



# for Every Season

## New Year, New Life

By Mark E. Ritchie, LCSW, Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care of Miami

### Every New Journey Begins with a Good-bye. Conversely, Every Ending is Also a New Beginning.

The beginning of a new year is traditionally seen as a time to look forward and make fresh or renewed starts and efforts. The ending of the previous year tends to be a time to look back and review the year gone by.

For those experiencing a very recent significant loss, it can be very hard to look forward to a new year and a new beginning, and as a person struggling with acute grief, it's a time to be gentle and patient with yourself. Your psyche or soul needs time to heal in order to function "well enough" to consider re-constructing your life without the physical presence of your deceased loved one.

For those who might be a bit further along in their grief healing, it can be an ideal time to tap into the energy of promising beginnings that a new year might offer.

*"Suffering breaks our world. Like a tree struck by lightning – splintered, shaken, denuded – our world is broken by suffering, and we will never be the same again."*

– Nathan Kollar

The initial surge of grief can indeed be remarkably disabling, and it's normal to feel lost, confused and disoriented as one grasps the full impact, loss and change that's been forced on him/her. The world has changed, one's life needs to be re-constructed incorporating the physical absence of the loved one, and this adaptation can be overwhelmingly daunting. Initially, the bereaved is in no state of mind to reasonably construct a new normal. However, as time passes, the bereaved comes to be up to that task in intermittent periods between waves of grief.

As the old year fades and you've survived the holiday season, in your periods of relative calm it's a great time to challenge yourself gently and patiently in the task of re-building your life like the mythical phoenix. As a person who is now another year older and another year wiser, you're able to build better than you would have a few years ago. The challenges of the initial grief surge, and having cared for your dying

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*small things  
that matter most*



# Miracle Monday

Once the music started and Sonia began to walk down the aisle, all the flurry and chaos of getting things ready in time on that Monday morning faded away, and all that was left was the lilting sound of Anita Baker's "Giving You the Best That I Got" and the look on Michael's face as Sonia approached her groom.



This wedding wasn't years in the making; in fact, it had only been three days since Michael popped the question.

Although the couple had been together for more than 20 years, there was an urgency in the question and the timing of this all – Michael was dying from lung cancer, and he only had a little time left.

Michael had been in the hospital for a few weeks as he declined, and Sonia, his "Renia," was at his side all day, every day, even sleeping in the hospital at night. When our hospice care consultant Althea was called in to talk to the couple, they made the decision to come on hospice care because they wanted Michael to live out the rest of his days exactly how he wanted to. As they talked about how Sonia would have power of attorney and be in charge of affairs after Michael died, Althea could tell Michael had something on his mind.

Then he came out with it: "Why can't I marry you, Sonia? I want to marry you."

Sonia was taken aback at first; they'd been together for 20 years, and they had always agreed that they didn't need to get married to prove their commitment to and love for each other. At this point, she was just trying to make sure everything was in order, so at first she brushed off Michael's comment. A wedding seemed unnecessary, and right now she wanted to just think about his care.

"But this is part of my care," Michael said. "You've been with me this long, you might as well go all the way with me."

"Okay," Sonia said at last. "Let's do it."

After that, it was all hands on deck to create the

perfect wedding in just three days. Our social worker Paige took lead on finding information about getting the marriage license, Althea helped Sonia with all the necessary paperwork, and over the weekend, everyone was brainstorming ideas to make the wedding more special. In fact, Althea got emails during the weekend from the nurses who were caring for Michael; he wouldn't stop talking about how excited he was to get married, and they wanted to make sure that he wouldn't be disappointed!

When Monday morning came, while Sonia went to get the marriage license, our team got busy decorating the family room at the Seasons Hospice Inpatient Unit. With the assistance of the Seasons Hospice Foundation, one of our staff members procured a decorated cake and a bouquet for Sonia to carry, and everyone was told to wear Detroit Lions gear because the couple were big fans. Despite the last-minute nature of the wedding, Sonia and Michael's family and friends were there to support them, filling up the room and gathering close.

Michael was the perfect groom, visiting with his guests while the rest of the wedding party assembled. Sonia had been so preoccupied with making sure she had everything ready that she hadn't had time to get a special dress, but one of her family members quickly offered to switch dresses with her, and before she knew it, she was in the perfect white outfit, complete with glitzy tiara and veil. Her bouquet was divided so that there were flowers for the bridesmaids and flower girl, and soon it was time for her to take the arms of her son and grandson and start walking down the hall of the hospice unit to where Michael waited in the family room.

