

# LIVING WELL

## with grief

NOVEMBER 2018 | leukaemia.org.au | 1800 620 420

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*"You can't put your life on pause forever" – Matt O'Hanlon. (See page 3.)*

## LYN AND LYNNIE'S FRIENDSHIP IS AN "ABSOLUTE BLESSING"

**Not only do Lynette (Lyn) Healy and Lynnette (Lynnie) Coupar share the same name but also the tragedy of losing a partner to blood cancer.**

And this has fostered a deep bond and friendship between the two women. They were brought together in sad circumstances in 2016 during the last months of their husbands' treatment for myeloma.

While Don Healy and Bruce Coupar were neighbours in adjoining hospital rooms in Cairns, they didn't meet up until a Leukaemia Foundation blood cancer co-ordinator played a key role in bringing their wives together.

"Lyn and I had met briefly at a carer's support group but when Donna

introduced us later she said 'you two definitely need to get together. Both your husbands worked in the mines, you have so much in common,'" said Lynnie, 59, of Cairns, who has two grown-up children and three grandchildren.

***"I can talk to her about anything..."***

"Lynnie and I started becoming friends at the day clinic," said Lyn, 61, also of Cairns, who has three daughters and two grandsons.

"Our boys were hooked up to their IVs and we all started talking. Then Lynnie and I would head down to the cafeteria for a cuppa or go for a walk and talk.

"We hit it off straight away. We were kindred spirits and shared a bit of black humour. That's really important for some comic relief when you're living and breathing blood cancer," said Lyn.

"Chatting away from the boys, we'd talk about their treatments and white cell counts and ask – 'how are you going?'" said Lynnie.

"We could talk openly about all our concerns. Talking to someone who is going through the same thing makes all the difference."

Lynnie's husband lived with myeloma for 15 years. When Bruce was diagnosed in 2001, the Coupars lived in Melbourne. He had stem cell transplant and "all the treatments under the sun" before going into remission in 2009.

"After such an intense eight years, we really needed a break, so went travelling," said Lynnie.

*Continued on page 10 & 11.*



*Matt Fry at last year's Light the Night in Adelaide.*

## LIGHT THE NIGHT HONOURS THOSE LOST

During October, more than 35,000 people gathered to walk for Light the Night – the Leukaemia Foundation's beautiful evening lantern walk.

This spectacular event brings together families across Australia to transform the darkness into a sea of glowing light to beat blood cancer.

Lanterns are raised high in a moving ceremony to pay tribute to those facing their own blood cancer journey and to remember loved ones lost.

Each coloured lantern carries a special meaning. Gold to remember loved ones lost to blood cancer, white for those with a blood cancer diagnosis, and blue to show community support for all those affected.

This empowering and supportive event also raises funds for vital research that will help beat blood cancer.

"My wife, Kaoru, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in April 2016. She fought the disease with a big heart and smile, but had to leave us on 14 November 2016. Kaoru had great respect for the Leukaemia Foundation and the work that they do every day. If she was still here, she would be working with them to support people with blood cancer and help researchers to further understand the causes, improve treatment and find cures for blood cancers.

"Carrying a yellow lantern at Light The Night allows us to honour, remember and celebrate our loved ones. To embrace the legacy they left and the importance they had in our lives. Being together with everyone on the night provides us with a sense of community and support. It's also great to be with all of the white and blue lantern holders. It's about being proactive and it's about hope!"

*Matt Fry, Yellow Lantern Ambassador*

## BLOOD CANCER CONFERENCE 2018

Leaders in blood cancer research, treatment and wellbeing gathered in Melbourne in September at the Leukaemia Foundation's Blood Cancer Conference.

More than 300 people with blood cancer and their families came from around the country to hear them speak across a range of topics.

In the first keynote session, clinical haematologist, Professor David Joske, looked at the impact and benefits of taking a holistic and whole-person approach to cancer care in his presentation on 'Humanity into Healthcare'.

Then journalist, Deborah Sims, shared her personal story and quest to access a new treatment which meant

participating in a drug trial overseas. She has since become a strong advocate for drug access and equity.

