No Shame in Grief: Letting Go of Facebook-Perfect Suffering

by Rev. Dr. Carla Cheatham

When we share on social media, we cannot help but follow the same model. Our mothers instructed us to put on clean underwear before traveling in case we were in an accident and to suck in our guts so our bellies wouldn’t show. How many of us hurt ourselves, with aching backs and restricted breathing, by walking around with a way-too-tensed-up torso trying to hide that our muffin top exists? Some things stick with us.

Before group pictures go on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat, we get our friends’ approval, because someone always thinks their chin or eyes or hair isn’t just right. We put the best of our smiling lives out there for everyone we know to see.

We don’t post our angry faces when someone almost runs us off the road, or share the creative combinations of four-letter words we yell at them from the anonymity of our cars. We don’t post our snarky fights with our partners or our nagging of our children or their rolled eyes and slammed doors in response. We don’t write about the one more date that was a dud or the loved one that relapses again.

We don’t share that we’re terrified about keeping our jobs or paying our bills or wondering if we’ll ever be as happy as the smiling Facebook-perfect lives of our friends that flash through our newsfeeds. In fact, increasingly research tells us what many already instinctively know—comparing ourselves with what we see of our friends on Facebook can leave us feeling depressed.

Anytime we compare ourselves with others, especially with the reality we think we see on others’ public faces, we set ourselves up for judgment of ourselves.

We want to share only the positives about ourselves, and, please hear me, there’s nothing wrong with that! Of course we want to present our best selves. It takes courage to air our dirty laundry, especially when many folks, in their own sense of shame and discomfort with imperfection, don’t want to see it.

But that’s the issue—shame holds us back from being real, and when we avoid letting people around us know how we are really REALLY doing, we rob ourselves of the support we need and deserve during tough times. Letting those people see what we are really feeling involves the risk of being vulnerable and authentic, which most often is not easy to do.

Certainly, there is great wisdom in carefully choosing to whom we bare our souls. We protect ourselves from sharing our tender selves with those who have not yet earned that sacred right. Each of us has our own story about trusting the wrong person and winding up on the receiving end of abandonment, judgment, shame or other betrayal. Reaching out definitely involves risk.
Many people understand that hospice professionals are experts at alleviating the physical symptoms of patients who are nearing the end of their lives. They may not know, however, that our care is more comprehensive. It involves treating the “whole person,” which includes working on any emotional or spiritual issues which patients or their families may express. Montgomery Hospice starts by listening to patients’ stories, by asking questions about where they find meaning in their lives, and by discerning what they see as their goals and objectives for the time that they have remaining.

Montgomery Hospice chaplains are skilled spiritual counselors who help people find comfort by affirming and exploring the beliefs and values of those they visit. Chaplains support people of all faith traditions and those with other non-faith backgrounds and perspectives. Each of our 17 chaplains has a master’s degree and advanced training in end-of-life spiritual care, and they represent a diverse array of faiths and denominations.

Montgomery Hospice social workers listen carefully to patient and family concerns, and help them with practical tools and coping skills. They also can help families with difficult conversations. The 22 social workers all have master’s degrees in Social Work; most are certified as an Advance Certified Hospice and Palliative Care Social Worker.

The eight members of our bereavement team also recognize the importance of listening, especially to personal stories. These grief professionals all have master’s degrees in a counseling-related specialty. For the families of our patients, Montgomery Hospice bereavement counselors provide support for 13 months after the death of their loved one. They follow the lead of the individual, understanding that each person grieves in a unique way.

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This fall, in conjunction with the Montgomery Hospice Center for Learning, the work of chaplains and bereavement counselors will converge as they team up to host a professional conference where Montgomery Hospice will explore many of the topics of spirituality and grief through the lens of storytelling. Our speaker, Rev. Dr. Carla Cheatham, has extensive education and experience in both chaplaincy and bereavement work. (Please see more information about the conference and about Dr. Cheatham in this issue of the newsletter.)

