The year that was…

Well it is nearly Christmas and I thought it would be a good time to review the year that was…

Our Saturday morning brunches have been a great success, as well as our six week Living Well With Grief course in June, the very special Bereaved Parent Weekend and Celebration of Life event in August. We also introduced informal morning/afternoon teas in various suburbs.

Jenny and I have completed in-services for health professionals with a focus on loss and grief issues. We also attended the International Bereavement Conference held in Melbourne in July this year. The weather was a touch chilly but well worth braving because of the valuable information we took away from this conference, particularly in the areas of resilience and complication in bereavement. Jenny and I had the privilege of chatting to one of the keynote speakers at the conference dinner, Robert Neimeyer, who spoke to us about bereavement interventions: present status and future horizons, such a relevant area for us.

Jenny and I have been busy doing what we love, supporting those who are bereaved. We are very privileged indeed. For those grieving the loss of a loved one, if you would like to have a chat with either Jenny or myself please don’t hesitate to give us a call. Even though you may be feeling very vulnerable and not sure what it is you need or want to do, please contact us - that is what we are here for. You can phone us on (07) 3840 3844 (ask for Jenny or Shirley). If we are not in please leave your name and number so we may return your call. You can also send us an email if you prefer to scunningham@leukaemia.org.au or jgallagher-grant@leukaemia.org.au  It is our hope to be able to support you on your grief journey, and though we can’t take your pain away we can offer strategies and an ear to listen.

We hope that you may be able to take part in some of the events we have planned for next year. In 2009 we will continue with Living Well with Grief luncheons, Living Well with Grief six week course, Bereaved Parents’ weekend, What about me? childrens’ workshop, Celebration of Life in North Queensland, as well as in-services for health professionals at various hospitals/communities.

We apologise for not being able to present a Celebration of Life in North Queensland in September due to staff changes. We now have a new support services coordinator, Lee-Anne Morse, who is keen to help organise a Celebration of Life event for early next year.

Till next year may you all have a safe and loving Christmas with family and friends.

Shirley Cunningham
Grief Support Services Coordinator
Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland
Coping through Christmas

Christmas is the season to be jolly, but for some people it is far from jolly.

Sadly, society has this expectation of us at Christmas time to be energised, buy gifts and make goodies for everyone to enjoy over the festive season.

However, for those who have lost a loved one, Christmas may not be filled with peace, happiness and goodwill. Instead, you may feel an incredible yearning, sadness and anger that your loved ones are no longer here to share this occasion with you and your family.

In order to cope with Christmas there are several things that you can do that may help you to manage the holiday season.

- Take care of yourself. Eating well, relaxing and exercising are all essential to maintaining a healthy mind and body.
- Acknowledge that you are sad. Allow yourself time to just sit and remember all the wonderful times you had with your loved one. Maybe you could write them a letter, visit a favourite place or share these memories with a friend or family member.
- Avoid keeping stuff to yourself. We all need to release the tension in our lives and this is no different. You may talk to someone you know and trust, try to write your thoughts down or you may get a bunch of pillows and punch them.
- Know it’s okay to enjoy yourself. Getting together with family and friends may allow you the opportunity to remember the wonderful times you all shared – this does not mean that you miss your loved one any less.
- Plan your time. This will allow you to reduce your stress. Make sure that you plan your ‘escape’ if you need to. Prepare a simple response for why you may not wish to attend a function or why you may leave early.
- Ask for ‘help’ if you need it. You may find that you do not want to go shopping for gifts or food. Ask a friend or family member to shop for you or alternatively, have them purchase gift cards for you.
- Talk to your family and friends. Let them know how you are feeling and that you may need to take each day as it comes.
- Share your memories with others. We all like to talk about our loved ones so why not share your special memories with others. This keeps your loved one’s memory alive in others’ hearts.
- Do something special. Light a special candle, change your routine - go out for Christmas lunch, take a holiday, buy a significant decoration for the tree, visit the graveside or a special place your loved one liked to visit, write a letter or card to your loved one, buy a gift for your loved one and donate it to a charity, or volunteer to serve lunch for a charity.

However you choose to celebrate this Christmas, it is important that you do whatever is comfortable for you. This may mean placing your needs first by only doing what you are ready to do and making others aware of what you are not prepared to do. If you feel that you are really not coping, please do not hesitate to seek professional help.