After lunch, the conference attendees split into groups for a range of sessions. They could choose from either a transplant or a survivorship topic and the physical wellbeing and emotional wellbeing sessions were particularly popular.

Then leading experts led disease-specific sessions and there was a session for carers that was delivered by Leukaemia Foundation staff, Maryanne Skarparis and Amanda Ferguson.

The full day's program ended with a clinical

trials Q&A covering different aspects of clinical trials, from what they are, to how to find them and how they work, along with the opportunity to ask questions and this involved some robust and lively discussion.

Many of the keynote speaker sessions were recorded and these presentations will be shared at: [leukaemia.org.au/blood-cancer-conference-2018](http://leukaemia.org.au/blood-cancer-conference-2018)



# TAKING ON EVEREST IN THE NAME OF BEATING BLOOD CANCER

The 'Beat Blood Cancer Everest Challenge' was a catalyst for conquering life's highs and lows for Townsville couple, Elle Duggan and Matt O'Hanlon.

In early-2017 Matt's mother received the devastating news that she had leukaemia.

"The doctor said it was a miracle Mum was even still with us given that her white blood cell count was through the roof," said Matt.

**"You have to get out there and live your best life - that's what mum would have wanted."**

"Eight months later we sat by Mum's bed trying to find a way to say goodbye – something no-one is ever ready to do, even more so when it is due to something so random, unpredictable and unfair [as leukaemia].

"Afterwards, we were extremely fatigued – emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The 'Beat Blood Cancer Everest Challenge' caught our attention as a way to get back in shape and back into a routine after months sitting by a hospital bed and not paying attention to what we ate," said Elle.

"It was hard to get motivated in the beginning as we were essentially dealing with the grief and adjusting to a new way of life. But once the trip got closer, we got out there, did a lot of walking with our dogs and trained hard at the gym."

During their inspiring journey, the couple raised \$20,000 for the Leukaemia Foundation.

"We hadn't put an end figure on it. We just did the best we could and were overwhelmed by the level of support we received from our friends and families," said Elle.

**"Everest might have been the destination but it was our journey that meant the most to us."**

"Seeing Everest for the first time was incredibly special and in that moment we felt so proud and humbled.

"When we made it to the base camp, we knew everything was going to be easier from then on – life and the rest of the trek. Everest might have been the destination but it was our journey that meant the most to us.



*Elle Duggan, front, and Matt O'Hanlon, top left, and his family, with his late mother, Margaret O'Hanlon.*

"Realising life has to go on no matter what you've been through is hard at first, but you can't put your life on pause forever. You have to get out there and live your best life - that's what mum would have wanted," said Matt.

Now Elle and Matt are encouraging others to take on a challenge by joining the Leukaemia Foundation at the Great Wall of China next June.

"Why not? What's stopping you?" says Elle.

"Get out there and start living! Life is too short not to."

Challenge yourself with this five-day trek into Chinese villages, across undulating farmlands and through thick forest, all while raising vital funds for the Leukaemia Foundation – to meet the emotional and practical needs of families living with blood cancer.

To find out more visit:  
<https://bit.ly/2PtRcB2>



*Matt and Elle at Everest base camp.*

## UNEXPECTED LIFELINE GIVES ERIC STRENGTH TO WEATHER GRIEF JOURNEY

Eric Montgomery felt completely alone when he lost Debbie, his wife of 34 years, in March 2016 – just six months after her diagnosis with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML).

The couple from Sydney's Western suburbs had fallen in love while working together at the old department store, Waltons.

Eric remembers her from the day she applied for her job there.

"My friend, Cranston and I both vied for her attention and after a few months I was successful," said Eric.

**"Debbie was the bravest person I have known."**

"We fell in love, married in 1982 and were inseparable right up until she sadly passed away.

"Even though Deb had other health issues (she was diagnosed with diabetes as a teenager) the leukaemia diagnosis came out of the blue.

Blood tests six months earlier had shown everything was normal.

"Within days of her AML diagnosis, Deb was in the bone marrow transplant unit and for months no-one could get near her without wearing a mask and gloves," said Eric.