Narratives of Healing: Presence with Others’ Stories and Our Own

What:  Montgomery Hospice Bereavement Conference  
When:  October 12, 2018  
Where:  Universities at Shady Grove Conference Center  
Speaker:  Rev. Dr. Carla Cheatham

The 2018 Bereavement Conference will feature Rev. Dr. Carla Cheatham, an outstanding national keynote speaker and educator who has extensive experience in hospice chaplaincy and professional training for hospice workers. She is an insightful and engaging storyteller, and her most recent book, *Hospice Whispers: Stories of Life*, is filled with wisdom from her work and life. During her daylong presentation, she will focus on issues of caring presence, being with suffering, good listening, resilience and spiritual meaning. The bereavement department is pleased to share the sponsorship of this event with our chaplain colleagues, recognizing that the presentation will be of interest not only to hospice workers, medical staff and mental health professionals, but also religious leaders, faith communities and many others. CE credits will be available to participants (pending approval). This conference is part of a wider educational program offered by the Montgomery Hospice Center for Learning.
When grieving, the temptation may be to protect ourselves during an especially tender time. While this may be wise in many ways, trying to pretty up our grief and make it Facebook-perfect does not serve us well.

Thinking we have to put on a brave face so others comment about how strong we are only sends grief underground, and tells others they have to suck in their emotional muffin top, too, as if it’s something of which we should all be ashamed. Do we really want to send each other that message?

I’m not saying we should emotionally vomit all over everyone on social media. I’m not necessarily suggesting you have to bring your phone with you under the covers as you eat a half-gallon of ice cream the third day in a row and show everyone what’s really going on all the time.

We are allowed to be judicious with our sharing and protective of our grief process. We must be mindful about whom we invite into our shrunken and shaken world when in the midst of acute grief.

But there’s a balance to strike here so that we don’t send grief, our own or others, underground with the message that it has to wear clean underwear, and have no double chin or bedhead, to be worthy and acceptable, or loveable and supported.

We must stop telling ourselves and each other that grief has to be brave, stoic, strong or Facebook-perfect. Real bravery in grief is to feel it, experience it, express it, and let it be what it needs to be without fear of shame and without judging ourselves or each other.

If being demonstrative or expressive isn’t your way, if you’re more private and guarded and are more likely to process things internally, that’s okay, too, so long as it’s the result of what you need for your process and not because you feel like you’re not allowed to let it be seen.

Let other people own their own judgments about your life; they aren’t yours to carry. Let them wrestle with their own misguided beliefs about how grief is supposed to act. Let them face their own internalized gremlins about expressing what get labeled as negative emotions. It’s good for them to have to deal with their own judgments and it’s bad for us to take others’ shame in as our own.

Find safe places to let your grief be seen, really witnessed, and cared for. Sniff out the people in your circles who get it and are able to sit with their own discomfort well enough to be with you lovingly in yours.

Let us all learn from each other that there is no shame in grief; that when someone we love dies or when the world as we know it or thought or hoped it to be falls apart in some other way that it’s natural to have a reaction, and a strong one that involves snot and yelling at G-d and confusion and regret and situational appropriate short-term depression and flat out not having it all together.

Silenced grief can sometimes be just as or even more destructive than the original source of our pain itself. We can’t afford to send grief and suffering underground or hide it behind fake smiles. We can help teach each other that grief need not be prettied up, rushed, airbrushed, edited or silenced.

For each of you who takes the brave step of letting your grief be seen, thank you for giving others of us permission to be real, to give our grief the space it needs to breathe and move, and to find healing over time.

