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, overworn 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, 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 flower pot can be extremely rewarding. In her book, she offers specific guidelines on how to proceed.

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.

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. Tell us your interests and how and when you’d like to help, and we’ll 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 Volunteer Services at 410-742-8732 or email volservices@coastalhospice.org.com for more information.
A parable about grief, gardening, and growth  
by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

One spring morning a gardener noticed an unfamiliar seedling poking through the ground near the rocky, untended edge of his garden. He knelt to examine its first fragile leaves. Unsure what this new seedling was to become, the gardener removed the stones near the seedling's tender stalk and bathed it in rainwater from his worn watering can.

In the coming days the gardener watched the seedling struggle to live and grow in its new, sometimes hostile home. When weeds threatened to choke the seedling, he dug them out. He spooned dark, rich compost around its base. He even fashioned a special cover for the seedling from an old canning jar so that it would not freeze.

But the gardener also believed in the seedling’s natural capacity to adapt and survive. He did not water it too frequently. He did not stimulate its growth with chemicals. Nor did he succumb to the urge to lift the seedling from its unfriendly setting. Instead the gardener watched and waited. Day by day the seedling grew taller, stronger. Soon a bud appeared. Then the purple-blue petals unfurled, revealing a single, perfect columbine.

The gardener crouched next to the lovely blossom. “Congratulations,” he whispered to the columbine. “You have not only survived, you have grown beautiful and strong.” Suddenly a small voice whispered back, “Without your help I could not have. Thank you.” The gardener looked up but no one was there. Just the blue columbine nodding happily in the breeze.

The seedling in this parable represents the person who has suffered the death of someone dearly loved and cherished. The seedling is struggling to live in its new environment much as you may be struggling to cope with your new, scary world — a world that is now much different than before. A world that does not often understand your need to mourn. A world that does not always compassionately support you.

You need the love and attention of others if you are going to heal and grow. As grief support providers, our role is to create conditions that allow for such healing and growth. At our grief support groups and social groups, our bereavement counselors and others listen as you share your deep seated emotions of pain or sadness, removing a heavy weight from your shoulders. Instead of water, these groups offer empathy, support and a safe place to remember and reflect, helping quench the thirst of the hurting.

But notice, too, that the gardener in the parable does not take complete control of the seedling’s existence, but rather trusts in the seedling’s inner capacity to adapt and survive. The gardener does not transplant the seedling but instead allows it to struggle where it has landed. Likewise, we do not seek to rescue the hurting from their pain. But rather, as a result of its own arduous work, help the seedling in the parable grow into a beautiful columbine.

With time and the loving care and support of others, you too have inside you the potential for this same kind of transformation. Our greatest joy is in witnessing this growth and new beauty, especially in those who have learned to reconcile their grief. What an honor it is for us to garden in such rich soil!

Meet our new grief support counselor

Marceline Brooks, MSW, MDiv., has joined Coastal Hospice as a bereavement counselor, providing grief support to the Wicomico and Dorchester County communities. Brooks is currently leading the grief support groups at the Dorchester County Library in Cambridge and at the MAC Center in Salisbury. Brooks grew up in Salisbury until her family moved to Glen Burnie, and is a graduate of Glen Burnie High School. After serving in the U.S. Air Force for four years, Brooks began her multi-year career in telecommunications, receiving her degree in the field from Howard University.

While at Howard, she felt “called to chaplaincy,” Brooks said, and received degrees in Masters of Divinity and Masters of Social Work from the university. She then worked for the Maryland Department of Social Services in Prince Georges Co. Brooks became interested in hospice work after Coastal Hospice cared for her stepfather. “It is my goal to bring comfort to someone who needs it,” she said. “An early mentor told me to ask myself, ‘Who are you touching? You always need to be touching somebody in this life.’

Gardening through grief

Continued from Page 1
advice on both outdoor and indoor gardening.

Shovel It: Nature's Health Plan
by Eva Shaw, Ph.D.
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
RECOMMENDED READING

“In Lieu of Flowers: A Conversation for the Living”

“In Grieving is as natural as breathing, for if we have lived and loved, surely we will grieve...”

Nancy Cobb meets death in the most vital of places — in the lives of everyday people — and in doing so has found a way to infuse this darkest subject with light. Her candor and refreshing perspective make the deaths of those she has loved — and death itself — a subject to explore rather than to avoid.

