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## A BUTTERFLY ON LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

by Dave Roberts

*Dave Roberts, Adjunct professor of psychology-Utica College. Past HuffPost contributor. Writes primarily about grief, loss, and addiction [www.bootsyandangel.com](http://www.bootsyandangel.com)*

*"Develop your senses - especially learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else."  
- Leonardo da Vinci*

### A Mountain Wedding

I recently returned from a week-long trip to Golden, Colorado. My wife Cheri and I got a chance to relax and explore some attractions in and around the Golden area. Our primary purpose for being there however was to witness our youngest son Matt marry the love of his life Jodi, in a beautiful, intimate venue on Lookout Mountain. It was a beautiful ceremony with both sides of our families being well represented. There was one conspicuous physical absence on our side of the family, however...my daughter Jeannine.

### Gone But Always Near

Jeannine died on March 1, 2003 at the age of 18, due to a rare form of cancer. Since her death, I have received numerous signs of after-death communications from her.



Signs reveal to us that our loved ones are ok, that they desire to have an ongoing relationship with us, and that we will see them again in the afterlife.

I have discovered through conversation with others and my own experiences that the signs we receive from our loved ones are usually a product of what is happening with us or around us in the present moment. As our family was preparing to celebrate Matt and Jodi's nuptials, I expected that Jeannine would make her presence known before and after the wedding. In fact, I invited her spirit to accompany me on the trip.

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NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,  
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

An intimidating 30-foot pole occupied a notable spot on the challenge-learning course. The facilitator explained that we were to climb the pole. The pole was manufactured with heavy metal staples that created a “ladder”-effect. Once we reached the top of the pole, we were supposed to mount the disk that was attached at the top, stand, turn to face the group—and, then, jump!

Why would I climb a pole if I didn't have to? The truth was—I didn't want to. But this pole stood in my way—representing a barrier between God and me, between the world and me; and perhaps, between me and the rest of my life. It was a choice between defeat or victory—much like the struggle of grief.

Early in my journey through grief, I completed a class that encouraged individuals to move from their comfort zone to their stretch zone. The lessons we learned in the classroom were now going to be applied experientially. The end-result reinforced a concept that could create a model for life. It was labeled “challenge by choice.”

We would wear harnesses. Trained course technicians would manage the belay lines attached to the harnesses that would control our suspension. Our fellow team members were responsible for operating the belay ropes that would

## VICTORY OVER THE POLE: LEARNING TO LET GO

lower us safely to the ground after our jump. Our instructor reminded us; we could stop at any point. The purpose of the exercise was to challenge us to take just one step more than we felt comfortable taking in a normal situation. For whatever reason, I was willing to give it a try knowing I could stop at any point.

For me, climbing the 30-foot pole was the easy part; it took only seconds. But as I approached the top, I saw the disk mounted there was only the size of a pizza pan. Surely this was a mistake. My feet were bigger than that!

Just two more steps. My hands reached for the disk above me. Reality took on a new dimension. My leaden feet felt glued to the staples; I couldn't seem to lift them. My team members yelled encouragement. “You can do it!”

I cautiously tested the disk. My instinct urged me to kneel, and then rise to a standing position. But the platform was too small. My coach called to me, “Don't kneel. You have to stand.”

Fear set in. How could I stand? There was nothing there to support me!

Minutes passed. My coach yelled out again, “You've got to let go in order to stand.”

“Let go?” I yelled back. “You want me to let go!”

I suddenly realized that this moment in time was no longer about “challenge by choice.” It was something far greater—a chance to rise above my fears. If I could do this, then just maybe I could



overcome the other obstacles related to my grief that were taunting me.

My mind raced thinking about those obstacles: insecurity, uncertainty, and the great unknown that lay in front of me after the death of my son, Chad. My faith was bruised. I wanted to cry out to God, “You've given me this mountain. Now teach me how to climb it! Show me what to do!”

I looked down. My support system was in place. My team members cheered, urging me to take the next step. The chorus of encouragement rang in my ears. I heard their voices, but I felt alone, frightened, and frankly...“chicken!”

I could turn back now. I already went one step beyond what was comfortable for me. I didn't have to prove more than that. It was my choice.