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After extensive education and research in the areas of counseling, health and spirituality, Rev. Dr. Carla Cheatham began a decade of work as a hospice chaplain and bereavement coordinator in Austin, Texas. She is now the Principal and Lead Trainer for Carla Cheatham Consulting Group, LLC and serves as a national keynote speaker and educator teaching in the areas of clinical presence and attunement, corporate and team health, compassion fatigue and resilience, ethical spiritual and existential care, grief support, ethical boundaries, and more. Carla is the section leader for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s Spiritual Caregivers Section, chair of NHPCO’s Ethics Advisory Council, an Adjunct Professor at the Seminary of the Southwest, and Affiliate Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland where she co-developed and now teaches courses for their new Masters of Science in Palliative Care degree.
Hospice Chaplains and Spiritual Care: Misconceptions and Facts

By Laura Edwards, MDiv, Montgomery Hospice chaplain

Chaplains are an important part of the team of professionals who care for Montgomery Hospice patients. Some of those patients, however, are reluctant to speak with the chaplain due to their misconceptions or preconceived notions, or simply because they lack understanding of the purpose of a hospice chaplain.

So, what does a hospice chaplain do?

**Misconception:** Hospice chaplains only provide support to patients who are religious, and they only talk about religious or spiritual matters.

**FACT:** Hospice chaplains provide compassionate, nonjudgmental support to people of all faiths and people of no faith, no matter what they believe or don’t believe. Chaplains seek to identify and connect to the strengths that are most meaningful to each patient and, incidentally, rarely talk about religion or theology. Some people enjoy a good academic discussion now and then, but as people near death, more often their focus turns to their life and those they love. The chaplain follows the patient’s lead and lets the patient do the talking.

**Misconception:** A hospice chaplain’s role is to take the place of the patient’s priest, pastor, rabbi or imam.

**FACT:** Hospice chaplains supplement but do not replace the support that the patient already receives from a spiritual leader. Specializing in end-of-life care, however, means that hospice chaplains bring an additional layer of education and comfort to this particular stage of life.

**Misconception:** A chaplain’s main goal is to proselytize and convert patients to their own religious beliefs.

**FACT:** No, no, no. A hundred times no. Chaplains do not represent any religious belief system when they enter a patient’s home; their goal is to support and respect whatever beliefs that patient has or doesn’t have. In fact, chaplains often find themselves in the position of protecting patients from well-meaning friends, relatives or caregivers whose mission is to “save” or convert the patient before they die. Chaplains always advocate for a patient’s beliefs to be respected.

**Misconception:** A visit from the chaplain means that death is imminent.

**FACT:** Hospice chaplains are about relationship, companionship, getting to know patients and having the privilege of walking with them along their way. The chaplain and the rest of the Montgomery Hospice team are there to support a person in their living and in their dying, to be a familiar, caring face as death comes closer and not a stranger who only shows up at the time of death.

**Misconception:** A chaplain’s purpose with patients is to read scripture and pray with them.

**FACT:** For patients for whom prayer and scripture are meaningful, the chaplain is well-prepared and honored to be a support in this way, but a chaplain does so much more. Chaplains listen with acceptance and care. Chaplains listen with an ear to the spiritual and utilize a person’s beliefs about day-to-day living and about death and dying. Chaplains provide a presence of acceptance and calm and meet patients where they are. Chaplains provide validation of patients’ accomplishments and affirmation of their being. Chaplains allow patients to struggle with difficult feelings and to express their greatest joys. Chaplains normalize the messiness of life and offer opportunities for non-judgmental reflection; chaplains enable patients to see their own life story and to celebrate all of it.

**What chaplains do**

- Listen with an open heart
- Focus on the patient
- Are “present” and open
- Listen with acceptance
- Allow expressions of anger, guilt, blame
- Allow for silence
- Pray if desired
- Accept tears as a normal response
- Stay calm
- Allow hard questions to be voiced
- Explore beliefs and meaning
- Allow for lighthearted moments, laugh
- Advocate for a patient’s wishes
- Honor the patient’s own wisdom

LOVE, LISTEN, RESPECT

Patients often express surprise as their misconceptions dissolve and they come to realize that chaplain visits can “gentle their journey” in so many unforeseen and positive ways.
Corporate Partners

Montgomery Hospice is grateful to its 2018 Corporate Partners. Donations through our Corporate Partnership program help to underwrite educational programs and other initiatives that inform county residents about our services.

