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Lopez Island  
Hospice & Home Support  
is a 501(c)(3) non-profit  
volunteer organization.  
All services are free.

# Supporting Someone Who Is Grieving

by Elizabeth Landrum, Ph.D. and Nancy Ewert

When it comes to understanding how to help others who are grieving, our greatest teachers have been our own life experiences, and other people who have shared how they experienced and coped with loss. The bereaved don't need an expert; they need someone who listens with curiosity, compassion, and a willingness to learn.

We trust that, because most people are uncomfortable with what to say and do to support the bereaved, there will be some readers who like to be reminded of what they already know; others will learn something helpful. Whether a loss is from the death of a person, an animal, the loss of a job, home, health, relationship or other significant attachment, grief is a necessary journey - a journey that leads not to "closure," but toward healing and personal change.

When people you know are hurting from a loss, you may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, making things worse, or maybe you feel helpless. Don't let these feelings cause you to back away.

**Acknowledge the loss and let them know you care.** The most important things you have to offer are your willing ears, your caring, and your calm, respectful presence. Because people grieve in individual and unpredictable ways, make room for *their ways*, with reassurance that even when they feel crazy, their process is normal and accepted.

**Trite reassurances, platitudes, and comparing your own experiences of loss are usually unhelpful.** Grief is a

very personal experience and belongs entirely to the person experiencing it. If you find yourself starting a sentence with "at least," "you can always," or "you should," it is better to swallow these statements. Remember that, no matter how much you may want to, you can't take their pain away. You may not even be able to comfort, but your **support by being present** with them matters. Witnessing deep pain, including anger and fear, can be difficult, but it is the greatest gift you can give. Supporters often experience their own pain and may wish to escape it. You, too, may need to find support from someone else who listens well in order to stay present and available.

While it is important to allow people to talk or not, depending on the timing and environment, let them know **you are willing to listen**. Experts say we should be listening about 80% of the time, leaving 20% to silence and a few words or questions. Most people who have experienced a recent death need to talk about the death and/or the deceased, to

*Con't on Page 2*

## A Message from the Board

*Your gifts in 2016 enabled us to support our growing client base. Our funding is totally dependent on donations. Please continue your support in 2017 by:*

- 1. Making an additional donation, and*
- 2. Encouraging friends and neighbors to become contributing members of Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support. Please help us to keep Lopez Island the vibrant, caring community it is. Great thanks.*

## Supporting Someone Who Is Grieving

(Con't from Page 1)

know the person will not be forgotten, to share stories, even repeatedly, in order to integrate the realities of loss and healing. You don't always need to say something; **sitting in silence is a gift** as well. We have often heard people say that a reassuring look, a hug or a squeeze of a hand was remembered longer and meant more than words.

If you feel that listening and sitting with pain are not your strong points, there may be **practical tasks** you can do, but don't leave it to the grieving to ask. Instead of asking if there is anything you can do, **take the initiative and offer something specific**, like shopping, weeding, or pet care, and let them decide. A gatekeeper/organizer may be appreciated if they are overwhelmed or flooded with people wanting to help.

Grief lasts much longer than most people, including the grieving, expect; **continue your support over the long haul**. This can mean years, so keep checking in to make sure your friends don't feel abandoned. You might want to ask *What is it like for you today?* or something specific to their life, rather than *How are you?* Your support will be most valuable after the initial period; the second year after a death is often harder than the first. The bereaved will continue to grieve the loss of pieces of themselves as well as the more apparent loss, and triggers for grief never disappear entirely.

Make sure they don't feel like they should be "moving on" in some way that you might have hoped or expected. Some people will never "get over" the loss, but people do "get through," **carrying the loss with them**, though perhaps changed in their perspectives, priorities, or philosophies. There are **no set patterns, stages, or timelines** for this transformative process.

It is easy to make assumptions based on outward appearances, yet you might want to acknowledge (verbally or nonverbally) that you realize there is more than the public face displays. Of course, you

won't truly know what is going on inside unless they feel safe and accepted enough to share. Those who do share their grief find that they gain a depth of relationship they would not have otherwise found, and that could be with you.

Recommended resource: [whatsyourgrief.com](http://whatsyourgrief.com)

*"They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly — that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp."*

- Anne Lamott

## Bereavement Support Available

If you or someone you know would like to receive bereavement support, don't forget that Lopez Hospice and Home Support provides this valuable service at no charge to anyone on the island. To request time with one of our professionally trained volunteers, call the office at 468-4446 for an individual session.