*Debbie with her sons, left to right, Marc, Anthony and Christopher.*

"It was pretty horrible, but Deb took it so bravely. During her third round of chemotherapy she got infections with temperatures over 40 degrees. They couldn't do anything to bring it down. When told that the leukaemia had returned again she decided at that point to stop treatment.

"When Debbie passed away on March 10, four days after our 34th wedding anniversary and three days before our youngest son's 21st, her whole family was there – her brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, her mother, our boys, Christopher, 34, Anthony, 32, and Marc, 23, and her daughters-in-law, Krystal and Bonnie.

"Once they took her off the treatment she was able to speak to everyone, then she slipped away," said Eric.

"Debbie was the bravest person I have known. She faced the leukaemia, treatment and made her final decision with determination, unbelievable courage and dignity.

"But the saddest day was when Anthony and Marc told her their wives were pregnant and both were having girls. Debbie had always wanted a girl, but at least she got to know the babies were coming."

**"I rang the Leukaemia Foundation to get donation envelopes and that's when they said 'you need to see our grief counsellor...'"**

Eric found being at home difficult after Debbie had died.

"Everything was where she had left it – her bags were still on the table and her clothes were hanging on the door. I got very annoyed if anybody moved anything," said Eric.

He discovered help almost by accident while requesting in-memoriam envelopes for Debbie's funeral.

### ERIC'S ADVICE TO OTHERS

"Pick up the phone and talk to the Leukaemia Foundation. You are not alone. There are lots of other people who have been through the same thing. The help at the end of the phone is invaluable."



*Debbie and Eric at their son Anthony's wedding in October 2013.*

*Continued next page.*

# GRIEF BRUNCH - STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE JOURNEY AFTER LOSING A LOVED ONE

Grief and the fear of letting go was the focus of a grief brunch held at one of the Leukaemia Foundation's accommodation villages in Brisbane in August.

This morning of inspiration and reflection also was an opportunity to come together in a relaxed and accepting atmosphere, to share the love, pain and laughter that is part and parcel of losing a loved one.

The guest speaker, psychologist, Lisa Johnson, discussed life balance and

explained a self-care wheel, which details the psychological, physical, emotional, spiritual, personal and professional aspects of grief.

While everyone enjoyed a delicious brunch, Lisa explained a range of strategies to help people who are bereaved to manage their grieving process.

Lisa said she was humbled to be included, even for a small part of their journey, and that she had learnt as much as the attendees throughout the morning.

There were more than 30 people at the grief brunch.

They left feeling inspired, understood and having gained strategies to take away with them to understand both their grief and themselves a little better.

**Keep up-to-date with grief events in your area:  
visit [leukaemia.org.au](http://leukaemia.org.au)  
or call us on 1800 620 420.**

## UPCOMING EVENT

<b>End of year Living Well with Grief Brunch</b>	8 December	9.30am-12.30pm	ESA Village, 41 Peter Doherty St, Brisbane
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"I rang the Leukaemia Foundation to get donation envelopes and that's when they said 'you need to see our grief counsellor, Donita Menon,'" said Eric.

"Donita is lovely and I have found my sessions with her incredibly useful. I am surprised that I'm still going after all this time but I feel that I really need to, it's a great service.

***"As a family, it's about all talking together."***

"There is just so much going on in the early stages. A lot of decisions need to be made quickly and she helped me with that. I see Donita once a fortnight now. She's helping me sort through things at home and gives me little bits of homework.

"If it wasn't for her, everything would still be where Deb left it. But it's not healthy for me or my boys to have things exactly as they were.

"Donita also organises group meetings and I found that quite useful, hearing other people's stories. We all get together once every six months for a catch up, to see how everything is going and it's so great to share in everyone's progress."

Eric has continued to make sure his three sons feel they can talk about Deb openly.

"As a family, it's about all talking together," said Eric.

"The boys were at the hospital when

Deb made her final decision. They were at all the doctor's meetings and were very involved in her funeral. I've done that on purpose, to make sure they feel like they can always have a say in everything and to help them in their understanding and grieving.

"We go out for Deb's birthday, and Mother's Day each year.

***"I am surprised that I'm still going (to counselling) after all this time but I feel that I really need to, it's a great service."***

We also bought a memorial garden for her. The boys go there often and find that very comforting."