Christmas without Gordon

By Erina Beruldsen

Sunday 25 November, our family (excluding my daughter and her family in Tasmania) gathered at my home to celebrate Gordon’s birthday. We had done this for years and decided to continue, we always planned Christmas Day on this occasion.

We enjoyed watching the ‘power point’ presentation of snippets of Gordon’s life, bringing back fond (and otherwise) memories, and having lots of laughs with each other.

The build up to Christmas was quite busy, with lots of coffee with friends, Christmas shopping with my youngest daughter, attending ‘Spirit of Christmas’, and two family gatherings.

Christmas day came and we all met at my son and his family’s home for a long brunch. We always enjoy our Christmas together and this one was no different.

My new toy (from my son and family) was a 7” digital photo frame. This kept me happily occupied between lunch and dinner and when I went home. I returned to my son Ashley’s for dinner with just his family.

On the 27 December I had dinner with family members at Mt Coo-tha just for fun. What a great Christmas this was – with all the loving support around me - how could it be otherwise?
The Leukaemia Foundation’s grief support services is always looking at how it can improve and broaden its services to best meet the needs of families and loved ones who are grieving.

Through her own experience with loss, the Foundation’s loss and bereavement counsellor, Jenny Gallagher-Grant, identified the need for a bereavement program specifically designed for children who have lost a loved one.

Thanks to the generosity of the H V McKay Charitable Trust, the Foundation will proudly launch the ‘What about me?’ children’s bereavement program in February 2009.

“When I became a widow seven years ago, I became a sole-parent to our three beautiful children then aged 15, 10 and 6,” Jenny said.

“At the time I had many questions running through my mind. Not only was I worried about how I would cope, I was also worried how my children would cope without their dad. Normally, I had been able to deal with most curve balls that had been sent my way but this time I knew I was not equipped to navigate the road that lay ahead on my own. How could I? I was barely coping with my own grief let alone dealing with someone else’s. I decided I needed help. So, I set about finding some.”

“Fortunately for me, I attended the Leukaemia Foundation’s Living Well with Grief program. Regrettably, they did not have a children’s grief program so, all I could do was hope that what I learned I could apply to my children. With their help and many hours spent reading about children’s grief reactions, my children (and I) are all fine. In fact I now work for the Foundation as a loss and bereavement counsellor, helping both adults and children with their grief”.

If you would like more information on the ‘What about me?’ program please ph: Jenny Gallagher-Grant on 3840 3844

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Living well with grief
Childrens’ Christmas workshop

You are invited to come along to have some fun making a wonderful Christmas decoration for you to keep.

When: Monday 15 December 2008
Where: Clem Jones - Sunland Village, 170 Middle Street, Coopers Plains
Time: 10.00am - 12.30pm
Ph: 3840 3844 or email jgallagher-grant@leukaemia.org.au
RSVP: Monday 8 December 2008

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PS Please wear old clothes in case we get messy!
Recently we took a group of parents away for the Leukaemia Foundation's Bereaved Parents’ weekend.

It was a wonderful weekend of education and pampering at one of the most amazing, tranquil, relaxing, nurturing places on earth called ‘Heaven in the Hills’ in Maleny on the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

From sharing stories around the camp fire, to the writing of their personal lyrics to “Lean on Me”, to the art workshop, to the fun had at the Amazing Stargazing Junkologist Band, there was a connecting of hearts and much needed laughter and smiles for those who had not experienced such joy for sometime.

What a weekend it was! Not only did the parents enjoy themselves, they learnt about ‘the gifts of grief’. They formed friendships with others that under normal circumstances, they may not have met. They also learnt that grief can be expressed in many ways, and tears, laughter and enjoyment can be incorporated into their grief journey.

I attended the recent bereaved parents’ weekend held at Heaven in the Hills in Maleny not knowing quite what to expect, but with an open mind and willing to participate.

As a generalisation it is probably fair to say that in the context of losing a child, the mothers, being more in touch with their emotions generally and having a nurturing role, express their grief more fully and freely. We, the fathers, on the other hand do not as a rule express grief so willingly. Whatever the reasons, I found exceptions to that strong silent male stereotype all weekend. All the fathers engaged in the events and activities, a tribute to their courage and strong bonds to their children. This was not an easy task. It may have been due to the beautiful setting, and the presence of wives and mothers that gave us the strength and willingness to shed our inhibitions and share our stories, grief and emotions, and share we did.

