

Navigating grief: A time for healing in our small community

BY HAYRIYA HEIDI HANSEN

As the holidays faded into the rearview mirror and the hustle and bustle wound down, many of us were left with quiet moments of reflection. For some, the holidays brought joy, connection, and cherished memories, but for others, the time stirred up feelings of loss, loneliness, and grief.

Grief has a unique way of showing up, often when least expected, and the year following the death of a loved one can be difficult. If you find yourself struggling, you are not alone. Grief is a natural response to loss, and it doesn't have a set timeline. In fact, it can often intensify after significant milestones, like birthdays, anniversaries, or the holidays. But acknowledging and embracing your emotions, however difficult, is an essential step toward healing.

Remember, grief is not linear. It doesn't follow a clear path or have a predictable timeline. For some, the initial shock and numbness of losing someone may give way to sadness, anger, or even guilt. For others, it may manifest as a deep sense of emptiness or a longing for a person who is no longer there. Every person's journey is different; there's no right or wrong way to grieve.

One of the most common feelings after a loss is a sense of being disconnected from the world around the grieving person. The holiday cheer and the promise of a new year can seem out of place, especially when weighed against the grief still heavy in one's heart. If you are finding it hard to get back to "normal" after the holidays, it's important to recognize that there's no rush. Grief takes time. It's okay to take it one day at a time.

In our small community, where many know one another, the emotional landscape is often intertwined. While that closeness can be a source of support, it can also be difficult if you're struggling to find the space to grieve privately. It's easy to feel as though you need to be strong for others or maintain a level of composure. However, it's important to remember that vulnerability is not weakness. Expressing your feelings, whether to friends, family, or in moments of solitude, is a powerful act of healing.

Though it may not seem possible in the early days of grief, you can take small steps to care for yourself as you move forward. Here are a few strategies that may help as you navigate grief:

1. Give yourself permission to grieve.

Acknowledge the pain and give yourself permission to feel what you feel. It's okay to miss your loved one and to grieve in your own way.

2. Find comfort in routine. The beginning of a new year can feel overwhelming, especially if it marks the start of a year without someone who was once at your side. A return to routine—even small daily tasks like making a cup of tea or taking a walk—can provide a sense of structure and normalcy.

3. Reach out for support. While grief can often feel isolating, it's essential to seek support. If you're struggling, reach out to friends, family members, or a support group. If needed, speak with a therapist who specializes in grief. Having someone to talk to can make a significant difference.

4. Honor their memory. This can be especially healing when done through a ritual, a letter, or creating a memory book. This act of remembrance can provide comfort and allow you to feel connected to your loved one, even in their absence.

5. Take care of your physical health. Grief is often not just an emotional experience, but a physical one as well. Ensure you're getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and moving your body, as all have an impact on your mental state.

6. Be patient with yourself. Healing doesn't happen overnight. It's a process, not a destination.

In times of grief, community can be an invaluable resource. Whether it's a simple gesture of kindness—a phone call, a hug, or a shared meal—these acts can help.

Remember, though the pain of loss may never fully disappear, the love and memories of those who have died continue to shape us and can provide us with the strength to face each new day. The new year may seem daunting, but it also holds the possibility of healing and hope.

If you or someone you love is grieving, please contact the Southern Oregon Living and Dying Alliance at the number below for more information.

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

More thank-yous and a reluctant good-bye

BY DIANA COOGLE

First, a *huge* thank-you to all our wonderful supporters who made our NewsMatch campaign successful again this year. Thanks to this program by the Institute for Nonprofit News, and such generous response from our readers, the *Applegater* is on firm financial footing for the coming year.

And then, with regret, I must report the resignation of board member Margaret Patterson.

Margaret not only served as distribution manager; she was also that all-important person on a board who fills in when something needs to be done. Margaret was especially good at doing those kinds of things for our public events. In addition, she and her husband, Tom, who own Cascadia Vineyards and Winery, were always generous donors for those events.

We will miss Margaret's quirky humor and cheerful demeanor on the board. We wish her well as she and Tom move into their next ventures.

The obvious next statement is that we now have a position open for a new board member. Might that be you, dear reader? We are looking for people who are enthusiastic about the *Applegater* and can dedicate two hours a month to board meetings, plus time to fulfill the job that that person takes on, such as grant manager, archivist, events chair, and other positions.

If you are interested in joining the board and helping keep the *Applegater* vital in our community, let me know. You can email me at diana@applegater.org or call me at 541-846-7447.

I hope to hear from you! Thanks for caring about our community newsmagazine.

Diana Coogle
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