Along with counselling and talking with family, Eric has also found comfort in Rocky – a fox terrier, gifted to him by Anthony and Krystal.

"Rocky has been unbelievable. He just knows when I'm upset or down.



**Eric and Rocky, his fox terrier.**

"He jumps on my lap and starts licking me on the neck. And then when he sees I'm a bit better, he hops off. Dogs are amazing animals," said Eric.

# CELEBRATION OF LIFE A REAL TRIBUTE

The Leukaemia Foundation hosted its annual Celebration of Life at the Kirribilli Club on Sunday, March 24.

This special event takes place each year to remember, reflect and honour loved ones lost to leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma or related blood disorders.

Associate Professor Ghauri Aggarwal, who heads the palliative care department at a Sydney hospital, was this year's guest speaker. Her interests include the interface between oncology and palliative medicine, education in palliative care, communication skills and ethics and end-of-life decision-making. She has co-authored publications on hospital based palliative medicine, pain management and is currently involved in research into end-of-life care.

Assoc. Prof. Aggarwal shared her reflections on the day along with Leukaemia Foundation grief and support staff who delivered some of their favourite readings to the group.

A candle lighting ceremony was held to pay tribute to their loved ones lost. (See below for the ceremony reading.)

To register your interest for the 2019 Celebration of Life event, please contact Donita Menon on 02 9902 2205 or [dmenon@leukaemia.org.au](mailto:dmenon@leukaemia.org.au)



"My three sons and I have attended the past two Celebration of Life ceremonies at the Kirribilli Club since my wife's passing. We have found them very moving and beneficial as part of the grieving process and remembrance. Certainly seeing their mother's name appear on the screen, lighting a candle, writing in a card and placing it on the remembrance tree for her was extremely moving. The speakers have always been interesting and we have found it beneficial meeting others in attendance who have gone through similar circumstances. The boys have indicated that they will attend the event in the future as well. I would certainly recommend Celebration of Life to others who have lost a loved one."

*Eric Montgomery, 2017 and 2018 Celebration of Life attendee*

## LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

The Celebration of Life candle, with its bright flame, symbolises hope and embodies the strength that allows us to continue and the song we sing to ourselves that is always there deep within our hearts.

"We light four candles from our main candle in honour of your loved ones. We light one for our grief, one for our courage, one for our memories, and one for our love.

"This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of feelings of despair and loneliness and of dreams that go unfulfilled.

"This candle represents our courage. It symbolises the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

"This candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together.

"This candle represents our love. The love we have given and received and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow: a love that will never die."



*The Celebration of Life candle lighting ceremony.*

# HOW REAL MEN DEAL WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

There is one major difference between men who are stable, happy, fulfilled and feeling positive about their lives, and those who are struggling, depressed and unfulfilled... 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'.

Talking about grief and loss will significantly improve your life. Bottling it up will also bottle up the happiness and success.

Talking about it makes you stronger, so let's look at the steps for letting it out.

## 1. Realise the impact of your grief or loss

Men defer to logic when things get difficult. We compartmentalise emotions – trying to understand why an event happened. We look at the physical realm and overlook the emotional one.

We address the logistics of losing a partner, business, or friend and say to ourselves, 'Now where am I going to live? What will happen to my kids? What about my business or career? How is this going to impact those areas of my life?'

What we should be asking is, 'How is this impacting me emotionally? Am I hurt? Sad? Angry? What am I experiencing?' Take the time to tune in to how your grief or loss is affecting you emotionally, not just logically and rationally.

## 2. Address the ugly elephant in the room – shame

We often feel as if we shouldn't experience grief. We feel shame for the emotions that arise alongside grief and shame. We feel grief at our loss and if a hint of sadness appears, we condemn ourselves, saying, 'Stop it! Feeling sad about it isn't going to help.'

Actually, it will... if you let it.

It's vital to address the shame. Don't numb it with booze, drugs, gambling, or any other addiction. After the bender, it will still be there and it will be worse.

***"The healthy let it out. The unhealthy numb it out."***

## 3. Stop hiding, start talking

One of the most common things men who have gone through loss or grief say is, 'I felt so alone. I didn't feel as if I could talk to anyone about it.'

