled nursing team, their physicians, their social workers and facility chaplains. Through phone calls, notes and regular meetings, the teams from both organizations work to ensure the patient’s wishes are being met. Montgomery Hospice chaplain Lynn Sifrit appreciates their close professional relationships, saying “being present and working together leads to being familiar with each other and trusting each other.” He and the other Montgomery Hospice staff appreciate the opportunity to work with The Village at Rockville and to help their residents.

Montgomery Hospice’s “Gentling the Journey” has been a great benefit to the members of our community. Their mission and ours complement each other as we both strive to allow members of our community to live their lives to the fullest at whatever place they find themselves. Our desire is to serve people the way we would want to be served. Montgomery Hospice is the natural choice for us since our philosophies intersect in such a vital way. It is our honor to partner with Montgomery Hospice.

Frank McGovern, MHA, NHA
Executive Director, The Village at Rockville

Growing through Grief: The Challenge of Change

secular and spiritual beliefs and practices that have served them well in the past. Indeed, especially when the deaths of loved ones are relatively peaceful and predictable, only a minority of people report searching for meaning in the experience, although those who do, like Mary, can struggle for years to find footing in their changed world. For example, in one study of widows and widowers, the 10 percent who reported a more intense search for meaning in the loss at 6 and 18 months after the death showed a more painful and prolonged grief reaction across four years of bereavement.

When losses are more objectively traumatic, research suggests that a search for sense or significance is more common, as with those bereaved by the sudden death of a family member, or parents who lose a child. A crisis of meaning is especially acute for those bereaved by suicide, homicide or fatal accident, who report a far more intense struggle to make sense of the loss than do those whose loved ones died natural deaths. Likewise, studies of bereaved parents reinforce the powerful role of meaning making in predicting bereavement outcome. In one study, for example, we found that parents’ degree
of sense making proved to be a potent predictor of their complicated grief symptoms, accounting for 15 times more of these parents’ distress than the parent’s gender, the length of time since loss, or whether the death was natural or violent. Almost half of the parents confessed that they were unable to make sense of their child’s death even an average of 6 years later, although most of them could identify some form of unsought benefits (e.g., greater personal strength or compassion for others) to balance the pain of the tragedy. Parents who believed the death was God’s will or that the child was no longer suffering, as well as those who reported benefits such as reordered life priorities, tended to fare better in their loss.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that adapting to loss involves more than simply overcoming painful symptoms of grief and depression, as many people report resilience or even personal growth in the process. Here, too, it seems likely that meaning making helps, as research demonstrates that sense making in the first 6 months of loss forecasts higher levels of positive emotion and well-being several years after the death of a spouse. Importantly, the growth reported by many of the bereaved in the form of greater maturity, spirituality, compassion and life purpose does not so much occur despite their suffering as it does because of it: those whose anguish is moderate, as opposed to either minimal or overwhelming, report the greatest growth in the wake of their loss. Spurred by pain, rebuilding a world of meaning would therefore seem to be a priority, one that could carry benefits not only in alleviating complicated grief symptoms, but also in renewing a sense of hope and possibility.

How might such significance and growth be found in the midst of mourning? The potential answers are many, as some grievers draw on core philosophic or spiritual beliefs that give meaning to suffering, or work with trained counsellors who can hear the hard stories of their loss and help them weave them into the fuller story of their lives with their loved ones. In addition, others find meaning in continuing, rather than relinquishing their bonds with the deceased, seeking ways to keep their stories alive as a source of inspiration as they move into a changed future. Still others come to view the present moment as a gift, as when we see a flower as all the more beautiful because it blooms only for a short time. As the field of bereavement has come to recognize the role of meaning making in helping people accommodate unwelcome change, self-help books for the bereaved that describe healing practices have appeared (Neimeyer, 2002), alongside volumes presenting numerous narrative, ritual, expressive and pastoral methods for bereavement professionals (Neimeyer, 2012; Neimeyer et al., 2011).

In summary, a good deal of evidence increasingly documents the helpful role of reaffirming or reorganising a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. I hope that this brief introduction to this work prompts practitioners to attend to the significance of bereavement as well as its symptomatology, and encourages the bereaved themselves to seek and find meaning in life-altering transitions.

References


Note: For studies mentioned in this article as well as additional resources for a meaning-making approach to grief therapy, go to http://web.me.com/neimeyer/

About Dr. Neimeyer

Robert A. Neimeyer, Ph.D., is a professor in the Psychotherapy Research Area of the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, where he also maintains an active clinical practice. Since completing his doctoral training at the University of Nebraska in 1982, he has conducted extensive research on the topics of death, grief, loss and suicide intervention.

Dr. Neimeyer has published 25 books and written nearly 400 articles and book chapters. He is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process, both in his published work and through his frequent professional workshops for national and international audiences.