Businesses and organizations interested in becoming a Montgomery Hospice Corporate Partner should contact:

Marlene Bradford, Vice President of Philanthropy
301 637 1874  mbradford@montgomeryhospice.org

Thank you to the 2018 Corporate Partners listed below.

Diamond Level Partners

Adventist HealthCare
Adventist HealthCare, the first and largest healthcare system in Montgomery County, Md., offers a full range of health and wellness services to the community, including acute hospital care, rehabilitation, mental and behavioral health services, home care, health education, a physician network, urgent care and wellness services for businesses. These include Adventist HealthCare Shady Grove Medical Center; Adventist HealthCare Washington Adventist Hospital; Adventist HealthCare Rehabilitation; Adventist HealthCare Behavioral Health & Wellness Services; Adventist HealthCare Home Care Services; Adventist HealthCare Center for Health Equity & Wellness; Adventist HealthCare Adventist Medical Group; Adventist HealthCare Urgent Care; Adventist HealthCare Imaging and Adventist HealthCare LifeWork Strategies.

Based in Gaithersburg, Md., Adventist HealthCare is a faith-based, not-for-profit organization of dedicated professionals who work together each day to provide excellent wellness, disease management and healthcare services to the community. The mission of Adventist HealthCare is to demonstrate God’s care by improving the health of people and communities through a ministry of physical, mental and spiritual healing. Adventist HealthCare’s commitment to caring for the community began in 1907 and continues today with a full system of care that includes dietitians, therapists, nurses, behavioral health experts, health educators, physicians and support staff dedicated to keeping the community healthy and living well.


Family & Nursing Care
Support from others can help you cope with grief and loss. When a loved one is receiving hospice care, having a team in place is vital to staying healthy and preparing for loss. Family & Nursing Care can be an integral part of the team.

Caregivers from Family & Nursing who have previous hospice experience have a better understanding of the importance of pain management and changes in condition such as breathing, alertness, appetite and mobility, and can report these changes to the hospice team. The Caregivers enable the family to spend quality time with their loved one and reduce the responsibilities of personal care.

A highly-trained, dedicated Client Services Manager (CSM) also serves as a support to the family every step of the way. Unique to Family & Nursing Care, the CSM will help coordinate the in-home Caregivers and stay in regular contact with the family and with hospice. This high level of communication means that the best care possible is given to your family.

Family & Nursing Care has been a long-time supporter of Montgomery Hospice and its mission to “gentle the journey through serious illness and loss with skill and compassion.” Home care is a perfect complement to help ease the burdens of clients and their families and provide them with dignity and comfort throughout their difficult time. As the spouse of a mutual Family & Nursing Care and Montgomery Hospice client expressed, “From their [Family & Nursing Care’s] responsiveness and flexibility to the high quality, sincerity and enthusiasm of the caregivers, they helped me and my family navigate this difficult journey with empathy and respect.”


Joseph Gawler’s Sons, LLC
Joseph Gawler’s Sons, LLC has been part of the Washington DC Metro community since 1850 when Joseph Gawler opened his cabinetmaking shop in a building in the 1700 block of Pennsylvania Avenue. It was here that the business eventually evolved into a funeral home serving thousands of families over the past 168 years. The business was moved to its current location of 5130 Wisconsin Avenue, NW in the early 1960s. This facility houses a beautiful chapel that will seat 220 and is complete with a pipe organ. Over the next several months the building and grounds will be beautifully renovated to continue to provide a warm and wonderful setting for our families to gather to honor their loved ones.


At Joseph Gawler’s Sons, LLC our priority is to help all families that call upon us to assist them through a difficult time in their lives. Due to our dedication, care, and persistent service excellence, we have had the honor of serving the families of several former Presidents of the United States. Our compassionate staff can assist each family with customized service and experience based on you or your loved one’s wishes. We pride ourselves on assisting families through the most difficult time with an unmatched service level.

We are proud to support Montgomery Hospice and their amazing ability to care for families and individuals at such an emotional and stressful time.

For more information on our history, please visit our website at www.JosephGawlers.com.

