



Finding Hope  
*As Seasons Change*

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# *Introduction*

If you are reading this booklet, more than likely, you or someone you love is battling an illness. Your season of life may hold unknowns; your future may seem uncertain. While there are no precise parallels between Mother Nature and the seasons of life, there are similarities.

Like nature with its changing seasons, life has seasons that are calm and others that are stormy and unpredictable. There are happy moments and sad moments, and sometimes sad seasons come earlier than we would have ever expected. But even in our sadness, if we look carefully, there are tiny glimmers of hope and joy.

When my grandson Sam was very small, he often wrestled with how to describe what he was feeling about a situation. He would say, “Grandma, it’s kind of like a happy-sad”; life can be happy and sad all at once.

Sam’s words have stuck with me. Even while my husband, his grandpa, was very ill and bedfast, we experienced some “happy-sads,” times of laughter and times of tears.

If your “winter” of life is closing in and the final transition is near, look for hope as you turn the moments you have with your loved one into memories that will someday bring you comfort.



Before the birth of a baby, a mother’s body expands while her unborn child grows inside her. With eager anticipation, the mother awaits her baby’s entrance into the world. But even a joyous birth is not without pain, and complications can occur.

The transition from womb to earth is only one of the many transitions a child will experience. Just as the seasons of nature change, life also changes. As we grow older, with each sunrise and sunset, we realize how swiftly the years pass, years that are filled with laughter and tears.

When Sheldon Harnick penned “Sunrise, Sunset” from “Fiddler on the Roof,” his lyrics eloquently painted a picture of the life cycle.



# *Sunrise, Sunset*

Is this the little girl I carried?  
Is this the little boy at play?  
I don't remember growing older, when did they?  
When did she get to be a beauty?  
When did he grow to be so tall?  
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?  
Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly flow the days.  
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflow'rs  
Blossoming even as we gaze.  
Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years,  
One season following another laden with happiness and tears.

Now is the little boy a bridegroom,  
Now is the little girl a bride.  
Under the canopy I see them side by side.  
Place the gold ring around her finger;  
Share the sweet wine and break the glass.  
Soon the full circle will have come to pass.  
Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly flow the days.  
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflow'rs  
Blossoming even as we gaze.  
Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years,  
One season following another laden with happiness and tears.

*By Sheldon Harnick, New York City, New York*  
(used with permission)







*Ah, how wonderful is the advent  
of the Spring!  
The great annual miracle....*

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*



## *Springtime and Hope*

*In the springtime*, Mother Nature sometimes tip-toes in quietly; other times she arrives with fury and storms. But she is best remembered for warm breezes, spring rains, and flowers—buttercups, tulips, the sweet fragrance of hyacinths and lilacs.

Fruit trees burst into blossom, and the feeling of anticipation is in the air. Geese fly northward to rear their babies, and spring-green leaves timidly emerge. Baby animals are born, and birds busy themselves building nests. Spring has arrived, and honey bees *buzz* as they gather the sweet nectar from flowers.

*The springtime of life* is filled with hope and anticipation of new life. Babies are born. Children grow, learn, romp and play. Young men and women fall in love, and life is exciting. There are sunrises and sunsets, *and seasons change*.

*A baby is God's opinion  
that life should go on.*

*Carl Sandburg*





*I wonder if the snow loves the trees and field,  
that it kisses them so gently ... and perhaps it says,  
“Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.”*

*Lewis Carroll*



## *Winter and Rest*

*During the winter season, Mother Nature declares when it is time for winter to push autumn aside. The trees hold their naked branches upward as if in surrender, and ice and snow turn the earth into a winter wonderland. The cold, north wind causes those on foot to quicken their steps, and the days are shorter. The world is at rest.*

*In the winter of life, the pace slows, and illnesses and deaths of family members and friends challenge one's fortitude. There are more doctor visits and physical pain. But winter is not all bad. It is a time of rest and reflection on life and relationships, a time to revisit the past through memories. There are sunrises and sunsets, and seasons change.*

*How do I love thee,  
let me count the ways ....  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning*





## *Richard's Season*

“There are seasons of life, and we need to recognize that,” my brother-in-law Richard would say, referring to his “season.” We knew he was referring to his increasing physical deterioration due to cerebella ataxia.

A part of Richard’s brain was slowly shrinking, making it more difficult for him to get around independently. He had to give up gardening, then mowing, and last cooking. He liked to “tootle” around in the kitchen, preparing supper for my sister Joy, even after he had to use a cane and walker to help him walk.

And as months and years passed by, we could tell that life was getting more difficult for him, and we would hear him mention “his season” of life. He *knew* what was ahead while we denied that it was happening—we did not want to face the fact that we might lose him.

Richard’s final season came; Richard died three years ago. He was the patriarch of our family, and we still miss him.

# *A Change of Address*

In our earlier years, many of the changes are joyful ones—births, graduations, marriages, and successes. But as we grow older, we face the difficult ones—illnesses and deaths of those we love—transitions that we would not have chosen. But there can be meaningful memories along with the sadness in our older years.

