How spring gardening can help you grow through grief

When Marla’s husband, Ray, passed following an extended illness, the plants and flowers that she received from family, friends and neighbors filled her home. Though she appreciated the thought behind each one, she admits to being overwhelmed with the prospect of caring for the plants, overcome with grief and exhaustion as she was. In the end, she gave all but two of them away to family and close friends.

“Ray was sick for such a long time,” said Marla. “And while I was grateful for the plants, I just didn’t have it in me, at that time, to care for anything else.”

But Marla had held on to one potted plant that she remembers catching her eye.

“One of my dearest friends, who’d lost her own husband just a couple of years back, brought me a beautiful, though empty, enamel flower pot,” she recalled with a smile. “But I was especially surprised because inside the pot was potting soil and tulip bulbs.”

A card attached to the gift offered sympathetic wishes that she would soon find comfort and hope in planting and nourishing the bulbs to full bloom.

“It was such a beautiful gesture and seemed to me that my friend understood my grief. It also gave me hope that there would be a time when things wouldn’t seem so sad.”

What Marla’s friend also understood was the powerful life-affirming power that gardening can offer.

Whether growing a single tulip bulb indoors, planning a memorial flower garden or digging in — literally — to a vegetable garden, the act of gardening can be a tremendous source of healing. The physical effort mixed with mindfulness of purpose (a form of meditation) has the potential to yield rewards that nourish both body and spirit.

Eva Shaw, PhD., author of Shovel It: Nature’s Health Plan, contends that those willing to dig in to the activity required of gardening “can find peace, health and happiness in your own back yard.”

According to Shaw, when planning a garden, it’s best to start small to ensure success. Starting with something as simple as a single indoor...

Welcome to our new “Journey Connections.” You are not alone.

Part of the mission of Coastal Hospice is to provide grief support to our families, friends, and caregivers for an extended time following their loved one’s death. Grieving is a uniquely individual experience with neither a schedule nor timetable.

In respect to our mission, we welcome you to our new publication, “Journey Connections.” Journey Connections will feature local stories, events, and education from our grief support team and others. Because grief is individualized and unique to each individual, Journey Connections will offer help, support, education, resources, and insights to assist you with your grief-related journey needs.

If you discover either through reading Journey Connections, self-reflection, or through other avenues that your emotions are interfering with your life, it may be helpful to seek professional help and support. We are here for you. With the support of professional grief counselors and others who have experienced loss, we can help you through the difficult times and assist you in adjusting to discovering the “new normal” for your life.

Coastal Hospice offers grief support, both individually and in groups, with specialized programs for children. Our services are free and open to anyone in the community who needs assistance, whether or not Coastal Hospice cared for their loved one. In our regularly-scheduled support groups — which take place throughout the Lower Shore (see Page 4 for a schedule) — participants work with a grief counselor to support each other. Each person has an individualized experience, but often their emotions are similar. Together they learn to live after loss.

Please know that you are not alone. We are here for you. Call us if you need us - 410-742-8732.
When you're ready...

Volunteering can be a way to get back into living

Most of you know firsthand how volunteers help us care for our patients and support our families. We couldn't provide the care we do without them!

What may surprise you is many of our volunteers were just like you — family members and caregivers for one of our patients. You may have personally experienced the positive impact our hospice volunteers had on your life. They may have run an errand for you, provided companionship to your loved one or given you a much-needed break. They may have waited on you at the Coastal Hospice Thrift Shop in Berlin, visited a veteran patient in your neighborhood, or informed you about hospice services at a local health fair.

Volunteering for Coastal Hospice is a wonderful opportunity to give back to a cause that has meant so much to you — and a great way to give of yourself to others. We have volunteers that serve in many different areas, and we have a place for you. Our criteria is simple: You need only have a compassionate heart for our patients and families.

There are several ways to help. Tell us your interests and how and when you’d like to help, and we will match you with one of our volunteer opportunities. We need volunteers for patient and family care, for staff and office support, for our Thrift Shop in Berlin, for grief support, and also for our We Honor Veterans Program.

We provide you with complete training before you are given an assignment, because we want to put your talents to work in ways that best serve our patients and also fulfill your desire to serve. When you are ready, please consider joining us!