In that moment of indecision, a sudden wash of supreme peace swept over me, surrounding me with a loving embrace. I felt as though my son reached out, hugged me, and said, “You know you can do it, Mom.” The feeling lasted only a moment, but it was long enough to give me the courage I needed.

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## VICTORY OVER THE POLE: LEARNING TO LET GO

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Fearfully, awkwardly, I reached my arms out into empty space. I felt as though someone literally lifted me up. My heavy legs were lighter and I felt secure. The pole swayed back and forth; and my breath caught in my throat. I was standing! Could I jump? Could I let go?

I stood as high as the treetops. I surveyed the golden colors of autumn around me, awe-struck by infinite beauty. My heart swelled with euphoria—a wonderful sense of accomplishment (just getting this far!). Surely God was there with me—and so was Chad!

The pole continued to wobble as I turned 180 degrees to position myself to jump. Oblivious to the echo of my team member's cheers below, now I was only aware of God, my son, myself—and my choice. I reached for the sky—and jumped. Y-E-S!

Words cannot describe my sense of elation in that brief moment of flight before my body was caught in the security of the belay lines, and my

teammates lowered me gently to the ground. I'll never forget it.

Looking back, I realize now that the climb and jump were much easier than the challenge I'd been facing every day since Chad died. Climbing upward through my grief was much more grueling than climbing the thirty-foot pole. Some days, lifting my legs to walk forward was the biggest accomplishment of the day. Moving, just moving was an accomplishment! No plan.

No destination. Oblivious to the world. Carrying out the tasks that we as survivors carry out because we have to, with very few people cheering us on.

Climbing the pole was nothing compared to what I knew now was my primary task: finding the courage to live again. My position on top of that pole

paralleled the personal crisis in my life. To move forward, I needed to overcome my fears. I needed to face my predicament, make a decision, and let go of my fear. Let go of my grief.

Letting go doesn't mean forgetting; it means cherishing the memories.

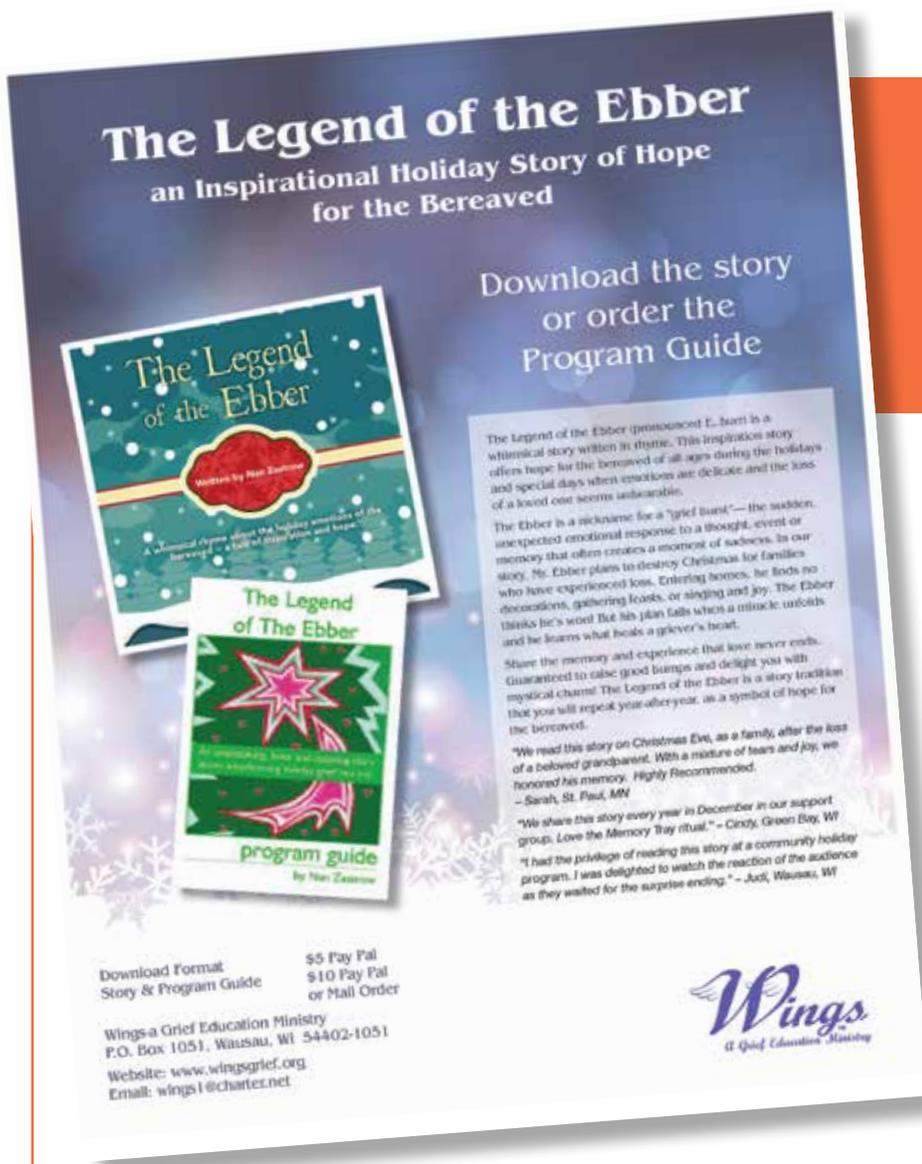
It doesn't mean ignoring the past; it means accepting the challenge of living in the present. Letting go is a choice that can lead to peace and purpose. I made that choice on top of that pole one fall day. Victory over the pole! Victory over the sting of death!