Suffering in silence is not the answer. Maybe you think your friends, family, or co-workers won't understand you.



In truth, they don't need to 'get it'. It doesn't matter if they haven't experienced the exact same thing. They can still support you.

Grief and loss are part of the human experience and everyone has gone through it at some point.

When you open up and invite people into your experience and talk about what has been going on, you give them permission to fully understand what's happening in your life. They get to see the real you, not just the well-trimmed Facebook persona.

## 4. Know you're not alone

Working with men across North America, I've yet to encounter anyone who has been through something so rare or horrific as to be un-relatable. Our illusion that we are alone in our suffering or experience is exactly that – an illusion.

I have met men who were physically and sexually abused as children, men who have been held captive, tortured, in near-death accidents, lost loved ones in strange and bizarre accidents, and so much more.

And every single time without fail, someone else in the crowd can relate, has been through something similar or has a close friend who experienced exactly the same thing.

## 5. Join a like-minded community

Fact: people care about you and want to support you (even the worst human beings in history had people who genuinely cared about them... and trust me, you're not that bad).

Having people in your life (read 'inner circle') leads to connection and guidance. When grief and loss arrive, you will be able to process and move through the experience more effectively, allowing you to get back on track, learn and grow from the loss.

## 6. Why dealing with grief and loss is the mark of a 'real man'

Unfortunately, the 'real man' phrase has been given a negative spin, but you know what a 'real man' does? He handles his emotions so he's not a drain on everyone else around him.

This means properly processing grief and loss when it comes up, which it definitely will.

Being a man isn't about pretending to be tough when life kicks you in the guts. It's about being mentally and emotionally healthy so you can show up fully for the people in your life.

**Based on an article by Connor Beaton, founder of ManTalks, an international organisation focused on men's health, wellness, success, and fulfilment.**

# HONOURING HER SON'S MEMORY IS ALWAYS FRONT-OF-MIND FOR JENNY

**After the unimaginable tragedy of losing her 20 year-old son Brent to leukaemia early last year, Jenny Holland has found connecting with other bereaved parents invaluable.**

Jenny and her husband, Allan are no strangers to loss, as their first three children died as babies before they had Brent and his younger brother, Scott.

"I realised early on the need to talk to other parents who have been through the same thing. They are the only people you can feel on an equal footing with," said Jenny.

The Leukaemia Foundation's 'Living Well with Grief Bereaved Parent Weekend' was the perfect environment for Jenny to connect with others who also had lost a child to blood cancer.

"I would encourage couples to go if at all possible, particularly regional parents who often don't have access to support groups. It is a rare chance to share your child's story with others who understand and to form new support networks," said Jenny.

The experience of losing a child shifts your perspective and Jenny said the common worries of life don't seem so significant anymore.

"When you go back to work and people get carried away with office politics or whatever, you think 'first and foremost, are your kids healthy?' because everything else seems trivial in comparison.

"I'm always thinking about everything Brent went through – his last days or even hours, and his courage.

"There aren't many people you can talk to about the nitty gritty of what it was like. Other people just don't want to hear about it, or you feel they don't want to.

"It may be more than 18 months ago now, and everyone moves on with their lives, but for families like Scott, Alan and I, it still feels like it was last month," said Jenny.

At the time of his leukaemia diagnosis in March 2016, Brent was just 19 years old and weeks away from completing his final exams to become a qualified electrician. He loved his job and co-workers, had a close group of mates and a girlfriend.

Jenny remembers the shock and uncertainty felt by the whole family as Brent had to receive treatment in Brisbane, a six-hour drive from their home in Gladstone.

"When Brent was admitted to hospital (in Brisbane), we were told 'you can expect to be here for five months'," said Jenny.

"The immediate question of where we were going to stay was answered by a visit from the Leukaemia Foundation within only a few hours of our arrival on the ward.

***"I realised early on the need to talk to other parents who have been through the same thing."***

"We were offered a unit at The Village Green apartments which was within walking distance of the hospital. That was fabulous because we could go back and forth without having to deal with the nightmare of parking," said Jenny.

Brent had chemotherapy, radiation, and a stem cell transplant. Scott was his donor.