The weekend was so well planned, the sessions so thoughtfully structured and presented by Shirley and Jenny that, to me, to participate and share in others’ journeys was a relief beyond what I could ever have imagined. It was a great honour as well.

To have the opportunity to get to know their children from the stories told, to learn of their legacy (so often one of strength and humour in severe adversity), for me created a tribal environment, a simple structure formed in a seemingly remote location, based on a shared journey of grief, but also created from the realisation that we were together in this pain. The “tribe” was duly endorsed on Saturday evening in raucous musical abandon thanks to the Amazing Stargazing Junkologists. That evening was a great emotional release and the bonds created grew stronger as the weekend progressed.

The positive impact of the weekend is still with me. I am stronger and hopefully more open now than before, and would sincerely recommend the weekend to any parent and particularly to the fathers who have suffered the loss of a child, surely the greatest emotional pain a human being can be asked to endure.”

If you would like information of the next Bereaved Parents’ weekend, please ph: 3840 3844
It never occurred to me to contact the Leukaemia Foundation for help or support in my journey of grief, as my son did not die of leukaemia, but from a six year battle with brain cancer.

My doctor and I realised I had come to a point in my journey of grief where I needed to touch base with others on a similar path. Thankfully, through numerous phone calls made on my behalf, Shirley made contact with me and extended the invitation to attend the six week *Journey of Grief* workshop run annually by the Foundation. I found support and nurture for my grief in a very comfortable and understanding environment provided by Shirley and Jenny. I am and always will be eternally grateful for the support I received through those weeks when at times I felt so incredibly burdened by my sadness and loss.

Consequently, my husband, Brian and I were invited to attend the weekend long *Bereaved Parents’ workshop*. In all honesty, I was feeling apprehensive as I had already attended a workshop and knew what challenges I faced personally in expressing my grief and story to others and now I realised I was going to share this intimate journey again not only individually, but also as a couple. I guess that may sound strange, but personally, I find it very challenging to share my grief, even with those closest to me, as I recognise the pain they are experiencing also in this journey and do not want to burden them further in any way.

On arriving, we were greeted with hugs, lots of smiles and plenty of great food. We met a lot of other parents who also seemed apprehensive about what was to come but as the weekend progressed many of the barriers and fears seemed to dissipate as we listened to the many heart-wrenching journeys all of our kids had endured. What an amazing bunch of kids! I am sure our children had many laughs that weekend as they witnessed some of the blood, sweat and tears we all experienced when we put spatula to canvas and produced some incredibly colourful works of art.

It never ceased to amaze me how we could feel such depths and peaks of emotion from tears to laughter in a matter of seconds. We all shared a powerful connection and common bond that, I am sure, has helped us all to move forward with our lives. We all felt comfortable enough to divulge some small intimate fragment of our children’s lives that stands to honour them individually and collectively as, I guess, heroes and heroines to us forever.

I personally felt some sort of relief when I realised I had found something that I thought I had lost forever and that was compassion for others in their sorrow, as I had been so engrossed in my own grief.

It was an honour to be invited to be a part of that special weekend. Each one of us found a new determination in the belief that our children were never a burden to us in life and most definitely will never be a burden to us in their death.

I know our paths will cross again and I look forward to recognising that special smile and tear we all found for one another that weekend. Thank you Shirley and Jenny and to those out there who continue to donate to the Leukaemia Foundation as you enabled a group of grieving parents to experience a truly magical and healing weekend.

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**The Spirit of Love**

*When I close my eyes*
I see a picture of you
I see you smile to me
I see your happiness in your eyes
Your passion, you care for me.

I see your romantic side in the
Bunch of flowers and the sense of humour
in the funny times.

Many times, you want to scream
The love you feel for me and,
I put my finger to your lips.

I know you love me and, I love you too
Don’t worry my darling,
I will take care of you.

*by Bernaditta Adriasola*
Gratitude

In the midst of pain it is easy to think “what have I to be grateful for? The following article talks on the value of gratitude, and that even in the midst of great pain, if we look, and sometimes we have to look quite hard, we can see something that we are grateful for. I had a gentleman share with me how he was grateful to have a beautiful daughter who visited him every second day since his wife had passed away. His daughter would bring her son and he would take great pleasure in getting his grandson to help in the vegetable garden, a place his wife loved to get “her hands dirty in”.