### *How to Connect with Wings:*

- Email: [nanwings1@gmail.com](mailto:nanwings1@gmail.com) • Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401 • Ph: 715.845.4159
- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website [wingsgrief.org](http://wingsgrief.org)
- Subscribe to the free online Eletter sent quarterly.
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at [www.centeringcorp.com](http://www.centeringcorp.com)
- Visit Wings on Facebook





## ARTICLES FROM THE ARCHIVES...

FIND NAN'S ARTICLES ON THE WEBSITE [wingsgrief.org](http://wingsgrief.org)

The holidays require emotional support. Since 1997, the Wings organization has provided community programs to help the bereaved. Here are some articles that focus on holiday grief.

- HOW TO BECOME A DREAM CATCHER AFTER LOSS
- WHAT'S UNDER YOUR TREE? HEALING GIFTS OR PANDORA'S BOX
- HOW A FORTUNE COOKIE HEALS GRIEF  
(There is also a book by this name that describes 12 Things that Heal Grief)
- PAINT YOUR HOLIDAY THE WAY YOU WANT IT TO BE

Nan also has developed Program Guides that you can use to present your own program to a Grief group or for a community grief program.

## A BUTTERFLY ON LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

*Continued from page 1*



### **A Serendipitous Receipt**

We began the first leg of our journey to Colorado at the Albany International Airport. After we went through airport security, I ordered a meal from McDonald's and was immediately drawn to the number on the receipt. The number 301 reflected the month and day of Jeannine's death, a definite indication that she heard my invite to join us in Colorado for her brother's wedding.

On July 3rd, me, my wife and her sister took another trip to Lookout Mountain to explore the Buffalo Bill Museum and his gravesite. I lingered for a bit by Buffalo Bill's grave; my wife and her sister were walking towards the museum. I noticed a butterfly flying in a circular route, several times around Buffalo Bill's grave. A couple of times she flew quite near to me. She eventually decided to take a brief respite before taking flight once again.

My first experience with signs that I can recall, after Jeannine's death was during the summer of 2003. I was walking around my neighborhood and discovered that a butterfly was following me and hovering over me for a good portion of my walk. At the time this butterfly appeared, Jeannine was prominent in my thoughts. As I was then, I was convinced that the butterfly I saw on Lookout Mountain was a sign sent by my daughter. (The keynote of the butterfly, according to Ted Andrews is transmutation and the dance of joy.) The butterfly reminds us that shapeshifting our perspective is necessary after loss, and that the experience of joy after loss is also possible.

I wish to conclude this piece with the benefits that I have discovered by incorporating signs into my personal grief path and some miscellaneous observations. Before I begin, I would encourage you to become familiar with the types of after-death communications that occur. Two great resources for increasing your technical knowledge in this area are: : Visions of the Bereaved, by Kay Witmer Woods and Hello From Heaven by Bill and Judy Guggenheim.