Silver Level Partners

Profit Law Firm, LLC

During a family crisis, when health issues become obvious, you may find yourself asking serious questions. What will happen to my legacy? Can I do more to protect my spouse, children or disabled family members? What happens to a business?

You may feel alone when asking these questions. You are not. The attorneys at Profit Law Firm, LLC listen to your concerns and can assist with finding answers and crafting solutions in difficult times.

Through our estate planning and elder law services, we can make it easier to assist family members, who may need assistance with daily living, or even Medicaid planning and care costs.

As you face these challenges, we are a phone call away. Our attorneys provide living wills, revocable trusts, special needs trusts, advance directives, powers of attorney, guardianships, probate and tax planning for businesses and estates. All of these services are available at our convenient, metro accessible locations in DC, Chevy Chase, and Greenbelt, Maryland.

Profit Law Firm is honored to work with Montgomery Hospice and assist Montgomery Hospice in accomplishing its mission to help the community. As attorneys we are personally dedicated to legacy planning and we are honored to support you and your loved ones as you navigate through obstacles.

Please phone 301 882 3670 or visit our website at www.profitlawfirm.com.

Sagel Bloomfield

Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care, Inc. is a family-owned funeral home that brings a rich history of experience and a 90-year tradition of caring for families from all walks of life. Blending traditional funeral services with contemporary forward-thinking approaches, our funeral home is a proven leader in the profession and a trusted partner for bereaved families. Our highest quality services, integrity, dedication to customer care, and deep roots in the community are key building blocks of the reputation that local and independent owners Al Bloomfield and Ed Sagel have built across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Sagel Bloomfield’s customized ‘Fair and Realistic’ approach is fully responsive to the needs and customs of the families it serves. We have a wide variety of services, and have Jewish expertise, as well as knowledgeable licensed non-Jewish staff for our Value Choice Cremation and Funeral Care Brand. We can handle advance planning needs, and memorial/monument design and installation at any cemetery. We’re truly able to deliver a funeral service of your choice and your way. Along with concern for the community, building strong relationships with organizations like Montgomery Hospice, we also strive to recognize the hard work of all hospice care workers throughout the year with meals, flowers or a simple thank you.

For more information on Sagel Bloomfield and Value Choice please visit www.sagelbloomfield.com or www.valuechoicecremationandfuneral.com.

Visiting Angels

Some things are innately beautiful and cannot be improved upon. A bunch of white daisies, a perfectly formed rose, and the smile of a child—none of these can be improved upon. Some things are beautiful because they have been improved upon. And, some things are both innately beautiful in their design and enhanced by their inclusionary nature. The basic premise of Montgomery Hospice, to gentle the journey of those with life-limiting illness, is in itself an awesome, innately beautiful gift to the recipients and their families. The gift is enhanced by partnerships Montgomery Hospice fosters, such as the partnership with Visiting Angels. Visiting Angels works hand-in-hand with Montgomery Hospice staff and volunteers to gently tend the body and spirit of the hospice patient.

For just over 15 years, we have held fast to our principles of quality care for our clients, regardless of any obstacles. We uphold the highest
Corporate Partners  cont. from page 6

standards of ethics and compassionate care. Our specially screened, licensed and trained caregivers provide assistance with all the tasks of daily living. Visiting Angels provides gifts through services that are often difficult for families and patients themselves. Our can-do spirit and our smiles convey to the family and the client that, at least for the time we are there, they are safe and cared for. 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.


We also want to thank:

Thanks also to our other corporate partners whose logos appear below.

Circle of Light Society

The Circle of Light Society recognizes individuals and families who have included Montgomery Hospice in their estate plans through a bequest, trust, insurance policy or other estate-planning vehicle. Individuals interested in joining the Circle of Light Society should contact Marlene Bradford, Vice President of Philanthropy, at 301 637 1874.

Montgomery Hospice also received donations from the following estates:

- Helen K. Biggs Estate
- Clare A. Gnecco Estate
- Eli Warren Goode Estate

Community Partners

We are grateful to our Community Partners who have supported Montgomery Hospice with a gift of $250 or more between September 1, 2017 and January 31, 2018.

