



# Valley Center Counseling, Inc.

## *Life Transitions Newsletter: December 2008*



*Dear Clients,*

*This newsletter focuses on how to cope with the holidays if you are bereaved. It is our hope that some of these creative ideas will help to ease your pain.*

*We are preparing the schedule for next year's newsletter topics. Please e-mail us with you suggestions. May you find peace during this holiday season.*

***Happy Holidays and Merry  
Christmas!***

***Penny Blazej, LCSW, BCD  
President of Valley Center Counseling***

### ***How to Cope during the Holidays if You are Grieving***

First of all there is no recipe or right or wrong way to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change.

The actual anticipation of the up-coming holiday can be much worse than the actual event. The key is to stay flexible – make plans but know that if you are not up to carrying them through, you change them.

Don't be surprised at the intensity of your grief. Feelings of anger, panic, depression, despair, guilt or regret, fearfulness, loneliness, as well as physical symptoms feel stronger during this time. This is normal. It is not a setback; it is how grief is.

Surround yourself with people who know of your loss AND have been supportive in the past - people you enjoy. Don't be afraid to express your feelings to these people. Allow them to comfort you. If at all possible, limit interactions with those you find unsupportive – it is not your place to take care of them.

For your first year without your loved one, many find it easier to cope by doing something different like: going to a mountain lodge; taking a cruise; staying home with just your closest family members; spending time in nature or volunteering to help an organization that reaches out to the poor. It is OK not to follow family traditions.

It may be important for you to include the deceased in your conversations and to find ways to memorialize them. For example: lighting a special candle at your holiday dinner in honor of your loved one; hang a stocking for your loved one in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings; going around the dinner table and asking others to

share stories about your loved one; asking family members to make a donation to a charity that your loved one supported, decorating their gravesite etc... Be creative in coming up with ways to honor them.

You may find it helpful to write about your feelings. For \$15.95 you can purchase a grief journal from [www.griefjournal.com](http://www.griefjournal.com) or you can write a computer journal or in a special book.

Most importantly be good to yourself and try to get enough rest. For more ideas go to: [www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)

### **Shorts**

- A new bacterium, Clostridium difficile, is raging through hospitals. This antibiotic resistant bacterium is not easily destroyed – even alcohol does not kill it. How do you protect yourself? Make sure that every person who touches you has washed their hands with soap and water. Clean your own hands thoroughly before eating (remember that the antibiotic hand washes do not work – they are mainly alcohol). Do not touch your hands to your lips, eyes, nose or any open wound. Once you leave the hospital, assume all your items have been contaminated. Wash them separately in hot water and lots of soap.

### **Book Reviews**

*“The Lovely Bones”* by Alice Sebold was given to me by a recently bereaved client who was having difficulty getting into the story. After reading this book, I would have to agree with my client. It is not a good book to read if you are recently bereaved. With that said, it is an outstanding book.

For those of you who have made the New Years resolution to tap into your creativity, I highly recommend the *“The Artist’s Way – A spiritual Path to Higher Creativity”* by Julia Cameron and the accompanying *The Artist’s Date Book – A Companion Volume to the Artist’s Way* by the same author.

You can order these books by going to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or you can borrow them from my library.

### **Wise Words**

*“Democracy is ... the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people.”* Harry Emerson Fosdick 1925

### **Just for Laughs**

Walking can add minutes to your life. This enables you at 85 years old to spend an additional 5 months in a nursing home at \$7000 per month.

I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.

The only reason I would take up walking is so that I could hear heavy breathing again.

I have to walk early in the morning, before my brain figures out what I'm doing.

I joined a health club last year, spent about 400 bucks. Haven't lost a pound. Apparently you have to go there.

Every time I hear the dirty word 'exercise', I wash my mouth out with chocolate.

I do have flabby thighs, but fortunately my stomach covers them.

If you are going to try cross-country skiing, start with a small country.

We all get heavier as we get older, because there's a lot more information in our heads. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

### **Snowfall in Sedona, Arizona**