### **Observations**

- The perception of signs is a subjective process, unique to each individual. That process is driven by evidence of the heart and must be honored by those who are privileged to bear witness to it.
- We don't have to wait for our loved ones to give us a sign of their presence. We can create a sacred space where we can communicate with our loved ones

anytime. Jeannine and I shared a love of music. When I am yearning for her presence, I will listen to some music that we both enjoyed while keeping her in my thoughts. Doing this always brings me peace.

### **Benefits**

- I am able to see Jeannine's death as a rebirth into a new existence and that we share a relationship that is pure, ongoing and constantly evolving.
- Openly sharing my experience with signs has allowed me to attract people who have committed to ongoing awareness and thinking multidimensionally. They inspire me, which in turn motivates me to inspire others.
- Perhaps the greatest teaching that I have discovered through my experience with signs is that not only do we eventually learn to live without our children's physical presence, but that we eventually learn to love with their eternal presence.



## Final Harvest

Author unknown

He was bound to the land from  
The day of his birth  
His roots anchored deep in the fertile earth  
Nurtured, sustained, by the soil he grew  
And his life, like his furrows,  
Ran straight and true.  
In faith, each spring, he planted the seeds  
In hope, to reap his family's needs  
With patience, he waited for  
The harvest to come  
To gather the fruits of his labor home.  
Ever turning seasons, the years sped past  
Till the final harvest came at last  
Then claimed anew by beloved sod  
He was gathered home to be with God.



## On the Lighter Side...

### GOTTCHA

When I was younger, I hated going to weddings. After the wedding, and during the reception, my aunts and grandmotherly types would come up to me and poke me in the ribs, cackling, "You're next." Finally they stopped, when I started doing the same to them at funerals!

### OOPS

At the skydiving training course, the instructor took time to answer some of the "first time skydiver questions. One guy asked: "If the chute doesn't open, and the reserve doesn't open, how long do we have till we hit the ground?" The instructor paused and said, "The rest of your life."



## I Heard Your Voice In The Wind Today

– *Unknown*

I heard your voice in the wind today  
and I turned to see your face;  
The warmth of the wind caressed me  
as I stood silently in place.

I felt your touch in the sun today  
as its warmth filled the sky;  
I closed my eyes for your embrace  
and my spirit soared high.

I saw your eyes in the window pane  
as I watched the falling rain;  
It seemed as each raindrop fell  
it quietly said your name.

I held you close in my heart today  
it made me feel complete;  
You may have died...but you are not gone  
you will always be a part of me.

As long as the sun shines...  
the wind blows...  
the rain falls...  
You will live on inside me forever  
for that is all my heart knows.

*Would you like to share  
your story or poem?*

If you would like to submit a short story, poem, or article, we welcome it. The material does not need to be original, but if it isn't, please include the author or credits that can be printed along with the material. We are looking for articles that inspire the bereaved, teach, and offer hope which is the focus of our ministry of Wings-a Grief Education Ministry. Poems or material may be submitted In memory of your special loved one.



***Notification  
to our  
Facebook  
Friends***

**Wings-a Grief Education Ministry** now has a public group page on Facebook which is primarily for posting the quarterly ELetter, Education Events, Support Group dates, and public speaking events. We recommend you join this group for appropriate announcements to stay in touch. Additionally, our regular Wings-a Grief Education FB page continues.

Look for Wings-Grief Education Events & Eletter on Facebook—and join the group!

# Reader Feedback



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

### MAKING MEMORIES LAST...

After a loved one dies, we find many personal belongings that create positive memories. These become treasures to us. Items might include jewelry, clothing, parts from a hobby or sport etc. Some of us find positive ways to repurpose an item and use it daily or for special occasions or holidays. Each time we use it we feel a loving connection to the person who died. Memories like these last for however long we want them to last.

Example of a repurposed item: Our son Chad loved fishing. We used the fishing line in his tackle box to string the ornaments on our Christmas tree. After all these years, it still works.

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I have several, but my favorite is Jon's high school class ring. I wear it everyday.

In addition, I used his favorite T-shirts to make a queen-sized quilt for myself, while pillows were made and gifted to his grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

5 years after Jon's death, my first grandson was born, and I used a dress shirt to make a teddy bear.

Tara  
Antigo, WI

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I purchased a decorative box with a magnetic closure from JoAnn Fabrics. I am not repurposing but am keeping some of my husband's things in my 'Memory Box'. I have his watch, a T-shirt that he had worn and still carries his smell, a recording of his voice.

