



# HEALING THE SPIRIT



Spring 2020

1-800-847-7831 | [healingthespirit.org](http://healingthespirit.org)



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Please check  
[www.healingthespirit.org](http://www.healingthespirit.org),  
LifeNet Health's Donor Family  
Services website, or call 757-609-  
4671 for updates on events.  
Events are subject to be  
postponed or cancelled due to  
the COVID-19 virus.

## Greetings Donor Families

The Donor Family Services Team (pictured above) is working hard to plan activities and ceremonies that will support you and help you find hope in the darkness of grief. All of our events are posted on our website [www.healingthespirit.org](http://www.healingthespirit.org) and on our private Facebook page. We are hoping to offer a variety of events – such as Remembrance Ceremonies, Tribute Album workshops, baseball games – but the pandemic will affect how this year will look.

Grief is difficult anytime but is even more challenging when faced with social isolation and social distancing. Those warm hugs or a friend offering a hand to hold are now discouraged as we struggle to stay healthy and safe. Try to stay connected to others by phone, text, Skype, email, or letter as this can be helpful for those dark days you encounter on your grief journey. Please know we are here to talk to as well – you can call 800-847-7831 and ask for Donor Family Services. You can also email me at [deborah\\_hutt@lifenethealth.org](mailto:deborah_hutt@lifenethealth.org). We would be honored to give you a call!

With hope,

Debbie Hutt, DFS Director

### May

5/29 – Baseball game – Pensacola, FL

### June

6/19 – Baseball game – Jacksonville, FL

6/20 – Potential Tribute Album

workshop -Jacksonville, FL

6/25 – Baseball game – Salem, VA

### July

7/16 – Baseball game – Norfolk, VA

7/18 - Tribute Album workshop -

Pensacola/Panama City, FL

7/28 - Baseball Game – Seattle, WA

### August

8/1 – 2 – Tribute Album Workshop –  
Va. Beach, VA

**Check the website or  
Facebook page for other  
upcoming activities!**

# Healing Tears



Dear Dr. Leary:

My husband died suddenly over a year ago. I was not able to say goodbye and am still not able to accept the reality that he is not with me. I find that I am hanging on to his clothes and possessions, when my friends are urging me to clean out his closets and get rid of reminders of him. Is there something wrong with me? Stuck

Dear Stuck:

There is nothing wrong with you. Tomorrow when you may have your worst day ever, throw a tantrum or gulp for air through your sobs, there will still not be anything wrong with you. You are not defined by your grief, or your progress through it. Grief demands compassion, time, forgiveness, and support. Grief looks like this: slogging through mud. Grief feels like this: an empty hole that cannot be filled. Grief sounds like this: "I don't know how to get out of bed". Grief touches our faith: "I don't know what I believe anymore". Grief is isolating and lonely. Grief is exhausting and on-going.

No one else can truly know what you need or how it feels to navigate through your unique circumstances. We all will grieve differently, even within the same family, because we have had different relationships and history with the deceased person. Allow them to grieve in their ways and be compassionately fierce about allowing yourself to grieve in your own way. Ask for help; accept help that feels supportive; and find new resources from others who have been through their own grief. It is okay to educate others about what is helpful for you, and to tell people when they are not being helpful.

The idea of "cleaning out his closets" is an overwhelming practical task but also a painful metaphor for the void that his death represents. When we go through a loved one's closet, often each piece of clothing holds flashes of memories and scents of precious times together. Doesn't it make sense that letting go of those touchstones would be difficult, if not devastating! Often, we feel that if we let go of our loved one's possessions, we are having to let go of our loved one all over again. But we can challenge our beliefs by asking ourselves: is it really true that if I give away his shoes that I am severing a final emotional tie and link to him? What other ways do I feel connected? How else do I keep him in my life?

Take your time; sit with your emotions; remember and reflect. Your grief is not a problem to be solved; it is a real, visceral experience that calls to be lived. You will work through this task when you are ready, and there is no cost to delay it if you need to. Over time, your connection to the objects may diminish and you may feel ready to let go...and maybe not. Why do we need to see this as a problem? As the song says, "you can't hurry love", so too, you can't hurry grief.

