

# COMFORT CARE

Passion for excellence. Compassion for people.

SPRING/SUMMER  
2024

For information  
or to make a gift to  
the Aspirus Health  
Foundation in support  
of hospice care,  
call 715-847-2470.

## TRANSFORMING PERSPECTIVES: HOW ONE FAMILY DISCOVERED THE BEAUTY OF HOSPICE CARE

When his family got the call from the Aspirus Hospice House that a room was available for his father, Todd Nicklaus recalls they experienced an immediate sense of relief knowing they would get the care his dad needed, followed swiftly by a profound sense of sadness.

“We found ourselves thinking that we’re going to move Dad to hospice, and this is kind of it,” remembers Todd. “It was hard for all of us, including Dad. He said he felt like he’d been defeated.”

Todd recalls the drive to the Hospice House, noting that once settled, his dad asked the family to leave so he could process.

“We felt terrible, like we were failing him by not being able to care for him. We left wondering if we’d made the right decision. The next day, though, it was like someone had flipped a light switch. Dad was doing so well, and he said ‘this is my home. I love it here.’ We absolutely had made the right decision.”

Todd’s father, Ron Nicklaus, had originally started hospice care at home. Treatments for early-stage pancreatic cancer about six years ago had caused damage to other organs, eventually leading to sclerosis of the liver. The family engaged hospice in summer 2023. Not long after, though, Ron’s symptoms progressed and the risks of keeping him at home were too high due to his propensity to fall, especially at night. Still, the decision to move to the Hospice House was very emotional.

***“Our thought process initially was that Dad was going there to die.***



Ron Nicklaus

***I think that’s unfortunately how a lot of people think of hospice. But what we hadn’t expected was how amazing, caring, and welcoming everyone was. The reality of the Hospice House was that it was an opportunity for Dad to continue to live, with dignity and care, in an environment that was literally like his own home.”***

Todd says the caregivers at the Hospice House became like family, joking around with Ron and showing a genuine interest in learning about him and his life. He recalls the family’s dogs visited and became pseudo therapy dogs for other patients as well.

“When the time came, it was the most amazing way for Dad to pass. The caregivers were wonderful in that moment. He just fell asleep and moved on to the next life.”

Following Ron’s passing in August, the family shared in a memorial tribute that the Aspirus Hospice House was a gift, and that the care Ron received was tender, gentle, and joyful.

*(continued on inside page)*

*(continued from front page)*

*“Most people don’t embrace hospice soon enough,” believes Todd. “There’s a fear of death and an unwillingness to talk about it. The biggest thing my family and I learned through this journey is that hospice isn’t about dying. It wasn’t a problem to be solved. The people who cared for Dad at the Hospice*

*House helped him and all of us understand and embrace that. They helped Dad live.”*

They also supported our family and helped us focus on what was most important – being there for each other. And the beautiful support didn’t end with Dad’s passing. The resources for our family continue to be there because hospice is also about the living. We are so thankful.”

## **HOSPICE MUSIC THERAPY PROVIDES COMFORT AND MEMORIES**

Through hospice, we strive to help patients experience the best quality of life possible. This takes an entire team, including doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, and volunteers. At Aspirus, one way we enhance the patient experience is through music therapy, a program we offer through Aspirus Comfort Care & Hospice Services, thanks to generous donor support.

The benefits of music therapy in a person’s overall health and wellness are well documented and have been proven to promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, enhance feelings and memory, improve communication, promote physical rehabilitation, and more. In hospice, music therapy helps enhance spiritual, emotional, physical and social well-being, while decreasing pain, depression, anxiety and lethargy.

*“Music therapy is such a powerful tool in hospice,” says Kristen Wickman, MT-BC, a music therapist with Aspirus Comfort Care & Hospice Services. “I have seen patients with memory loss who were primarily non-verbal sing along to songs from their childhood. I helped a patient record himself singing a song that he wanted shared at his funeral. I get the privilege of helping patients reminisce about their favorite memories, relax and fall asleep while listening to their favorite songs, dance, play instruments or musical games, and so much more.”*

She notes that music therapy benefits the patient’s family, as well.

“Loved ones can also listen or engage in music and exchange memories. Through music therapy we offer a variety of legacy projects, including fingerprint jewelry, song recordings, or personalized playlists. It’s something special we can offer to remember the ones we love. I am so thankful that I can be part of the process to create those joyful memories for patients and families.”



*Aspirus Health music therapist Kristen Wickman spends time with hospice patient*

# LIFE AFTER LOSS

By Troy LaRue, Mdiv, Bereavement Coordinator,  
Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services

Grief is a wound for which there is no cure or easy solution. It is not a disease where its symptoms can be managed and reduced. This is because grief is the appropriate response to the loss of someone we have loved. Grief and mourning are how we cope with the death of loved ones. Weeping, sleeping, and remembering are how we move through grief.

It is unfortunate that so many do not understand this and see grief as a thing one must “get over” in order to be productive once again, as if grief was something like tax season that ends when you submit your taxes and which you don’t think about until next year. Grief fundamentally changes us. It changes how we relate to our family and friends. It changes our holidays and celebrations. It changes our daily routine. Grief changes

our future and the direction of our lives. Grief also changes how we understand ourselves. We take on new labels like widow and widower. Grief is existential in this way.