I have some pictures, a baseball cap, his gloves, a sample of his handwriting, his hunting license and love notes and cards he gave me. I can take my memory box out whenever I want and relive my memories of my dear sweet husband.

Also, I requested a grapevine wreath with fresh flowers to be placed around my husband's urn for the funeral service. I kept the wreath and have replaced the fresh flowers with silk using the same colors as were in the wreath. Additionally, I took all the pictures of him from the

display boards used at the visitation and arranged and framed them using poster frames that I purchased.

I took all the pictures of my husband that I had up at the visitation and made two collages that I framed with poster frames.

Linda,  
Merrill, WI

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After we finally came to terms with our 26 year-old daughter's death in a car accident in 2004, the task of "going through" her possessions remaining in her room became our lot. Londa was a much-loved and sought after babysitter for a number of neighboring families, often being asked to remain overnight, if the parents had to be away. As we gathered her treasures, the idea came to us to give a special one to each of the children whom she watched. One by one we asked the children to come into our home so we could make this occasion a memorable and personal one for them too. Yes, there were lots of tears, but those moments were very precious to the givers and the receivers alike. It is just like Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Gary,  
Bracebridge, ON, Canada

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I turned some of my husband's shirts into sofa pillows for each of our children and grandchildren. I gave them as Christmas gifts last year.

Diane,  
Wausau, WI

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My son, John, loved his grandmother's pies. He asked for one of her pie pans to have it engraved and decorate it to hang on his wall in her memory. He lives in DePere, WI.

Rhonda,  
Stevens Point, WI

---

We did several things: For Laura's husband Ray – we still have all his electrical tools in his 2 tool bags. Soon Vincent (5 years old now) will be using them as he is a 'gear guy'. He loves gadgets!

For my Mom (whom died 10 months earlier), I'm passing on the tradition of having rugs made out of the clothes (polyester and otherwise) that were in her closet. She had this done for her mom's clothes and gave us each something. They are soft and squishy, not the braided kind.

Rebecca,  
Merrill, WI

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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A family friend took one of my dad's favorite shirts to make a teddy bear for my mom.

Then my cousin and I have a favorite shirt that we loved seeing dad in and made a pillow for my siblings. It brings so much pride and great memories. One of my sisters told me once she put a few drops of dad's aftershave on her pillow, when she is having a hard time.

Kim,  
Idaho

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I have several articles of clothing I wear, and some jewelry I wear. I also acquired a large amount of their possessions which, after 10 years, I can release and give away.

Reese,  
Wausau, WI

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We have taken some of my daughter's and mother's jewelry/earrings/pins and decorated small lamp shades--I have a fabric type shade and its decorated with their treasures poked thru or attached. This brightens our days/evenings in various ways.

Gale,  
Rothschild, WI

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I have my wife Karen's wedding ring and mine nested together on a chain she gave me. I wear it around my neck 24/7. If I need to feel close to her, I just hold the rings and think good thoughts about Karen. It keeps me close to Karen.

David,  
Wausau WI

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My mother in law has an old boot of my late husband's that she plants chicks and hens in outside in her memorial garden for him. I saw it in Pennsylvania a few weeks ago and was so happy she still had it, as it's totally falling apart from weather. But it's so meaningful to both of us. I wish his feet were still in the boots instead.

Louise,  
Fond du Lac WI

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My husband, Bob, loved collecting keys and padlocks. Whenever we stopped at a garage sale or flea market, he was always looking for keys. I made a shadow box with items from his collection that's become a very special family treasure.

Diane,  
Wausau, WI

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## *Be Good to Yourself*

### SELF CARE TIP

#### Special Items Repurposed

The holiday season reminds us of Christmases past and good times spent with someone who has now died. We honor the person in many ways such as by telling stories, using favorite recipes, and looking at pictures. These are traditional ways to "remember."

But more people are becoming creative and repurposing former belongings including clothing, linens, furniture, and jewelry. It's a satisfying way to keep a loved one in our thoughts with these special reminders. These items allow us to stay connected to our loved one without their physical presence. These may also be "linking objects" or tangible items that bring back fond memories. They are symbolic and have emotional attachments. A little imagination can preserve the memory of a loved one for years to come.