"He came through that really well and was out of hospital just before his 20th birthday on June 30, so there was talk around Brent having two birthdays in June, one being the start of the rest of his life," said Jenny.

"But it wasn't to be; 133 days after his transplant we were told the leukaemia was back with a vengeance."

Having been away from home for nine months, Brent was determined to return to Gladstone and live out his life close to family and friends.

"From then on we promised he would never spend another night in hospital," said Jenny.

"He wanted to swim in the ocean, hang out with his mates, brother, and girlfriend, and just do all the simple things he had been missing out on.



*The Holland family in October 2016 – Allan, Scott, Brent and Jenny, with their dog, Skid.*

*Continued next page.*



# BEREAVED PARENT WEEKEND – A SAFE SPACE FOR REFLECTION AND HEALING

The Leukaemia Foundation has long recognised the need to support parents who have lost a child to blood cancer.

For more than 12 years, our 'Living Well with Grief Bereaved Parent Weekend' has provided a safe and supportive environment where participants can explore and express their feelings of grief and loss.

At a country getaway this special weekend enables parents to gain information on the nature and process of grieving and effective methods to manage those feelings.

This year, Leukaemia Foundation grief support services manager, Shirley Cunningham and Linda Male, a grief psychologist, facilitated the weekend held in late-June. Linda specialises in parental grief and loss, general parenting, and step-parenting issues.

Those who attended took in the beautiful surrounds of Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland while participating in group and music therapy sessions. They were also treated to a relaxing massage and delicious meals throughout the weekend, all free-of-charge.

To register your interest for the 2019 Living Well with Grief Bereaved Parents Weekend, contact Shirley Cunningham: 07 3055 8235 or [scunningham@leukaemia.org.au](mailto:scunningham@leukaemia.org.au)



Attendees created a shrine of remembrance for the children they had lost.

"Allan, Scott and I just felt so powerless the whole time. It felt like being in an old silent movie when you're tied to the tracks with the train hurtling towards you and there's nothing you can do.

"Christmas day was particularly difficult that year. What gifts do you give your child when you know it will be their last? When the gift you desperately want to give is to change places with them?"

Brent passed away peacefully at home on 13 February 2017 surrounded by his family and friends.

The Holland family now focuses their energy on honouring Brent through promoting blood donation and fundraising to support other families affected by blood cancer.

***"Fundraising events are a good reason for Brent's friends to catch up and I'm always proud he has inspired so many people to help others."***

"I've been so touched by the way Brent's passing has inspired his friends and co-workers to get involved with the cause. Many of his mates are now blood donors and use our Red25 donor group *Bleed4Brent* to recruit new donors," said Jenny.

"You really understand the importance when you see how much blood and platelets leukaemia patients need and which wouldn't be available unless people were donating.

"A lot of Brent's friends have also taken part in the Leukaemia Foundation's World's Greatest Shave and next year, I'll be shaving for Brent.

"The last two years we have done Relay for Life, a great fundraising event involving an overnight relay and ceremony to honour and remember our loved ones lost to cancer

"Brent's employer, Gladstone Ports Corporation, has been outstanding in their support for both Brent and our family. They've taken us under their wing and include us in all their fundraising events," said Jenny.

"Fundraising events are a good reason for Brent's friends to catch up and I'm always proud he has inspired so many people to help others.

"It makes us really proud that Brent was so well-loved and that all these tradesmen, many twice his age, were truly his friends.

"They placed a plaque in his memory on a seat in the parklands overlooking the marina.

"It gives us all somewhere to go, to feel close to Brent, and as parents it is so, so important to feel that your child's name is not forgotten."



Brent at a Brisbane heat cricket game in December 2015, two months before his diagnosis.

## A MEDITATION ON GRIEF

**Grief is one of the heart's natural responses to loss.**

When we grieve, we allow ourselves to feel the truth of our pain, the measure of betrayal or tragedy in our life. By our willingness to mourn, we slowly acknowledge, integrate and accept the truth of our losses. Sometimes the best way to let go is to grieve.