Contact Sally Rankin at 410-742-8732 or email volservices@coastalhospice.org.com for more information.

A parable about living in the moment

“Peter and the Golden Thread” reprinted from Robin Sharma’s book “The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari.”

Peter was a young boy who could never live in the moment. He constantly daydreamed, never taking the time to savor the special moments that filled his days. One day, Peter fell asleep and was startled by an old woman with snow-white hair holding a magical ball with a hole in the center. Out of the hole dangled a long, golden thread.

"Peter," she said, “this is the thread of your life. If you pull the thread just a bit, an hour will pass in seconds. If you pull harder, whole days will pass in minutes. And if you pull with all your might, months – even years – will pass by in days.” Peter took the ball.

Peter was feeling bored as a schoolboy and wished he were a teenager. He pulled the string and was suddenly 16. But he still wasn't content. Instead, he dreamed of being an adult, so he pulled hard on the thread and many years flew by. Now he was middle-aged adult with a wife and children, grey hair and an old and frail mother.

Yet Peter still could not live in the moment, so again he pulled on the magic thread and became a 90-year-old man. His hair had turned white as snow and his wife and mother had passed. His children had grown up and left home to lead lives of their own.

For the first time in his entire life, Peter realized that he had not taken the time to embrace the wonders of living. He had never gone fishing with his kids or taken a moonlight stroll with his wife. He had never planted a garden or read wonderful books. Instead, he had hurried through life, never resting to see all that was good along the way.

Peter became very sad, fell asleep and again was startled by the old woman who had given him the ball and thread years earlier. “Have you enjoyed my special gift?” she asked.

“At first it was fun, but now I hate it,” he said. “My whole life has passed before my eyes. Sure, there would have been sad times as well as great times, but I haven't had the chance to experience either. I feel empty inside. I have missed the gift of living.”

“You are very ungrateful,” said the old woman. “Still, I will give you one last wish.”

“I'd like to go back to being a schoolboy and live my life over again,” Peter responded. When he opened his eyes, he was absolutely delighted to see his mother standing over him looking young and healthy and radiant. He had returned to his former life.

Peter went on to live a full life, rich with delights, joys and triumphs, but it all started when he stopped sacrificing the present for the future and began to live in the moment.

Continued from Page 1

Gardening through grief

flower pot can be extremely rewarding. However, in her book, she offers specific advice on both outdoor and indoor gardening.

RECOMMENDED READING

Shovel It: Nature’s Health Plan
by Eva Shaw, PhD.

Combines cutting-edge medical research and the best-kept gardening secrets. Dig in the dirt. Pick a posey. Come close to the grass. In this easy-to-read, how-to-guide, Dr. Shaw gives the backyard gardener the garden therapy advice needed with how to design a meditation garden, the principles of garden therapy, tips on garden journals, beating stress in the garden, designing a sanctuary, a fitness program, breathing exercises, the score card on the language of flowers, aromatherapy, feng shui, herbal remedies, gardens for those with physical challenges, and sharing one's garden to continue a life-long therapy.

Publisher: Writeriffic Publishing Group
ISBN-10: 0970575807
The death of his grandmother inspired Elmer Davis, M.Div., to become a chaplain at Coastal Hospice & Palliative Care.

“My grandmother, Odella Newton, was in Coastal Hospice’s care,” Davis said. “Before she passed, she told me I should do something for them because they were so kind to her. I went to volunteer; they found me a position as chaplain, and I’ve been here since then.”

Davis is a member of the grief support counseling team at Coastal Hospice, helping those who have lost a loved one deal with their grief.

“I believe God has called me to do this task,” Davis said.

Part of the mission of Coastal Hospice is to continue to support the family after a loved one passes. The team of grief support counselors makes phone calls to families, provides individual counseling, and runs support groups that meet regularly across the four Lower Shore counties.

Davis runs the grief support group meetings in Dorchester County. Anyone in the community who is experiencing grief is welcome to attend the free gatherings, not just families of hospice patients.

“Being in Dorchester, I’ll be the grief support counselor, meeting individuals where they are, helping them through the grieving process with the support of others who are grieving at the same time.”