You are not alone in feeling pushed before you are ready; many in your support circle or family may be uncomfortable with grief. They may have strong judgments or assumptions that your grief is unhealthy and believe that you are unable or unwilling to "get on with your life". Grief often makes others uncomfortable, but that is usually a reflection of their own fears or unfinished business and has nothing to do with you or your process. People who you want to be supportive may not have learned how or have not yet been through their own personal loss. In the same way that you did not know the depths of grief until you experienced the death of your husband, they too can not truly know until they have lived through their own loss.

When you believe it is the right time, there are practical and systematic ways you might go through his clothes and belongings. The crux of the work is to feel and accept the emotional hold and meaning of each possession, and the grief that erupts as you hold, smell, or remember each item. You may want to ask a friend who can support you to companion you through this process. Or you may feel that you need to do this alone. You may want to make this into a ritual, with his favorite music; light some candles; or talk to him as you go through his things.

## HONORING AND REMEMBERING

### In Celebration & Remembrance Ceremonies

In Celebration & Remembrance events provide donor families a time to come together in memory of their loved ones. We are monitoring the current COVID-19 directives and will announce dates for events in all areas.

For more information, such as locations and times, please check our website [healingthespirit.org](http://healingthespirit.org). You can also find information on our private Facebook page.



*You can disperse his things to friends, families, or organizations that you know. It may help to see others enjoying them. Perhaps you are willing to share his favorite t-shirts with his friends who enjoy the same outlook, joke, or organization. It may also be true that it would be too painful to see his clothing on others, and you could send his things to an organization in a distant location.*

*If you don't feel comfortable or ready to give away his belongings, there are things you can do to collect and save them. I often recommend that you save a clothing item in a zip-lock bag to preserve the scent of the clothing, blanket, etc. Perhaps you can find a seamstress who will use his ties or shirts to sew together into a beautiful quilt that you can wrap around yourself...Or create a wall hanging from his belongings...or, as in Japan and China, a shrine of his favorite possessions.*

*His possessions may bring you both joy and pain. As we remember our loved ones, we realize that our grief is big enough to contain both joy, pain, and importance. Honor your timing, your process, and all your feelings.*

*Blessings,  
Lani*

*Lani Leary, Ph.D., specializes in work with chronically ill, dying and bereaved clients. Dr. Leary has worked for the past 25 years as a psychotherapist in private practice and in six hospices across the country.*

*Have a question for Dr. Leary? Contact Debbie Hutt at [deborah\\_hutt@lifenethealth.org](mailto:deborah_hutt@lifenethealth.org).*

## **Donor Family Story**



### **MELVYN HARGROVE**

On May 24, 2012, life for our family changed forever. I will never forget that day or the phone call from my mom saying that "Poppy" (that's what we called him), was in an accident and was non-responsive." He had been medivacked to VCU Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. My mother tried her best not to sound frightened because she knew I had to drive 2.5 hours with my two sons who were 2-1/2 years and 6 weeks old at the time. She's a very strong woman, but on this day, she couldn't seem to disguise her helplessness. All I kept saying was "What do you mean, non-responsive?" Not my father. This couldn't be happening. This was all a dream. I was simply having a nightmare. I just knew someone was going to shake me and tell me to wake up because I was screaming so loudly. I honestly don't know how my children and I made it to the hospital in one piece because my vision was completely blurred from the tears pouring from my eyes because I cried the entire drive to the hospital. There was so much confusion because we didn't know how the accident happened and no one had any answers. The doctor kept giving us updates on my dad's condition but it wasn't looking good. We continued to keep our faith because "Poppy" was God's servant. He was loving, caring, kind, gentle, smart, strong; just an all-around wonderful man, husband, father and human being. He was the patriarch of our family. Why would God want to take him away from us?

On May 25, 2012, at 1:04pm, my father, Melvyn Hargrove, was pronounced dead. It would be my dad's first and last time in a hospital. A wail of cries filled the room as we all stood in utter shock and disbelief and then fell into each other's arms squeezing, hugging, crying and holding one another up. The love of our lives, our patriarch was GONE. In an instant. Just like that. With no warning, no preparation, no nothing! We were completely distraught.