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- Adventist HealthCare
- Jim Coleman Automotive
- Discovery Communications, Inc.
- Ralph J. Duffie, Inc.
- Environmental Management Services, Inc.
- Family & Nursing Care
- Heffron Company, Inc.
- Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, Inc.
- J&G Electric Co., Inc.
- Joseph Gawler’s Sons, LLC
- Lerch, Early & Brewer, Child.
- McMillan Metro, PC
- Metropolitan Shuttle
- M.E. Electricians, Inc.
- Mobile Medical Imaging
- The Original Pancake House - Bethesda and Rockville
- Profit Law Firm, LLC
- Right at Home
- Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care, Inc.
- Sandy Spring Bank
- Schaeffer Financial, LLC
- Senior Helpers
- Shanghai LTD. Partnership
- Signature Construction Group
- Signet Technologies Inc
- Toledo Refining Company
- Visiting Angels

**faith groups**
- Darnestown Presbyterian Women’s Association
- The German Lutheran Church
- Washington, DC
- Harwood House Thrift Shop
- Howard Chapel-Ridgeville United Methodist Church
- St. Bartholomew Catholic Church
- St. Elizabeth Catholic Church
- St. Francis of Assisi Church
- St. Raphael Catholic Church
- Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville

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- Gary and Pennie Abramson Charitable Foundation
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- The Rona and Jeffrey Abramson Foundation
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- The Browning Family Foundation
- The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
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- Gillespie Notley Trust
- Pettit Family Charitable Foundation
- Rothkopf Greenberg Family Foundation
- The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc.
- Wolpoff Family Foundation, Inc.

**government**
- Maryland General Assembly
- Montgomery County Council Community Grant
- Montgomery County Executive Community Collaboration Grant

**organizations**
- The Association of Union Constructors Hospice Cup, Inc.
- Montgomery County 4-H Sheep and Swine Club
- Sandy Spring Bank Foundation
- Sugarloaf Mountain Region of the A.C.A.C, Inc.
- U.S. Army Research Laboratory E&P Division Staff
- United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1996
- The Woman’s Club of Bethesda

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- The Woman’s Club of Bethesda
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Ruby Bist
E. Margaret Belter
Walt H. Bennett
Toby R. Cutler
Jane C. Howard
Montgomery Hospice patient.
Gifts made "in memory of" may recognize any person, including members of the community or a Montgomery Hospice patient.
memory of or in honor of the following individuals. We are grateful for these gifts.

Between September 1, 2017 and January 31, 2018, Montgomery Hospice received contributions in honor of:

Margaret R. Miller
Debora S. McGregor
Mrs. Joseph F. Maloney and family
Barbara Lynch
Donald H. Luecke
Helen J. Barry
Catherine F. Bechta
Robert C. Schultz
Sarah L. Sullivan
David H. Stoller
Teresa A. Yousef
Kam-Shui Yung Gabey
Harold and Marilyn Young

in honor of:

Between September 1, 2017 and January 31, 2018, Montgomery Hospice received contributions in memory of or in honor of the following individuals. We are grateful for these gifts.

Please accept our apologies if we have omitted any names from these lists.
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calendar of events

Bereavement Care: free grief education for anyone who lives or works in Montgomery County

*Remembering Mom and Dad Workshop* May 9, 7:00-8:30 pm, Rockville
*Afternoon Grief Support Group* May 15, each Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm for six weeks, Bethesda
*Evening Grief Support Group* May 16, each Wednesday 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Rockville
*Loss of a Child Support Group* May 16, each Wednesday 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Rockville
*Parent Loss Support Group* May 17, each Thursday 6:30-8:00 pm for six weeks, Chevy Chase

Volunteer Training
Friday, September 14, 2018, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm,
Friday, September 21, 2018, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, and
Friday, September 28, 2018, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Fundraising
Save the date!
2018 Montgomery Hospice Gala
November 10, 2018

*Visit www.montgomeryhospice.org for updated calendar information.*