“What drew me to grief support was I understood the emotional ups and downs,” Davis said. “In bereavement, you bring back life to people who think the light has gone out. You bring them back to good memories, good days. You help them through the holidays. And you are the agent that brings them along and helps them recognize and process their grief. You help them validate their emotional feelings about their loved ones.”

Davis, who was born and raised in Salisbury, attended James M. Bennett High School, Wor-Wic Community College and Wilmington University before earning his Masters Degree in Divinity from Howard University in 2005. He was a lieutenant with the Salisbury police department for 22 years where he gained experience in crisis situations.

“A United Methodist Conference pastor, he has been married for 28 years to Tyronna Davis and has two children and two grandchildren.

Grief support counseling at Coastal Hospice is not about religion or faith, Davis said.

“We generally don’t talk about our faith. We talk about processing the grief and give them the tools to do that. A lot of people just need the space to talk freely. We give them that opportunity.

“If your loved one dies suddenly, I may ask you to write a letter, because there could be some things you probably didn’t get to express. Once you write it, then it affords me the opportunity to help you process your grief. I’ll be able to illuminate some things you never thought about,” Davis said.

“You may be reluctant initially to expose yourself to what you’re really grieving. Later on, you don’t mind being part of a social group. It depends on where you are in your grieving process.”

Davis encourages the African-American community to use the services of Coastal Hospice, to make sure their loved ones receive the most advanced care.

“In the African-American community, we tend to take care of our own families. But to me, taking care of your own means making sure they get the best care. That’s hospice.”

“If I have an electrical problem, I call in an electrician, someone who has the skills. For end-of-life, we need to bring in professionals that know how to handle it. It’s not life or death that messes you up; it’s the iffy situations in the middle. We’re here to answer those questions – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Coastal Hospice provides the best end-of-life care any patient can receive.”

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UPCOMING GRIEF SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

**Dorchester County**

**Evening Support Group** – Dorchester County Library, 303 Gay St., Cambridge
All meetings on Tuesday at 6 p.m.:
March 7, March 28, April 11, April 25, May 2 and May 9
Information ~ Elmer Davis 410-726-2583

**Worcester County**

**Lunch Social Group** – all at 1 p.m.
March 16 - Longboard, 6701 Coastal Hwy, Ocean City
April 20 - B&I's on the Water, 75th St, Ocean City
May 18 - TBD
RSVP ~ Diana Pikulsky 410-641-6566

**Support Group** – Ocean Pines Library, 1100 Cathell Rd., Ocean Pines,
Every Thursday at 11 a.m.
Information ~ Bob Miller 410-251-8163

**Somerset County**

**Support Group** – Somerset County Library, 100 Collins St., Crisfield
Every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 11 a.m.
Information ~ Bob Miller 410-251-8163

**Wicomico County**

**Lunch Social Group** – all at 1 p.m.
March 8 - Fratelli's, 925 Snow Hill Rd., Salisbury
March 22 - Brew River, 502 West Main St., Salisbury
April 12 - Ruby Tuesday, 413 N. Fruitland Blvd., Fruitland
April 26 - Bob Evans, 2601 N. Salisbury Blvd., Salisbury
May 10 - Adam's Rib, 219 N. Fruitland Blvd., Fruitland
May 24 - Denny's, 100 East Cedar Lane, Fruitland
RSVP ~ Bob Miller 410-251-8163

**Support Group** – The MAC Center
909 Progress Circle., Salisbury
Every 2nd and 4th Friday at 1 p.m.
Information ~ Bob Miller 410-251-8163

**Evening Support Group** – The MAC Center
909 Progress Circle., Salisbury
Every 2nd and 4th Monday at 6 p.m.
Information ~ Bob Miller 410-251-8163

NOTE: All lunch socials are “Dutch treat.”

**TO OPT OUT:** You are likely receiving this publication following the death of a family member, friend or loved one who received care from Coastal Hospice. Grief support is a vital part of the hospice philosophy of care. This publication serves to share information you can use during this time and highlight upcoming events. If you do not wish to continue receiving this publication or have a change of address, please contact Melissa Dasher at 410-742-8732, ext. 621 or mdasher@coastalhospice.org.