And, in that moment of sheer devastation came light. There entered LifeNet. At a time when we couldn't even begin to grasp what was happening, my dad had already prepared us for the next steps. When LifeNet approached us about him becoming a donor, we didn't have to think twice. We knew that was his wish. Every time the subject came up, he would always say, "I can't use my organs when I'm gone, so why would I take them with me when someone else needs them?" For him, it was a no-brainer. He continued to give, even after his death.

I don't recall how soon after my dad's death, I received a letter in the mail from LifeNet and on the back of that letter, it asked would I be interested in volunteer opportunities. I reluctantly answered "Yes." I say, reluctantly, because I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if I was ready to face people or if I even wanted to be around people for that matter. I was still very much in the midst of grieving my dad. Still trying to accept this "new normal." I didn't know if I had the strength to help others when I was literally falling apart inside myself. So, I took a deep breath and said to myself, "Poppy, I'm going to do this in your honor."

I became a member of DFAC (Donor Family Advisory Committee) in 2014, unaware of what it was or what it even meant. All the members were so kind and supportive because they had all experienced the same thing I was going through. I have met the most amazing people, who are now my family, and whose stories will move you to tears. I know that it was through the grace of God that he placed me where I needed to be at a time when I needed to be there. When one loses a loved one, the calls and support from friends tends to trail off and they go back to their everyday lives and soon forget the pain that we are left to endure on a daily basis. LifeNet has literally been my "Life Net." I am so thankful for all the ways LifeNet continues to show their appreciation for our loved ones. It is also very inspirational to witness and hear the donor recipients as they share their stories for a second chance at life. But, to actually have the opportunity to meet those donor recipients is life changing.

The loss of my father gave new life to others and has helped me in my grieving process because LifeNet continues to remember and honor our loved ones throughout the year in various ceremonies and activities such as In Celebration & Remembrance, Tree of Life Ceremony, Tribute Album Workshops, LifeNet Donor Day and so much more. They keep the legacy of our loved ones alive and for that, I will forever be grateful.

## The Journey

### LifeNet Health in Florida Holds Three Tree of Life Ceremonies

LifeNet Health held Tree Lighting ceremonies at three of its Florida hospitals in the month of December. The first was held at Ascension Bay Medical Center in Panama City on December 3rd. With hurricane Michael devastating the hospital in late 2018, this was the first Tree of Life held at the hospital since the storm and it was a very special evening. Attendees were able to enjoy beautiful music supplied by the Director of the ER, Sarah Braddock, who played Christmas songs on the piano and her friend, also a nurse, who accompanied her on the violin. Both had heard about the event and graciously volunteered to provide music even after working all day.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, Ascension Sacred Heart held their event for the first time at the new Children's Hospital in Pensacola, FL. North Okaloosa Medical Center in Crestview, FL held its first Tree of Life on December 5<sup>th</sup>. At all 3 programs donor families were invited to attend and either bring a special ornament or create their own ornament from a variety of crafts supplies. Refreshments were served and families were able to share stories and memories with other donor families while creating their special ornaments. The program ends with the placing of the ornaments on the tree by donor families who are given the opportunity to share a little about their loved one, if comfortable doing so, followed by the lighting of the tree. The trees remained up throughout the holiday season for many to appreciate and hopefully share in honoring those who so selflessly gave the give of life, sight or restored mobility through, organ tissue and eye donation.



#### Photos:

Anna, sister of Drew Morgan a tissue donor shows off her owl ornament she created at the Panama City Tree of Life.

### LifeNet Health in the Pacific Northwest - Finishing 2019 with beautiful holiday events

LifeNet Health's Tree of Life Events took place at Trios Health Southridge Hospital (Kennewick, WA), Providence St. Peter's Hospital (Olympia, WA) and UW Medicine Valley Medical Center (Renton, WA), during the first two weeks of December. Donor families, tissue recipients and LifeNet Health staff came together for this special event to honor loved ones by placing ornaments in memory of tissue donors and in honor of recipients. There were smiles and laughter while spending time together mingling and reminiscing about loved ones. Witnessing the connections between donor families and recipients was powerful and heartwarming. Seeing each family member as they placed their ornament on the tree was a really moving experience.



The Tree of Life Event was a wonderful experience for donor families, recipients, and staff. Our tree was a beautiful addition to the hospital's main lobby throughout the month of December.