Rabindranath Tagor once said, “Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because dawn has come.” While death can bring relief from pain and a new beginning to someone who is ill, it can bring sadness to those who are left behind.

Speaking of death, Rev. Billy Graham said that when he took his last breath here, he would be taking his first in heaven. Another person compared dying to moving to a new residence with a new address, a new location, and Sir Walter Scott compared death to “the final awakening.”

Henry Scott Holland, University of Oxford, wrote:

*“Death is nothing at all. It does not count. I have only slipped away into the next room. Nothing has changed. Everything remains exactly as it was. I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged ... There is absolute and unbroken continuity ... Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am but waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner. All is well.”*



# *Two Hands to Hold*

I don't remember the lady's name or where she was from, but I have never forgotten what she taught me. It was a morning in 1982 when I was a student nurse in a hospital. My assignment was to prepare a lady for surgery.

As with any surgical procedure, there are several steps to get a patient ready for the Operating Room—hospital gown, little blue hat, nail polish off, vital signs taken, IV started, and paperwork.

After my hands-on nursing duties were completed, I turned my focus to how my patient was dealing with her situation. There were no friends or family members with her. But it was not until the OR staff arrived that I realized how terribly alone and frightened she must have felt.

She had a look of near-panic in her eyes. Perhaps she was afraid of the procedure or terrified of what the biopsy might reveal. Whatever the case, she was scared!

I helped move my patient onto the gurney for her ride to the OR. I took her hand and held it. As the gurney rolled along, I walked down the hall beside her. We reached the double doors of the OR, and that was as far as I could go. It was then that I saw her tears.

She looked at me and said, *"I need two hands to hold!"* I took both of her hands for a few seconds. But the OR staff needed to move on, so I had to let her go.

She was alone in a hospital with only an inexperienced student nurse, a stranger, to hold her hands. I felt like a poor substitute for a family member or friend, but I learned the importance of holding one's hand, literally or figuratively, when a person is facing a scary situation.

Touch can help alleviate stress, decrease pain, and lower blood pressure. It can communicate support which says *"I'll help share your load."*





# Your Loved One Needs

- ♥ To be kept comfortable. Someone who is terminal needs to be kept comfortable with their pain controlled. So pay attention to what he/she says as well what their body language is telling you. Discuss concerns with your hospice nurse or doctor.
- ♥ To have physical and emotional needs met and know they are loved.
- ♥ To be told the truth about their condition and to have hope for more time to live.
- ♥ To have their wishes respected and to die with dignity.
- ♥ To still have something to hope for even as their condition worsens.
- ♥ To finish their business matters and know that the ones left behind will be all right. *One morning, near the end of his life, my husband instructed me to “get a pad and pencil.” Then he had me write down 27 instructions about how to handle things around the house, for example, the bills, vehicles, etc. He was taking care of business!*
- ♥ To know their life mattered, to know they lived their life well.
- ♥ To know they will be remembered after they are gone. *Before my husband died, he told me, “You have to tell the story,” meaning the story of his life. Since the grandchildren were so young, he was afraid they would never know who he was.*



♥ To be touched even after they lose weight and look different due to their disease process. *Our little four-year-old granddaughter Audrey stood on a stepstool beside my husband's hospital bed and held his hand and talked to him; he seemed to love it. He would tell me "Stay close." In his last 3 weeks, I slept in a recliner very close to his hospital bed. He was content as long as I could touch his shoulder and remind him I was near.*

## *Life's Final Transition*

### ♥ WHAT TO EXPECT

Signs and symptoms that death is near are not always the same for everyone. Ultimately, every person will die in his/her own way at their own time. Some may suddenly be "gone," and others may decline slowly.

To the disappointment of loved ones, some who are ill sometimes slip away when a loved one or caregiver briefly leaves the room. Perhaps it is too hard for the patient to leave in the presence of their loved one.

Depending on a patient's diagnosis, they might have some unusual and rare symptoms such as grimacing or frothy sputum. And many develop noisy respirations, a "rattle," that can be alarming to family members.

This may be due to the fact the person can no longer swallow secretions properly. It does not usually seem to be troubling to the patient, but it may be for the family. Talking, reminiscing, or playing soft background music can help distract from noisy respirations.

Many deaths are very peaceful as they sleep their way into heaven. No matter what kind of death a patient experiences, many family members or friends still say they are glad they were there with their loved one.

Hearing is believed to be the last sense to go, so don't hesitate to say "*Forgive me,*" "*Thank you,*" "*I love you,*" or "*I will be all right*" to your loved one. Also, tell your loved one "*It is okay for*

you to go” - it will make their final transition to the next world easier.

Increasing fatigue is a sign that an illness may be progressing. The patient may need longer and more frequent naps and more rest at night. Their energy may be limited so it is important to prioritize activities that need to be done and squeeze in some activities the patient enjoys.

During this time, the patient will probably have a decreased appetite. Try to not be alarmed, and do not force a person to eat. It is our natural tendency to want to nurture those we love by feeding them. But not wanting to eat is a natural part of the body shutting down, and food may make them feel badly. Follow your loved one’s lead.

