

Café connection for people in grief

There's no "cure" for grief but being with people who've been there can help.

A series of Grief Cafés offered by Victoria Hospice Bereavement Services gives people in bereavement a chance to share their experience and connect with people who understand what they're going through.

"Grief can be profoundly isolating," says Marney Thompson, Director of Bereavement Services. "Bereaved people often feel vulnerable, drained, and disconnected from the world. Grief Cafés offer a warm, welcoming space to step out from that solitude, even just for a moment."

Volunteer facilitator Rick Styles was used to finding solutions to problems in his professional career. But that's not how grief works, he says.

"One of the key takeaways from our volunteer training is that grief can't be 'fixed'. There's no prescription for it. Everyone's grief is different, and everyone's grief journey is different," he says. "The best thing you can do to support someone in bereavement is to be there and listen."

Grief Café participants are encouraged to support each other without giving

advice, Rick says. "We often ask, 'how is your grief today?'"

"People share in their own way and in their own time," he says. "There are tears and laughter in equal measure."

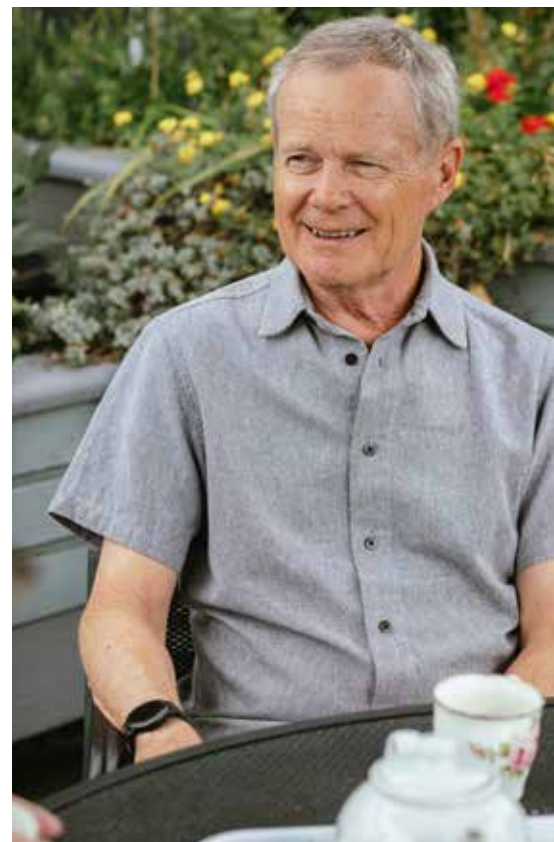
Rick's first exposure to Victoria Hospice care came about when his father received end-of-life care on the Inpatient Unit.

"When I arrived, I found a quiet, calm place. It was really comfortable for me and my sister. The staff were matter of fact about my father's death, but in a caring way."

"I didn't really know what I thought about death, but I was curious, and I thought, well, this is a good place to find out," he says. "I wasn't sure whether I was afraid of it, or if there is life after death. I don't think I had terribly unique questions, but they were front and center for me."

Impressed by the care team and volunteers on the unit, and aware that Bereavement Services is 100% donor funded, Rick was inspired to join the community support and bereavement volunteer teams.

"I get the sense that the Grief Cafés give people the opportunity to share things they may not otherwise have," he says.



Longtime volunteer Rick Styles lends a comforting ear at the Grief Cafés

"We certainly hear how grateful people are for the experience. It's rewarding."

The biweekly Grief Café is free and open to anyone in bereavement.

Find out more or reserve your seat at victoriahospice.org/events

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Giving back and paying forward

Cliff Dezell's decades of experience in pharmacy and healthcare administration told him something his father's physician didn't: His dad had only a short time to live.

"It was 1972 and the attending physician seemed unable to admit it, unfortunately. He had more difficulty dealing with the fact that my father was dying than I had," he says.

Back then, pain management wasn't always as effective as it is now, and the need for specialized end-of-life and hospice care was evident, Cliff says.

"That experience contributed to my view of hospice care as extremely important."

When Sharron, Cliff's wife of 62 years, faced a life-limiting illness, Cliff wanted to do everything he could to ensure she was comfortable. During her three months at the Victoria Hospice Inpatient Unit, Cliff was by her side 12 hours a day and made sure someone was always with her when he couldn't be.

"The staff were wonderful," Cliff says. "I don't think anyone works in hospice care

who doesn't really want to be there, and that's important."

To honour Sharron and the care she received, Cliff has directed a portion of his estate to Victoria Hospice. A monthly donor, Cliff says establishing a legacy gift extends his ongoing support into the future.

"It's a way to support what you think is important and helping it continue after you're gone. It's really as simple as that. If we have extra resources, we can make informed decisions about where those resources should go," he says. "I hope people realize the importance of the work of Victoria Hospice."

Shortly after Sharron died, Cliff knew he had to make some big changes, he says.

"I said to myself, 'everything is going to have to be different from now on. Everything I did, Sharron and I had done together as a couple. Everything reminded me of her. If I continued trying to do what I had always done, in the way I had always done it—it would be soul destroying."

He changed all his routines, signed up for singing lessons, and now has a new groove in music and performance.

Thoughts of Sharron and their 62 years together are never far, Cliff says. "I'm sure it comes as no surprise to anybody who's experienced grief, but there can be these hidden icebergs. Every so often you run into something, like at the symphony on Mother's Day and all the memories are there."



Cliff Dezell has chosen to make a legacy gift in memory of his beloved Sharron



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Dedicated monthly donors honour legacy

A family legacy in the British hospice movement is the inspiration behind one of Victoria Hospice's longest-giving donors.

Nikki Bridger recalls her mother, Dr. Marjorie Reid, working tirelessly as the co-founder of Willen Hospice in Milton Keynes, England.

After caring for patients in a busy medical practice and parenting five children throughout the day, Dr. Reid devoted many late nights to getting the new facility off the ground, Nikki says. In addition to securing a site and negotiating with city council, Dr. Reid raised funds to see the new hospice open in 1981 and became the hospice's first medical director.

"She was an amazing woman, with incredible energy and commitment. She saw the need for death to be seen not just from a medical point of view. That was very important to her."

Dr. Reid championed compassionate end-of-life care in the early days of the modern hospice movement.

"We learn to care by listening to the dying, by remembering that they are whole people, not in any way diminished or made into second-class citizens by the approach of death," Dr. Reid said. "Their personal dignity must be respected and their sense of dignity maintained. It is important that they be helped to live until they die."

As a teenager, Nikki had the opportunity to see that compassionate approach in action when visiting the new facility with her mother.

"I was very fearful the first time I went into the hospice with her, and she said, 'you need to see this'. I remember her going around and chatting with all the staff and patients. I thought many patients didn't look like they were dying. She told me, 'that's because their pain is being managed and they have

the support they need. They can be in a peaceful place where they can relax in their last few days or weeks.' It gave me a whole new perspective on the difference that hospice could make."

Nikki and her husband, Ian, have honoured that commitment to compassionate care and Dr. Reid's memory, as dedicated Victoria Hospice donors for 30 years and monthly donors for 18 years.

"I think of her smiling down, saying, 'good on you for keeping this going.'"



Nikki and Ian Bridger honour Nikki's mother, Dr. Marjorie Reid, with monthly donations

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