It takes courage to grieve, to honor the pain we carry. We can grieve in tears or in meditative silence, in prayer or in song. In touching the pain of recent and long-held griefs, we come face-to-face with our genuine human vulnerability, with helplessness and

hopelessness. These are the storm clouds of the heart.

Most traditional societies offer ritual and communal support to help people move through grief and loss. We need to respect our tears. Without a wise way to grieve, we can only soldier on, armored and unfeeling, but our hearts cannot learn and grow from the sorrows of the past.

To meditate on grief, let yourself sit, alone or with a comforting friend.

Take the time to create an atmosphere of support.

When you are ready, begin by sensing your breath. Feel your breathing in the

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***When after heavy rain the storm clouds disperse, is it not that they've wept themselves clear to the end?" – Ghalib***

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area of your chest. This can help you become present to what is within you. Take one hand and hold it gently on your heart as if you were holding a vulnerable human being. You are.

As you continue to breathe, bring to mind the loss or pain you are grieving. Let the story, the images, and the feelings come naturally. Hold them gently. Take your time. Let the feelings come layer by layer, a little at a time.

Keep breathing softly, compassionately. Let whatever feelings are there – pain and tears, anger and love, fear and sorrow – come as they will. Touch them gently. Let them unravel out of your body and mind. Make space for any images that arise. Allow the whole story. Breathe and hold it all with tenderness and compassion. Kindness for it all, for you and for others.

## CONTINUED: LYN AND LYNNIE'S FRIENDSHIP IS AN "ABSOLUTE BLESSING"

They made their way to Darwin where they spent the next six years. Lynnie flew with an airline and Bruce worked one week on, one week off in the mines in Western Australia.

"When we had time off, we'd fly to Hawaii or Cairns or go down to the Kimberleys. It was a fantastic lifestyle," said Lynnie.

In 2013, when Bruce relapsed, they flew back and forth to Melbourne for treatment until he ran out of treatment options, and from early-2016 he was managed by a haematologist in Cairns. (The Coupars had moved to Cairns when Lynnie's job was transferred there from Darwin.)

Don Healy's blood cancer journey was much shorter. Lyn, a paramedic, was shocked by his myeloma diagnosis in April 2015. His only symptom was a sore back, from picking up an esky.

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***"We hit it off straight away..."***

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They were in Mt Isa at the time and went to Brisbane to see a neurosurgeon. Don was referred to a haematologist and the Healys ended up staying in the Queensland capital for eight months.

"Being so far away from family and everything was a real hardship. Luckily, we stayed at the Leukaemia Foundation village which was amazing

and great for a bit of companionship which was vital during that time," said Lyn.

She used all the long service leave she had accrued but Lyn wasn't able to keep her training up-to-date or do shift work while looking after Don.

"The decision was clear – I couldn't continue to work," said Lyn.

Don didn't respond well to treatment. He had a stem cell transplant in Brisbane, experimental treatments in Townville, and in April 2016 he had more chemotherapy in Cairns. (The Healys had moved there and were staying with Lyn's parents.)

"That treatment didn't work either and the doctor said – 'we're sending you home to spend the time you've got with family,'" said Lyn.

"We went to the day clinic for blood or plasma and that's when we met Lynnie and Bruce."

Lynnie's husband died in mid-August 2016; they had been together for 40 years.

Lyn went to Bruce's funeral and two weeks later her husband died on their 40th wedding anniversary.

"We kept in touch well and truly from then," said Lyn.

"I don't know anyone else I can talk to about the things I talk to Lynnie about. It's just invaluable.



*Bruce and Lynnie Coupar.*



The grief we carry is part of the grief of the world. Hold it gently. Let it be honoured. You do not have to keep it in anymore. You can let it go into the heart of compassion; you can weep. Releasing the grief we carry is a long, tear-filled process. Yet it follows the

natural intelligence of the body and heart. Trust it. Trust the unfolding. Along with meditation, some of your grief will want to be written, to be cried out, to be sung, to be danced. Let the timeless wisdom within you carry you through grief to an open heart.

*This excerpt is from 'The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace' by Jack Kornfield. He has a PhD in clinical psychology and is one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practice to the West.*

***"It's a different kind of loneliness now."***

"One of the biggest things is sorting through everything in the house, going through all your memories," said Lyn who offered to help Linnie with this.

