

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

January 2022
Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today
West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

Grief Education Support Group

Tuesday, January 4, 5:30 pm
WTRC/HOSA Bates Bereavement Center
1933 University Avenue

Monthly Luncheon

Tuesday, January 18, 11 am
WTRC/HOSA IDT Room
1933 University Avenue

Monthly Support Luncheon

For many years, Hospice of San Angelo has had a monthly support luncheon which would meet in a different San Angelo restaurant on the third Tuesday of each month. The main purpose of the luncheon has been to provide support by offering an opportunity to eat out with others, rather than alone, and to meet and visit with others who are traveling the grief journey. Beginning this month, HOSA will now be hosting the luncheon at 11:00 am on the third Tuesday of each month at our new facility, WTRC's Stephens Family Center for Hospice Excellence, 1933 University. The food will be provided and it will continue to be a time of support as well as an opportunity to see and visit with the staff that provided care for your loved one. We welcome those of you from the community as well as our HOSA families to come and enjoy lunch with us. For more information about any of our bereavement services, contact the Bereavement Department, 325-658-6524, or email kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com.

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EXCERPT: For Many Widows, the Hardest Part Is Mealtime

Amelia Nierenberg, *New York Times* (October 28, 2019)
Accessed at [NYT.com](https://www.nytimes.com)

The connection between food and mourning runs deep: In almost every culture or tradition, a community brings dishes to the survivors in the weeks or months after a death. But for a spouse, accustomed to sharing every meal with a partner, the grieving can go on long afterward, renewed constantly by the rhythms of shopping, cooking and eating.

"It's almost like the sixth stage of grief is cooking alone," said Jill Cohen, a grief counselor in New York, referring to the now-disputed theory of the Five Stages of Grief, developed by the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler Ross.

Bereavement counselors said only in the last decade have academics and nonprofit groups begun directly addressing the relationship between grieving and food. At meals hosted by The Dinner Party, an organization that has expanded in more than 100 cities worldwide since its founding in 2014, people in their 20s or 30s who have lost someone meet regularly to share. Ms. Cohen said many of her patients bring up eating issues in therapy.

In the Chicago suburbs, a free support group called Culinary Grief Therapy directly addresses the link between food and widowhood. (Bereavement counselors now use "widow" as a gender-neutral term, like actor or waiter.)

The three-year-old group grew out of a 2016 study on the difficulties of eating and cooking as a widow. Grocery shopping and preparing meals alone could be painful and overwhelming, the study found, and could often lead widows to skip meals or eat in expensive or unhealthy ways.

"Cooking and mealtimes are some of the most overlooked aspects of grief," said Heather Nickrand, the lead author of the study. "How many people are actually asked: 'How is the cooking or grocery shopping going? Are you eating O.K.?' "

In response, she founded Culinary Grief Therapy, which uses demonstrations and group discussions over meals to teach participants how to cook, eat and shop for one, alongside other widows. She runs training sessions and attends conferences, helping other community centers and bereavement groups develop their own versions of the program.

Michele Zawadzki is one of 30 or so widows who come every few weeks to a large industrial kitchen at the College of DePage in Glen Ellyn. Participants learn straightforward recipes with minimal ingredients, from Laura Lerdal and David Kramer, who are chefs with the program: roasted vegetables tossed in olive oil and salt, a simple roast chicken, single-pan pasta. A Tuesday-night session in August centered on barbecue.

“In the beginning, I just didn’t want to cook. I’d make a bowl of cereal,” said Diane Kantak, 78, who shared a cooking station with Ms. Zawadzki. Ms. Kantak had been married for 54 years when her husband, Francis, died in 2013.

For partners who weren’t the main cook, especially older men, widowhood poses a new set of challenges. Many moved straight from their mother’s food to their spouses’s, and know only a few recipes.

“The microwave has bailed me out,” said Vincent Collazzi, 75, to chuckles and nods from the others. “I don’t use the stove, but I do miss the meals.”

Sitting around the table together, talking about what happened during the day: This is what many widows say they miss the most. Some eat on the couch or at restaurants. Without a spouse sitting opposite, the kitchen table can feel unbalanced, a seesaw for one.

“That has to be relearned,” said R. Benjamin Cirlin, the executive director of the Center for Loss & renewal, a bereavement practice in Manhattan. “Time has to be relearned, now that time of eating is really a sign of one’s identify.”

The group has learned how to honor their spouses in a favorite meal, part vigil, part traveling dinner. Each widow cooks next to a framed picture of her partner, and maybe a candle. As they eat, they share memories, honoring one another’s loved ones.

You need to eat to live, they remind each other, and you need to keep on living.

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*If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, or if you would like to be taken off the mailing list, please contact Karen at [kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com](mailto:kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com), or 325-658-6524. Thank you.*

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