When Sonia reached Michael's side at last, time stood still for a little bit, finally, as they listened to Anita Baker's classic words:

*My weary mind is rested  
And I feel as if my home is in your arms  
Fears are all gone, I like the sound of your song  
And I think I want to sing it forever*



*"It was the perfect chance to celebrate a lifetime of love and commitment, and to hold family and friends close."*

Forever. That's what Sonia and Michael promised each other.

After the ceremony finished, everyone stuck around to eat cake and celebrate the couple. There were tears, laughter, love and memories shared. It was the perfect chance to celebrate a lifetime of love and commitment, and to hold family and friends close.



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loved one, leaves you a changed person with new experiences and possibly more compassion for others experiencing grief and loss. Maybe this will be the first time you've had a chance to consider your own needs, wants and likes as you re-build a new sense of self and purpose that is whole and meaningful to you. Look through the newspapers, community postings, or other resources to see what appeals to you in terms of what to do with your free time. Consider doing things that you might not have had an opportunity to do before – try things out. The possibilities are endless as to whom you can choose to become, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon.

Your grief and the loss of your loved one may well have thrown you into crisis mode as you struggled to simply survive the pain, but the good thing about crisis, is that it's the only time we really open ourselves to grow in new ways. As perhaps you start to build your new "normal" you will discover new things about yourself; your tastes, priorities, strengths and preferences that you have not had a chance to reflect upon in a very long while.

This change, this "new normal" is not something you chose or wanted, and you have every right to resent that it's been forced on you. Cry, kick, claw at it if it helps, but in the end, reality has a way of reasserting itself over and over until we accept it and while it'll never be something you wanted, you might be surprised to find opportunities for meaningful growth that emerge from the rubble of your old life or normal.

Michael passed away the next day, on Tuesday. "This isn't just any Monday," Chaplain Portia had said the day before. "This is Miracle Monday." And it was true – the knowledge and the memory of the love that Sonia and Michael had reaffirmed to each other on that Monday, and the love and support that surrounded them that day, will be with the family forever.

## Finding Our Way Through the Winter Months

By Yusra Al-Shawaf, LCSW, Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care of Illinois

The winter months can be really hard for people. With the days getting shorter and, for most, getting colder, many people feel cooped up, lethargic, and generally down. For people who are grieving, the winter can make their feelings of grief that much more intense. When the loss makes them feel isolated, the weather is another barrier to reaching out for support. When the loss makes them feel empty, the lack of sunlight makes them less likely to engage in fulfilling activities. And for those who celebrate winter holidays, partaking in the festivities without that loved one can feel devastating.

There are ways, however, to mitigate the grief winter blues. If the holidays are hard to deal with, make a plan. Create a new tradition to honor that loved one or make it feel like they are still part of the celebrations although they are not there physically. Write a list of activities you enjoy in the wintertime and set a schedule to make them happen. Know that although it can be harder to visit with people in-person, there are other ways to connect. If calling on the phone is not your thing, try texting or messaging through social media, or exploring volunteer opportunities. Sometimes the best way to help ourselves is to help others.

Grief is hard enough as it is without the added effects of the winter season. But that doesn't have to mean we have to trudge through those cold, darker months. With some planning and a little work, we can make it just a little bit better.



## Honoring Life by Giving Hope

Through the generosity of our donors, Seasons Hospice Foundation has been able to touch the lives of patients and families in need by granting 388 final wishes through Q3 of 2018. Fulfilling these wishes alleviates suffering and supports our patients in achieving peaceful life closure. As we celebrate with loved ones and count our blessings during this holiday season, please



Gisèle D. Crowe  
Executive Director,  
Seasons Hospice Foundation

consider giving a gift in memory or in honor of a loved one. A gift to Seasons Hospice Foundation marks the love and joy that someone brought to our lives, while also helping other patients and their families. To learn more, please visit [www.SeasonsFoundation.org](http://www.SeasonsFoundation.org) or call 847-692-1000.

*Wishing you peace!*



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If our mailing records need to be updated, or if you would like to receive this newsletter electronically, please contact Seasons Hospice Foundation at 847-692-1000, ext. 4.

## Helping Others Through SEASONS HOSPICE FOUNDATION



*"If we lose  
love and  
self respect  
for each other,  
this is how  
we finally die."*

– Maya Angelou

### SEASONS HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Bereavement support for loved ones is an essential component of Seasons' mission. Thus far in 2017, we have provided outreach and grief support services to more than 20,000 family members. Seasons offers several opportunities for families to find support. Trained counselors provide:

- Support groups
- Individual counseling
- Check-in phone calls
- Supportive mailings
- Services of remembrance
- Educational workshops
- Online resources

These services are offered free of charge for families, friends and caregivers of Seasons Hospice patients. To learn more about support groups

available in your area, please visit <https://www.seasons.org/our-services/beravement-support/>. If you are in need of support, please reach out to your local hospice care team.