Your loved one will choose to drink less water because they are not thirsty. This results in a decrease of urinary output and urine that is very dark and sometimes bloody. The body is getting ready for its final transition.

If pain increases, rely on your physician or hospice personnel for advice about how to control pain as well as nausea. If a person becomes unable to swallow pills, liquid drops of medications can be given under the tongue.

When the patient can no longer tolerate liquid drops, pharmacists can make pain and anti-nausea medications in gel forms that can be rubbed onto the skin. *(Follow the directions carefully and wear gloves so you do not absorb the medications.)*

## ♥ TWO OR THREE WEEKS

When death is near, a person may talk about wanting to “go home” even if he/she is in his/her own home. This is figurative language for wanting to make their final transition to their heavenly home. They may see and talk to people from their earlier life that others cannot see. Fatigue may increase so they sleep more, and their skin may become cool to the touch.

## ♥ AS DEATH APPROACHES

Shortly before death, the person may have a sudden burst of energy and ask to get out of bed or eat even though they have been unable to do so for a while. They may talk and visit with family

members, leaving false hope that they are much better. Some believe this burst of energy may help them toward their journey to their final “home.”

### ♥ BLOOD PRESSURE

Blood pressure may begin to slowly decrease.

### ♥ EYES

Eyes may appear glassy, half mast, or fixed.

### ♥ PULSE

As blood pressure decreases, the heart rate may increase as the heart tries to pump faster in order to keep the blood pressure up.

### ♥ RESPIRATIONS

Respirations/breaths may increase for a while, but then gradually become irregular with pauses that last a few seconds up to a minute. Oxygen levels may lower.

### ♥ SKIN

Lips and nail beds, knees and elbows may take on a dusky, blue color. Legs may become blotchy with a purplish color called mottling.

### ♥ TEMPERATURE

The body’s ability to control temperature may not be working properly, and the patient may develop a fever or become very cold.

### ♥ URINARY OUTPUT

Urine output may decrease to nothing.

### ♥ LAST MINUTES

Breathing may change significantly, from very slow with pauses that lengthen, to decreases in the rate, to breaths like a fish out of water.

### ♥ DEATH

Absolutely no responses. There is an absence of a heartbeat/pulse. No respirations and eyes may be fixed.



## *Spring Will Come Again*

The first spring after my husband's death, I paid little attention to the warm breezes of spring. My heart was just too sad, and springtime slipped by almost unnoticed. Even though the fruit trees were blossoming and leaves were emerging on trees, it was difficult to find joy without my husband.

But by my second springtime alone, my heart was beginning to heal. My life was busy, and I felt like laughing again. I was taking a college class and working full-time. Writing my thoughts and walking after work was therapeutic for me, and it was fun to watch my grandchildren thriving and growing.

I planted two weeping mulberry trees and a red blaze maple in my husband's memory. I still missed him terribly, but I felt confident that I could have a future, and I knew I would always have my memories.

Just as flowers bloom in a desert after a spring rain, I realized that my life must go on. There were hints of springtime in the air.



## *The Winter of Grief*

Death follows life, just as surely as winter follows fall,  
draining color from our days and passion from our nights.

Life once green and lush with grass and dancing flowers  
turns grey devoid of laughter and song.

When death comes to visit, silence follows,  
Time breathes slowly ... a lonely echo in an empty home,  
We who grieve enter darkness,  
as the great black bear enters its den to dream  
While snow falls softly on empty fields, we remember and weep.

Then one day after several moons have come and gone,  
the bear emerges sniffing colors in the air.  
She takes a drink of fresh spring water,  
and paws the ground for tender greens.

We too slowly emerge from our cocoon of grief,  
smell the lilacs and feel the grass beneath our feet.  
For life follows death just as surely as spring follows winter  
returning color to our days and hope to our hearts.

*by Stephanie Stevens, Bovey, Minnesota  
(used with permission)*



## *Gone From My Sight*

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship, at my side,  
spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts  
for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength.  
I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck  
of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle  
with each other.



Then someone at my side says, “There, she is gone!”

*Gone where?*

Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast,  
hull and spar as she was when she left my side.

And, she is just as able to bear her load of living freight  
to her destined port.

Her diminished size is in me—not in her.

And, just at the moment when someone at my side says,  
“There, she is gone!”

there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices  
ready to take up the glad shout: “Here she comes!”

And that is dying.

*Henry Van Dyke*

# Finding Hope *As Seasons Change*

Mother Nature ushers in the seasons, sometimes gently and other times with fury—we can sense when changes are coming. Like nature, the seasons of life are never static. Just as dark clouds warn us a storm is near, signs and symptoms gently let us know when death, life's final transition, is approaching.

*Finding Hope as Seasons Change* is about what to expect before our loved ones go "Home." It is about using every remaining moment to make meaningful memories and reach for hope even during the final season of life.

This booklet is appropriate for use by hospices, churches, or anyone who works with patients with a terminal illness.

*"In three words I can sum up everything  
I've learned about life: it goes on."*

*Robert Frost*

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