Dr. Neimeyer is the editor of two respected international journals, Death Studies and the Journal of Constructivist Psychology, and has served as President of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has received numerous awards.
Montgomery Hospice is grateful to the many area businesses and private foundations that made a philanthropic contribution to our work by participating in our Corporate Partnership Program. Donations from our corporate partners help to underwrite educational programs and other initiatives that educate county residents about our services.

Among the many benefits afforded to our Corporate partners are:

- Community visibility through educational, marketing and program materials
- Access to free grief and loss education for employees through Montgomery Hospice’s Bereavement Care Services
- Free end-of-life planning education seminars for employees
- Year-long recognition with listing of your company name and logo on the Montgomery Hospice website with a link to your website
- A recognition item to be displayed in your place of business
- Your company logo appearing in each issue of Hospice Matters, the Montgomery Hospice newsletter that is published two times a year with a distribution of over 14,000 per issue
- Your company featured in one issue of the 2012 Hospice Matters
- Recognition in Montgomery Hospice’s annual report, distributed widely to donors, medical professionals, state and federal lawmakers and policy-makers
- Listing of your company’s name in the Tree of Lights program, Annual Conference marketing materials and program, and in the Hospice Cup program
- Banner recognition in our Gazette educational supplement, which is distributed to nearly 300,000 Montgomery County households and at health fairs and other venues throughout the area
- Invitation for a company representative to attend a VIP Montgomery Hospice event.

Businesses which are interested in becoming a Montgomery Hospice Corporate Partner for 2012 should contact Marlene Bradford, Director of Development at 301 921 4401 or mbradford@montgomeryhospice.org.

Diamond Partner

Gold Partners

Joseph Gawler’s Sons has provided the highest standards of funeral and cremation services to the families of the greater Washington DC metro area since 1850. We pride ourselves in providing a “Concierge Level” of service to families, with the sole purpose of alleviating stress at a most crucial time. We feel that by giving this high level of service, we are offering a greater value to families.

We strongly support the efforts of Montgomery Hospice, which provides professional care to terminally ill persons and also to the families of those who are ill. Montgomery Hospice is the leader in providing compassion, comfort and support to all persons they serve.

Hines-Rinaldi has provided compassionate and dignified funeral services to families in the Metropolitan area since 1873. We realize the importance of everyone’s personal wishes and traditions, and will work to create the funeral experience you want - from traditional services to anything that is possible today. Our funeral arrangers are experienced and compassionate professionals who will listen to what you have to say and who take pride in making sure each and every detail is handled with care for you and your family.

Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, Inc. is proud to partner with Montgomery Hospice, as their services are a valuable tool for the families of Montgomery County. Their commitment to provide excellent service to each family goes hand in hand with the core values of Hines-Rinaldi, and we are privileged to work with such a great organization.
Gold Partners cont.

The Pettit Family Charitable Foundation was started in 1989 and is operated by five trustees from the Pettit family. The Foundation works mainly in the areas of food, health, housing and shelter.

Silver Partners

Several of the Foundation’s trustees are active members in the community, serving as volunteers with area non-profit organizations. Mr. Dick Pettit was a Montgomery Hospice board member for many years, also serving as Chairman of the Foundation Board. He currently serves as a volunteer on the Corporate Gifts Committee for “Gentle the Journey,” the 3-year comprehensive fundraising campaign to raise $8 million for Montgomery Hospice.

Family & Nursing Care, family owned and operated since 1968, has long been the leader in compassionate, progressive and complete care for older adults. Family & Nursing Care is the area’s most trusted resource for home care and also the nation’s first provider of in-home therapeutic massage for older adults.

Family & Nursing Care’s in-home care services range from aides to assist with daily living activities for an aging parent, companionship or hospice care, to RNs and LPNs for more complex needs. In addition, our licensed massage therapists provide older adults with relief, wellness and better quality of life through therapeutic massage. Massage therapy is an increasingly common component of hospice care because it brings great comfort and relaxation. We have given thousands of families peace-of-mind, knowing that their loved ones are being cared for by dependable, respectful, compassionate professionals.

Family & Nursing Care proudly supports Montgomery Hospice in its mission to gentle the journey through serious illness and loss with skill and compassion. We applaud Montgomery Hospice’s commitment to ease the burdens of patients and their families, and to provide them with dignity and comfort throughout their difficult time. Furthermore, we appreciate all the volunteer services offered, especially the bereavement care support services Montgomery Hospice offers to anyone in the community coping with loss.

Visiting Angels, America’s Choice In Homecare®, has been serving Montgomery County for over a decade. We are licensed, bonded and insured. We uphold the highest standards of ethics and compassionate care. Our specially screened, licensed and trained caregivers provide assistance with all the tasks of daily living, such as: personal care, meal preparation, laundry, light housekeeping, medication reminders and incidental transportation. Visiting Angels conducts no-cost assessments by a Gerontology Specialist to help patients and their families create a personalized care plan. We believe each patient is unique and special and their care plan should be customized to meet their needs. We Care Every Day In Every Way®.