## Volunteers are the Hearts & Hands of Our Organization

Lopez Island Hospice and Home Support has been busy this past year. Our well-trained group of more than 60 volunteers has supported our many clients with caring, confidential assistance. Their dedicated, generous, and reliable services have provided so much to those in need. Tasks include transportation, physical and social outings, household chores, food preparation, assisting with physical therapy exercises, socialization, and respite for caregivers. Our community is truly a better place because of them. Thank you.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, contact the office at 468-4446, or Client Services Manager Mary O'Bryant at 360-468-2338.



### *More "Living Long on Lopez" Community Education Programs in the Coming Months*

On Saturday, October 22, 2016, Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support organized a panel entitled "Finding Help At Home," to discuss resources available to serve Lopezians in their homes. The question and answer program was well attended, with presentations from seven panel participants who were available to discuss their services, how to access them, and how they work together to assist Islanders with a variety of needs. It is clear there is an impressive array of services available, as well as a spirit of cooperation and collaboration here on Lopez Island. A call to any service provider can lead to referrals to the appropriate resources. Examples of the services/organizations discussed were:

**Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support** provides in-home support and services by trained volunteers to people experiencing illness, loss, or injury, as well as emotional support for the bereaved, caregivers, and people living with cancer. We also loan free durable medical equipment to anyone requesting it.

**Senior Services** offers congregate meals as well as home-delivered meals for homebound individuals over 60. They also offer off-island transportation for medical appointments, referrals for services, and respite care.

**Island Hospital Home Health** offers in-home nursing, bathing, physical and occupational therapy, and speech therapy, with referrals from physicians, often after a hospital stay.

**Hamlet House** provides meals and activities with 24-hour staffing, and is available for respite stays when rooms are available.

**Lopez Island Family Resource Center** gives assistance to individuals and families in need through federal food programs, Medicaid assistance, transportation programs, energy assistance and mental health programs.

**Private caregivers** serve islanders with in-home paid care, including personal care, transportation, socialization, and home chores.

**Emergency Medical Services:** In addition to 911 emergencies, EMTs respond to calls for accidents, falls, and storm damage. When needed, they may also assist with transportation and prescription pick-up.

We are grateful to those who gave time to this panel discussion, both as presenters and as attendees. We plan to continue our "Living Long on Lopez" series, with the next program being a video/discussion on supporting family members with dementia. Please watch Lopez Rocks, bulletin boards, and our website ([www.lihhs.org](http://www.lihhs.org)) for announcements.



## Welcome New Board Members

Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support is pleased to announce the election of two new board members. We are looking forward to their energy and service to the board of directors.

Jeremy Rempel has spent the last 15 years working on risk and accountability issues with non-profit organizations. Along with his wife Claudia and children Ana-Sophia and Silas, he has been part of the community on Lopez since 2015.

Craig (Corky) Searls has 35 years experience as a research scientist and manager, both for the Government and the Department of Energy National Laboratory. He is currently working as a logistics volunteer for Lopez Fire as well as being an active LIHHS volunteer.

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## Winter 2017 Information and Resources

### *Jingle Bell Dinner a Great Success*

Thanks to our sponsors, guests, and volunteers, the 2016 Jingle Bell Dinner was a great success! With exciting auction items, a truly wonderful dinner provided by Haven, entertainment by Lopez's own Mamatamba, and lovely decorations by Elizabeth Landrum, a good time was definitely had by all.

The generosity of our community made for an amazing evening. The event brought in close to \$30,000 to assist Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support in helping our neighbors in need.

Thanks once again for your support and dedication to Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support.

See you in November!

### *Longtime Volunteer Sr. Judy Tralnes Retires*

We bid farewell to Sr. Judy Tralnes, a valued Lopez Island Hospice & Home Support volunteer since 2004.

Born and raised in Seattle, Sr. Judy spent "every holiday and every summer" with her grandparents, who lived at MacKaye Harbor.

Even as a pre-school student Judy wanted to be a nun. At 19 she answered the call to a life of faith-based service. When Sr. Judy semi-retired she moved back to Lopez Island and became active in the Lopez Catholic community. She also joined Hospice & Home Support.

We wish Sr. Judy all the best in her new endeavors in Seattle. From all of us, thank you for your service.