So in the midst of your pain you may be able to take something from the following article written by Drs Blair and Rita Justice, to help you on this journey of grief.

A grateful attitude may provide useful coping skills for dealing with losses and other stressful events, such as appreciating important things that we have previously taken for granted.

Gratitude, with practice, can become not only a habit, but a way of viewing the world. “Ain’t it Awful” is as much learned as “Ain’t it Grand,” and not nearly so much fun. This amazing health remedy is yours for the taking, right now. So, say, “thank you”.

10 steps to gratitude

So, what’s the best way to make all these great things happen? In his book Thanks, Emmons recommends these 10 steps:

1. Keep a gratitude journal daily, recording in writing what you are grateful for.
2. Remember the bad. A mental comparison of how bad it was and how much better it is now really helps.
3. Learn prayers or meditations of gratitude.
4. Come to your “senses”. Count bodily related blessings: being able to see, hear, walk, eat, etc.
5. Use visual reminders, like pictures of loved ones or scenes of nature.
6. Three questions to ask yourself: what have I received, what have I given, what troubles and difficulty have I caused.
7. Make a vow to practice gratitude.
8. Watch your language. Negative talk undermines the gratitude practice.
9. Go through the motions. Feelings follow words and actions.
10. Think outside the box. Think of the non-obvious things to be grateful for.

“Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic.”

John Henry Jowett

Celebration of Life

The Leukaemia Foundation’s annual Celebration of Life event was held on Sunday 24 August at the Clem Jones - Sunland Leukaemia Foundation Village.

This was a special opportunity for family and friends to reflect and celebrate the lives of those who have died from leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders in the past 12 months.

Many ask what is there to celebrate? It is not about celebrating the loss of your loved one, how could any one celebrate this painful event. But it was a time to celebrate the gifts they gave to us while alive, and it was a time to remember just how loved we were and how much we loved them.

This year the atmosphere was filled with many emotions and all present were surrounded by their own unique memories of those they had lost. All support staff attended and participated in the program which allowed them time to reflect on their journey with the family and loved ones, and is often the first time they may see the family since the person has passed away. It allowed time for reconnection and moving forward in a world often filled with struggle. Celebration of Life though filled with sadness also offers a place for healing to begin and/or continue for all present.
Lucia’s story

Lucia is a widow in a new relationship. She is in her forties and has a teenage daughter.

My husband Frankie died two years ago after 20 years of marriage. Sophie was 11 years old at the time. She was a daddy’s girl, they lived for one another. We all lived for one another.

My marriage was fantastic and I miss everything about it. Frankie was my friend and soul mate and we were going to be together for ever. We had grown into one another and taken on each other’s views on life. We were a great team and my loss is immense.

I knew I didn’t want to be on my own. I had loved being part of a couple and was meant to be a wife and mother. Eighteen months after Frankie died I met Gary at the races. He is very different to my husband in many ways. I wasn’t particularly interested in him at first, but he pursued me and that was very flattering. I have been dating him for six months and I’m still not sure if I want to be in this relationship.

My husband Frankie is the one I want. I sometimes wish I had never started with Gary, as I have so many ups and downs in my emotions now. Gary doesn’t understand what I am going through and he doesn’t understand the physical pain of grief.

My husband made me feel like a princess. I felt attractive and totally cherished. Gary makes me feel like a twenty year old again when I’m getting ready to go on a date, but is that enough? It is a distraction from the loneliness. After Frankie died I missed being hugged, not so much about sex, but I missed the affection and sharing I had with him.

I cannot bear to take off my wedding ring. I still have Frankie’s clothes hanging in the wardrobe. Frankie is still very much with me, my family still feel he is my husband and don’t want to know about Gary. They think it is too soon, but I know it is too soon for them. I know my needs. I feel I have to justify myself to them.

Gary makes me laugh. I want to be taken away from my misery. I want to be able to enjoy myself. I want to live.

Life is for living. That is one lesson I have learnt. Sometimes I think my life is over. Other times, I feel it is an adventure. I like being part of a couple again. I’m enjoying meeting new people and seeing things from a different perspective. It all adds to the richness of life.

The colours of hope

The colour of hope is the theme explored at a special art workshop designed to allow participants to explore their creativity with colour and paint.

The workshop is taught by contemporary visual artist, Froyle Neideck, and is designed for beginners with the emphasis on releasing individual creative expression through painting.