"We had a really good day together." And Linnie has found Lyn's friendship and humour indispensable since Bruce's passing.

"When we go around to each other's place to catch up, we laugh a lot and talk about where we're going to go from here," said Linnie.

"I can talk to Lyn about anything. She's been an absolute blessing."

The pair help each other practically, hanging pictures, fixing gates, using sanders, drills and ladders, and they have been camping together, each with their own tent and car.

"That was a real concern of mine. I thought I couldn't go camping because I didn't have anyone to go with, but Linnie said, 'you just need to set the car up and go'."

Linnie had kept her late-husband's ute and had it fitted out with a canopy and Lyn had an awning that came in handy when it rained during their first trip to Ellis Beach.

"It was fantastic. I absolutely wouldn't have gone if Linnie hadn't suggested it," said Lyn.

"You have to be braver and do things outside your comfort zone. We want to go fishing out on the reef too."



*Lyn and Don Healy.*

However much they feel comforted by one another, both still feel the pain of losing 'their boys'.

"Talking the other day, I said 'it seems like it's getting harder' and Lyn agreed, saying 'yeah, you miss them more and more as time goes on,'" said Linnie.

"It's a different kind of loneliness now."

Lyn and Linnie have taken part in the Leukaemia Foundation's beautiful evening lantern walk – Light the Night event – where Australians come together to mark their blood cancer journey or to honour a loved one.

"At Light the Night last year, we were asked to share our side of the story," said Lyn.

"It was hard, but it felt good to do it as it recognised 'the boys' and what the Leukaemia Foundation had done for us.

"It felt really special. Telling our story was another way of honouring Don and Bruce. It was a real tribute to their memory. They will never be forgotten."



*Lyn and Linnie on their most recent camping trip together.*

# SUPPORT NEAR YOU

For information about Leukaemia Foundation grief events and support programs, visit [leukaemia.org.au](http://leukaemia.org.au) or contact your local blood cancer support co-ordinator.

NEW SOUTH WALES/AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY		
Donita Menon	Grief & Bereavement Co-ordinator	dmenon@leukaemia.org.au
QUEENSLAND		
Shirley Cunningham	Grief Services Manager	scunningham@leukaemia.org.au
SOUTH AUSTRALIA/NORTHERN TERRITORY		
Laura Schuitemaker	Team Leader	lschuitemaker@leukaemia.org.au
VICTORIA/TASMANIA		
Andrew Smith	Team Leader	a.smith@leukaemia.org.au
WESTERN AUSTRALIA		
Julie Tovey	Team Leader	jtovey@leukaemia.org.au

## 12 TIPS FOR COPING WITH GRIEF DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON

Holidays can be a particularly difficult time for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one. You can prepare yourself for the feelings this time of the year may trigger by following some of these tips.

1. Acknowledge that the coming holiday season will be different, perhaps even challenging.
2. Make plans, but keep them flexible.
3. Discuss your plans with family members in advance.
4. Decide which traditions you want to keep or those you want to change.
5. Accept that everyone grieves differently, even within the same family.
6. Ask for help with the tasks you find daunting.



7. Prioritise your commitments and allow time for self-care.
8. Acknowledge your loved one in some way. For example, light a candle, hang a special decoration, or raise a toast.
9. Allow yourself time to grieve, but also allow yourself to experience times of pleasure and joy.
10. Monitor your food and alcohol intake. It can be easy to use these for self-comfort.
11. Donate a gift or some of your time to a charity, honouring the memory of your loved one.

12. Trust your own instincts to know what will be helpful for you.

### SHARE YOUR STORY

Reading about the grief journeys of others can bring great comfort.

If you would like to share your story in a future issue of this newsletter, we'd love to hear from you.

Email us at [newsletters@leukaemia.org.au](mailto:newsletters@leukaemia.org.au) or call 1800 620 420.



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MISSION TO CARE

### CONTACT US

If you need support or would like to make an enquiry please contact the Leukaemia Foundation on 1800 620 420 or go to [leukaemia.org.au](http://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 issues of this publication please contact the Leukaemia Foundation Support Services Division on 1800 620 420.