Visiting Angels is proud to renew our support for, and commitment to, Montgomery Hospice. Visiting Angels and Montgomery Hospice share a common vision of helping families care for a loved one. We each assume nurturing, caring roles to ensure that our patients are comfortable, well cared for and families are able to spend quality time together. We work shoulder to shoulder with patients, families and Montgomery Hospice. Our relationship with Montgomery Hospice is ever growing as we continue to learn from their fine example. We are Visiting Angels but no one gentles the journey like Montgomery Hospice.
Memorial and Honorary Gifts

In memory of:

Quentin Aanenson
Elle A. Abel
Velma Vereckhout Allen
Dorothy Allen
Mary Allen
Paul Allen
Marylyn Altmare
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Richard M. Asofsky
Mary G. Arthur
Harold Arnaiz
David Templeton Armitage

Gifts made “in memory of” may recognize any person, including members of the community or a Montgomery Hospice patient.
Between September 1, 2011 and January 31, 2012, Montgomery Hospice received contributions in memory of or in honor of the following individuals. We are grateful for these gifts.

**In honor of:**

James B. Altman
Virginia & Ed Boxwell
Bradley Martin Presbyterian Church
Ada Colferai
The Copstick Family
Jane C. Corrigan
Lora E. Drezen
Lois A. Eaton
Family Care
Beryl Feinberg
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**Arthur Lifson**

**William H. Lefkoff**

**Lowell Charles Woodford**

**Hugh M. Woodward**

**Gilbert Charles ‘Chuck’ Willett**

**Moses Wilson**

Please accept our apologies if we have omitted any names from these lists. **
Thank you to all who supported and attended the annual Tree of Lights ceremony in November, 2011.

In honor of:

George Lawrence Altman
Donald B. Anderson
Ira Byock
Colin B. Catlett
Richard L. Chace
Delphine Davis
Shirley Colvin
Ira Byock
Tom Briscoe
George Lawrence Altman
Roberta Zwilsky
Rosa Zepeda
Matthew C. Zehner
Rosa Zepeda
Robert Zeliski

Community Partners

We are grateful to our Community Partners who have supported Montgomery Hospice with a gift of $250 or more between September 1, 2011 and January 31, 2012.

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Debate Evangelical Lutheran Church
Darnestown Presbyterian Church

organizations

Foster, Murphy, Altman & Nickel, PC
Hospital Care
Inter-Faith Chapel
Potomac United Methodist Church

11
calendar of events

Bereavement Care- Open to all Montgomery County Residents. Free. Pre-registration required. 301 921 4400

May 1  Remembering Mom and Dad: A workshop for adults who have lost a parent or parents. 7:00-8:30 pm. Montgomery Hospice, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville.

May 8 & 15  Beyond Words: Grief Expression through Art. A two-session workshop for anyone mourning the death of a loved one, using creative ways of expressing grief. 6:00-8:00 pm at Montgomery Hospice, 1355 Piccard Dr. Rockville.

May 15  Afternoon Grief Support Group. For anyone grieving the death of a loved one. Group meets each Tuesday from 1:00-2:30 pm for six weeks at Trinity Lutheran Church, 11200 Old Georgetown Road, North Bethesda.

May 22  Evening Grief Support Group. For anyone grieving the death of a loved one. Group meets each Tuesday from 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks at Medstar Montgomery Medical Center (Montgomery General Hospital), 18101 Prince Philip Drive, Olney.

May 23  Loss of a Child Support Group. For parents grieving the death of a child of any age. Group meets each Wednesday from 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks at Montgomery Hospice, 1355 Piccard Drive, Rockville.

May 24  Parent Loss Support Group. For adults who have experienced the death of one or both parents. Group meets each Thursday from 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks at Woodside United Methodist Church, 8900 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring.

Professional Education

Sep 6  Annual Montgomery Hospice Conference with Dr. Robert Neimeyer. “Lessons of Loss: Rewriting Stories of Bereavement” - an all day conference at The Universities at Shady Grove, Rockville. Professional CEUs awarded.

Volunteer Training

May 25, Jun 1 & 8  Volunteer Training prepares volunteers for their work supporting patients with life-limiting illnesses and the families who support them. 8:30am–3:30pm each day. Montgomery Hospice, 1355 Piccard Dr., Rockville. Pre-registration required: 301 921 4400

Fundraising

May 2  May Madness for Montgomery Hospice. Community fundraiser to benefit Montgomery Hospice at Caddies on Cordell in Bethesda. 6:00pm - 9:00pm.

For information about any event or activity, contact us at 301 921 4400. Visit www.montgomeryhospice.org for updated calendar information.