Cobb’s personal experiences become a point of departure for what amounts to a longer conversation about loss. In telling stories about encounters with grief, Cobb opens us up to our own experiences, and she encourages us to accept and honor the “divine intersections” where the living meet the dying.

Thank you to all of you angels — 1,163 of you — who this year contributed more than $118,000 to help fund the charity care we provide. We had a record-breaking year!

Last year, Coastal Hospice cared for nearly 1,200 patients and families in the four counties on the Lower Shore and provided more than $600,000 in charity care to patients who have no resources for care or have needs beyond their insurance coverage.

The average gift this year was $101, a significant impact on the care we provided. For example, a $100 donation pays for one month of oxygen for a hospice patient at home. A $70 donation pays for one month of medical equipment for a patient at home.

Angels like you are the bright lights in the midst of our lives!

Spring is a time for rebirth and renewal

by Howard Travers, Bereavement Care Manager

Spring is almost here! The horizon screams of budding trees and flowers. There is rebirth and renewal in nature as flowers and trees bloom and everything turns green again. As we seek things that can offer us hope in the midst of our season of grief, many of us yearn to feel the warmth of the sun after a long, cold winter. Spring generally brings a sudden flurry of change as things begin moving faster around us. Spring often brings heavier traffic as people quickly begin flocking to their favorite warm-weather activities.

Yet, with the coming of a new season, you may feel a deepening of your sadness. As seasons begin to change, grief can become more intense because we miss sharing this new time of year with our loved one. It is perfectly normal to experience new heightened grief and/or grief-related anxiety in spring just as it is in other seasons of the year. Grief does not suddenly go away just because seasons change. And yet warmer, sunnier months can be nurturing and inspire new hopefulness.

A helpful way to respond to your anxiousness about spring is to remind yourself that YOU are in control. The warmer months offer unique opportunities for nurturing activities such as travel, planting gardens, nature walks, photography, family gatherings, star-gazing, and many other things.

Open your eyes and your heart to the beauty of your surroundings. You’re like a flower in spring. Let your heart bloom. Open wide your arms. Embrace whatever new things this season holds for you. The flowerbed has always been there, but like a growing thing, it needs to be nurtured and cultivated. Till your garden and pluck out the weeds. Open your heart to love and friendship. In opening your heart, open your mind as well to new people, new experiences, and new possibilities.

Spring can be an opportunity to begin anew. When we open the doors and windows to our heart and mind again, we find what has been waiting there all along – new life just waiting to spring forth!

Thank you for being our Angels!
UPCOMING GRIEF SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

**Dorchester County**
**Support Group** – Dorchester County Library, 303 Gay St., Cambridge
Mondays at 3 p.m.: March 12, March 26, April 9, April 23
*Information* ~ Marceline Brooks 443-859-1312

**Worcester County**
**Lunch Social Group** – all at 1 p.m.
March 15 - DiFebo’s, 104 N. Main St., Berlin
April 19 - Fins Ale House & Raw Bar, 119 N. Main St., Berlin
*RSVP* ~ Diana Pikulsky 410-641-6566

**Support Group** – Ocean Pines Library, 11107 Cathell Rd., Ocean Pines,
Every Thursday at 11 a.m.
*Information* ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

**Somerset County**
**Support Group** – Somerset County Library, 100 Collins St., Crisfield
Every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 11 a.m.
*Information* ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

These groups provide a time of respite and a safe place to express feelings in the grieving process. We offer these activities at no cost to any adult who has experienced the death of a loved one, even if they were not a patient of Coastal Hospice. For information, call **410-742-8732**.

**Wicomico County**
**Lunch Social Group** – all at 1 p.m.
March 7 - fratelli’s, 925 Snow Hill Rd., Salisbury
March 28 - Brew River, 502 West Main St., Salisbury
April 11 - Ruby Tuesday, 413 N. Fruitland Blvd., Fruitland
April 25 - Bob Evans, 2601 N. Salisbury Blvd., Salisbury
*RSVP* ~ Melissa Dasher 443-944-5846

**Support Group** – The MAC Center
909 Progress Circle, Salisbury
Every Friday at 1 p.m. (No meeting on March 30)
*Information* ~ Marceline Brooks 443-859-1312

*Please note: Socials are “Dutch treat”*