# On Santa's Team

– Author Unknown –

I remember my first Christmas adventure with Grandma. I was just a kid. I remember tearing across town on my bike to visit her on the day my big sister dropped the bomb: "There is no Santa Claus," she jeered. "Even dummies know that!"

My Grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. I knew Grandma always told the truth, and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her "world-famous" cinnamon buns. I knew they were world-famous, because Grandma said so. It had to be true.

Grandma was home, and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me. "No Santa Claus?" she snorted.... "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumor has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad!! Now, put on your coat, and let's go."

"Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my Second World-famous cinnamon bun. "Where" turned out to be Kerby's General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything.

As we walked through its doors, Grandma handed me ten dollars. That was a bundle in those days. "Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car." Then she turned and walked out of Kerby's.

I was only eight years old. I'd often gone shopping with my mother, but never had I shopped for anything all by myself. The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few moments I just stood there, confused, clutching that ten-dollar bill, wondering what to buy, and who on earth to buy it for. I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbors, the kids at school, the people who went to my church. I was just about thought out, when I suddenly thought of Bobby Decker. He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair, and he sat right behind me in Mrs. Pollock's grade-two class.

Bobby Decker didn't have a coat. I knew that because he never went out to recess during the winter. His mother always wrote a note, telling the teacher that he had a cough, but all we kids knew that Bobby Decker didn't have a cough; he didn't have a good coat. I fingered the ten-dollar bill with growing excitement. I would buy Bobby Decker a coat! I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm, and he would like that.

"Is this a Christmas present for someone?" the lady behind the counter asked kindly, as I laid my ten dollars down.

"Yes, ma'am," I replied shyly. "It's for Bobby." The nice lady smiled at me, as I told her about how Bobby really needed a good winter coat. I didn't get any change, but she put the coat in a bag, smiled again, and wished me a Merry Christmas.

That evening, Grandma helped me wrap the coat (a little tag fell out of the coat, and Grandma tucked it in her Bible) in Christmas paper and ribbons and wrote, "To Bobby, From Santa Claus" on it. Grandma said that Santa always insisted on secrecy. Then she drove me over to Bobby Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially, one of Santa's helpers.

Grandma parked down the street from Bobby's house, and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk. Then Grandma gave me a nudge. "All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "get going." I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw the present down on his step, pounded his door and flew back to the safety of the bushes and Grandma. Together we waited breathlessly in the darkness for the front door to open. Finally, it did, and there stood Bobby.

Fifty years haven't dimmed the thrill of those moments spent shivering, beside my Grandma, in Bobby Decker's bushes. That night, I realized that those awful rumors about Santa Claus were just what Grandma said they were, ridiculous. Santa was alive and well, and we were on his team.

# When the Holidays Hurt

*Two opportunities for helping you through the holidays*

## Lean on Me

### A Concert with the Living River Quartet

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain and sorrow. These challenges often steal the spirit of the holiday season.



Our Concert provides an opportunity to “Lean on Me” and

find support, camaraderie, and love from others who gather together for this traditional event. This concert is a safe place to feel your emotions through the gift of music. The Living River Quartet will share goodwill in spiritual song, feel-good music, and traditional Christmas songs. We invite you to hear music that can soothe the hurt and lyrics that say the words you need to hear.

**Saturday, December 1, 2018**  
**4:00 – 6:00 pm**

Plaza Hotel and Suites  
201 N. 17th Ave,  
Wausau, WI

**Public is welcome. Free will donation.**  
**Registration not required.**

### For information, contact:

**Nan Zastrow**

Wings – A Grief Education Ministry at 715.845.4159

**Amy Kitsemel**

Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services at 715.847.2703

## All I Want for Christmas is the Right to Grieve

Do you ever wish that people would honor your right to grieve? Maybe family and friends just don't understand how difficult the holidays will be for you. If the thought of the holidays creates tension and pain or you aren't quite sure how you will get through the weeks ahead, we've got some ideas for you.



Come join us for our When the Holidays Hurt program. Learn how you can satisfy expectations without compromising your feelings. The “Good News” is that almost every bereaved person is capable of finding joy—even when the holidays hurt!

**Tuesday, December 4, 2018**  
**6:00 – 7:30 pm**

Aspirus Wausau Hospital  
Medallion Room  
Wausau, WI



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