According to grief services coordinator, Jenny Gallagher-Grant, the colour of hope workshop was recently included in the Bereaved Parents’ weekend.

“I was truly inspired by the intensity of the creativity, emotion and thought that was integrated into the paintings. It was as if the parents were openly expressing their inner love and feelings for their child without having to use their voice. A very ‘healing’ experience for all.”

Just as grief is a personal experience, so too is hope and healing. The workshop is facilitated in a group setting but aims at allowing individual response. Every painting is different as each person is encouraged to create from their own heart and Froyle gives individual coaching.

For more information about art workshops
ph: Froyle 0402 267 377 or www.froyleart.com
The following list has come out of the Living Well with Grief six week programs run by the Leukaemia Foundation. This may help you to feel that what you are going through is “normal”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical impacts of grief</th>
<th>Emotional impacts of grief</th>
<th>Behavioural impacts of grief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gain/loss of eating habits</td>
<td>• Daily routines all over the place</td>
<td>• Look at/react to things differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tummy upsets</td>
<td>• All the “what ifs”</td>
<td>• Avoiding daily chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laziness (hard to put the effort in)</td>
<td>• Anger</td>
<td>• Issue of moving on, the questions and doubts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of a “hole” that is felt physically –</td>
<td>• Dreaming</td>
<td>• Loss of feminine/masculine touch</td>
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<tr>
<td>causes actual physical pain</td>
<td>• Flashbacks</td>
<td>• Language change/fit e.g. “ours”, “mine”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Headaches</td>
<td>• Triggers</td>
<td>• Belonging, identity changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Change in exercise patterns</td>
<td>• Regrets and memories</td>
<td>• Talking to our loved one as if alive</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Missing touch, intimacy, physical presence</td>
<td>• Shock and fear</td>
<td>• Loss/gain of confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sighing</td>
<td>• Too attached to the physical</td>
<td>• Lack of motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Forgetfulness</td>
<td>• Feeling dead and empty</td>
<td>• Engaging in distracting activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sleeping problems</td>
<td>• No emotion</td>
<td>• LEARNT TO SURVIVE!!</td>
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Support Services Team

**Brisbane Support Services Team**
Barbara Hartigan - Director of Support Services  
Dean King - Support Services Coordinator  
Danelia Martin - Support Services Coordinator  
Kris Murphy - Support Services Coordinator  
Maryanne Skarparis - Support Services Coordinator  
Natalie James - Support Services Coordinator  
Pat Neely - Amyloidosis Services Coordinator  
Jenny Gallagher-Grant - Grief Support Services Coordinator  
Shirley Cunningham - Grief Support Services Coordinator  
Marian Marshall - Support Services Administration Officer

**Townsville Support Services Team**
Lee-anne Morse - Support Services Coordinator

For help call...
Brisbane: 07 3840 3844 or Townsville: 07 4727 8000 [www.leukaemia.org.au](http://www.leukaemia.org.au)

Get involved in **World’s Greatest Shave 2009**
12-14 March 2009

As someone whose life has been touched by blood cancer, you know only too well how the funds raised through the Leukaemia Foundation’s World’s Greatest Shave can make a huge difference.

There are a number of ways you can be involved in World’s Greatest Shave including:
- encourage your family and friends to colour / shave their hair;
- sponsor someone wishing to colour / shave their hair;
- place posters or brochures in your work places/ schools/ clubs etc.

If you would like more information on World’s Greatest Shave 2009 please call 1800 500 088.

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**Our Vision to Cure and Mission to Care.**

The Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland is a not for profit organisation focused on the care and support of patients and their families living with leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders.

The Foundation does this by providing emotional support, accommodation, transportation and practical assistance for patients and their families. The Leukaemia Foundation also funds research into cures and better treatments for leukaemias, lymphomas, myeloma and related blood disorders.

The Leukaemia Foundation receives no direct ongoing government funding, and relies on the continuous support of individuals and corporate partners to expand its services.

To find out more about the work of the Leukaemia Foundation of Queensland and how you can help, phone 1800 620 420 or visit the Foundation’s website: [www.leukaemia.org.au](http://www.leukaemia.org.au)

Disclaimer: No person should rely on the contents of this publication without first obtaining advice from their treating specialist.

If you do not wish to receive future editions of this publication please contact the Leukaemia Foundation Support Services Division on 07 3840 3844.