



# HEALING THE SPIRIT

Spring 2022

1-800-847-7831 | healingthespirit.org



## Dear Donor Families,

As spring arrives, we often find ourselves wanting to open the windows to the fresh air and reorganize our living spaces. This process of cleaning out or reorganizing can be more difficult after the loss of a loved one. Letting go of material items that are sentimental or bring back memories that you cherish can be very challenging.

How do we know when to give ourselves time or when to gently nudge ourselves to start this process? There is no right answer, but I hope this edition of *Donor Family Quarterly* will help you understand your own journey and encourage you to give yourself grace.

All the Best,

Debbie Hutt, DFS Director

If you would like more information on any Donor Family Service Programs, please contact us.

800.847.8731 | DFS@lifenethealth.org

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### In Celebration & Remembrance Events

**September 25: Seattle, WA**  
Museum of Flight

**October 16: Billings, FL**  
Pensacola Yacht Club

**November 13: Billings, MT**  
Northern Hotel

*Thank you to all who joined us at our Virginia events.*



### Memorial Tribute & Keepsake Ideas:

- A photo collage for a wall
- A digital photo collage to share
- A shadow box to display small items
- A quilt made of their clothing
- A garden in their honor
- Planting a tree or flower in their honor
- A candle to light in a special location
- A storybook of their life
- Creating a scholarship in their honor
- Donating to a cause in their name
- Volunteering in their honor

# Healing Tears



*Dear Dr. Leary:*

*I have so many things that belonged to my late husband that I cannot get myself to donate or throw out. Is there a plan I can put in place to help myself let go of these?*

*Signed, Paralyzed*

Dear Paralyzed,

You are referring to the “stuff of grief” and how difficult it is to deal with the possessions and memories of a deceased loved one. The first tenet is that there is no “one right way” to cope. The second is that there is no timetable.

You say that you cannot get yourself to make decisions about his things. You may need something or someone to move forward. Do you need time? Is someone pushing you forward when you need more time to accept the reality of his death? Do you need the support of a companion to be with you as you sort through things and memories? Be kind to yourself and allow yourself whatever support is called for in this moment.

We could begin by examining what you believe it means to “throw out” your beloved husband’s belongings. Ask yourself what you are telling yourself this feeling means and what this means about him and about you. Are you discarding him? Are you turning your back on your history together? Does this mean you are forgetting him? Does this mean you are being disloyal? What is the belief that is holding you back from moving forward?

Follow the beliefs and name your feelings; is this fear or guilt or sadness? Try to sit with your feelings, make friends and listen to them; they will lead you to answers to help you care for yourself and to respond authentically to what is truly at the heart of your resistance.

The answers from your feelings will help you to make decisions about when, where, how, and with whom to take care of his belongs:

- Be true to yourself. Don’t let anyone else’s agenda, beliefs or needs dictate your pacing and process.
- Set aside time for the memories that will surface; his, yours, and shared memories.
- Pace yourself: consider the task hour by hour, or day to day; you don’t have to complete it all at once or by anyone else’s timeline. You can break down the task by rooms (den) or items (sports equipment) or category (suits).
- Ask for support: find a friend who will listen as you reminisce and validate your feelings.
- Create a ritual and use the time to review, feel it all, and let go.
- Be creative: I’ve taken favorite shirts to a seamstress who repurposes them into stuffed bears to share as keepsakes with family members; or used them in a quilt for my own bed.
- Find meaning: Donate items go to an organization that reflects his or your values.
- Follow up with self-soothing self-care through movement, being in nature, listening to your favorite music, journaling, eating healthy foods, and participating in gentle rituals.

You can find additional support and resources in Chapter 13 of “The Grief Recovery Handbook” and at <https://www.griefrecoverymethod.com/blog/2017/02/letting-go-stuff-after-loss>

*Lani Leary, Ph.D., specializes in work with chronically ill, dying and bereaved clients. Dr. Leary has worked for the past 25 years as a psychotherapist in private practice and in six hospices across the country.*



## The Journey

### Finding Paul

By Donor Mother Cindy Harris

Our son Paul died in September 2006 after a single-car accident followed by a weeklong struggle. He became an organ, eye, and tissue donor, helping 69 people. Family and friends helped us during those sad, sad times.

The air of grief that permeated our lives was as heavy as a dense fog, the kind we couldn't see through. I knew there

were things that needed to be taken care of, but I just couldn't bear to navigate the thick soupy fog of sadness and grief.

Family and friends went back to their homes and lives. I felt a tremendous need to "find" Paul...bits, and pieces that would bring him back to us. We went through his closet, laundry, and soccer bag. We found dirty T-shirts that still held his smell, the scent of his Axe cologne and deodorant. We put them in Ziploc bags hoping to keep that smell. It broke my heart.

I went through a drawer, athletic bag, toiletries, clothes and stopped when I cried. I could go back another day and face this daunting task. I soon realized there was no rush! No timeline! No one could tell me I "needed" to clean. These tasks could be done in my time. The fog started to lift slightly. I still couldn't see the edge of grief and sadness, but I came to realize that the sun still shone beyond the dense, gray, cold, damp fog, and might shine again for us.

One afternoon while napping in Paul's bed, I had a vivid dream. I saw beautiful mural paintings on the walls, paintings of Paul, the ocean, his sisters, and friends, bodyboarding, playing, happy and free. The skies were blue, and we were happy. I woke up and knew what we had to do! We would make a tribute room, where our grandkids could spend the night, laughing, talking, playing, and reading stories. I hoped it would capture his essence, joy, and that all who visited and stayed there would feel that love.

My husband and Paul's father, Chuck, found the name of a mural artist who had a heart for our ideas. She painted five canvases inspired by our photos: Paul and his sisters, Hillary and Emily when they were young, Paul and his friends at the beach, Paul bodyboarding. They were attached like wallpaper to the walls. We painted and brought in beds and chairs, his antique desk, and his door of surfing stickers. My dream has come to fruition in this happy place. Our grandchildren have slept, played, read, talked about every subject under the sun, and most importantly, brought new life to this room where Paul grew up.

During the years we have given other precious belongings to family members and friends. Each "gift" was specially meant for the person who received it, which would make Paul happy.

The "cleaning" continues. Fifteen years after Paul's death, there are still patches of fog. I struggle with decisions about what to do with his precious belongings. The photos are in boxes, but not yet in albums, T-shirts, toys, and other of his things are still here.

We had beautiful t-shirt quilts made for each family. Some of his things are on display or in boxes. Someday, when I won't cry, I will donate or give more away. One of the most difficult things was parting with Paul's sports trophies. Last year during Covid, we took photos, said "goodbye", and let them go.

Each of the things we have given, donated, repurposed, or thrown away has been like losing a little piece of Paul. Whether called spring cleaning, sorting through mess or organizing, these are processes we all go through in life. Goodness knows it's hard enough when our children grow up and leave home! But for those who have lost loved ones, cutting through the dense fog of grief to face the task of cleaning out is overwhelming. We can do it! We can find the edge of the front, walk out of the fog, and face the sunshine once again.