The simple change in our lives is, however, that a person whom we loved is no longer with us. No longer will we have the simple blessing of their conversation and presence. We do not see them through the window digging in the garden. They no longer sit at the table with us to share a meal or a cup of coffee. This is the hardest change to bear.

Grief is the most natural and appropriate reaction to loss in our lives. Allow yourself to weep and remember. If people are impatient with your grief, attribute their impatience to naivety and continue to grieve in the way that feels important to you, for it is through grieving that we manage the deep pain of our loss.



## JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2024

Registration is required for virtual groups and for in-person groups.  
Contact Nan to receive a zoom link or to save your in-person spot.



An open session  
for sharing your  
grief experiences

**Tuesdays: JUNE 11, 18, 25**

**(3 Weekly Sessions) IN-PERSON**

**THE LANDING -YMCA Wausau**

**3:00 to 4:00 p.m. 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.**

Registration is required. Class size is limited.

Facilitator: Nan Zastrow

**INPERSON—INTERACTIVE—Closed after the first session.**

Join us for a guided sharing session to talk about your grief experiences with others also dealing with loss. Discuss your thoughts, ask questions, share your challenges, and know that you are not alone. Participants will be asked to honor confidentiality, be non-judgmental, and respect each other's feelings. This is not a counseling session—and I won't be giving advice. It's a time to authentically share your feelings in a safe space. The facilitator may provide some guided ways to share your story. The goal is to leave the session with a positive feeling to rely on in difficult times and begin to restore balance and hope in your life again.



Messages and Signs from Beyond

**Single session:**

**Thursday, June 20**

**6:00—7:00 p.m. CST**

**Register for a link**

Have you ever thought that your loved one who died is supporting you, reassuring you and even cheering you on from beyond? Do you believe in the possibilities of messages and signs that your loved one can connect with you? Do you continue to “talk” to your loved one to relieve the stress of grief and give you a sense of comfort and peace? If these questions intrigue you, you may want to attend this program where your curiosity and inner spirit beckon you to believe in things you cannot see or confirm. Learn about the behaviors that may prevent you from receiving this life after life affirming gift. And learn what gifts are out there just waiting for your acknowledgement.



**Give Sorrow Words...**

**Silence is Not Golden.**

**In-Person Group @ The Landing-YMCA**  
**Tuesdays: August 13, 20, 27 and Sept. 3, 10**  
**5:30—7:00 p.m.**

**ZOOMGRIEF-VIRTUAL**  
**Thursdays Aug 15, 22, 29 and Sept 5, 12**  
**6:00—7:00 p.m. CST**

Grief is something you may consider private and personal, as though only you can own it. We live in a culture that avoids talking about loss and one that wants us to move quickly through mourning to become our former selves. But grief is a process that takes time and work. Silence is not golden. When you give sorrow words, you express how you are feeling and begin to release your personal anguish. You teach others about your grief. Grief that goes unnamed and unspoken, remains unresolved. Grief is an emotion that can rule your life if you don't give it the attention it demands. In this series, you will learn what's normal and what's necessary to heal your grief. This is a perfect group for those new to grief or for those who feel grief still is hanging on. Learn how grief challenges your common sense. Giving sorrow words after loss helps you find peace and meaning in your life going forward.

Register online at [wingsgrief.org](http://wingsgrief.org) or email: [nanwings1@gmail.com](mailto:nanwings1@gmail.com)



Certified Grief  
Educator | Facilitator:  
Nan Zastrow

[wingsgrief.org](http://wingsgrief.org)  
715.845.4159

**Wings**  
A Grief Education Ministry

Thank you to our sponsors:

  
**ASPIRUS™**

**Brainard Funeral Homes**  
**Helke Funeral Home**  
**Peterson Kraemer  
Funeral Homes**

## FESTIVAL OF TREES – THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

A heartfelt THANK YOU to everyone who made the 2023 Festival of Trees an incredible success! Together, we raised over \$214,000 with proceeds to support Aspirus Comfort Care & Hospice Service and the Aspirus Family House. Get involved in 2024!  
Contact Kim Smerda 715.847.2892 | [kim.smerda@aspirus.org](mailto:kim.smerda@aspirus.org)

## UPCOMING GRIEF SUPPORT EVENTS

### Treasuring Memories Create A Stepping Stone

Wednesday, July 24 | 1-3pm Wausau, WI

Registration is required

Woodson Art Museum - 715.845.7010

### Candlelight Memorial Walk

Thursday, Sept 26 | 4:30-6:30pm Marathon City, WI

St. Anthony's Spirituality Center, Marathon City

### Camp Hope for Kids (Helping Others Pain End)

Oct 5-6 Rosholt, WI

Free weekend camp for grieving children, teenagers and their families.

[website:camphopeforkids.org](http://website:camphopeforkids.org)



**THANK YOU!**

*Pictured (L to R) with volunteer Enid Krueger, Hospice House nurse Lacie B. and volunteer Reese Aarthun.*

*Thanks to Reese and her husband who have donated special food for New Year's Eve and day for patients and families at the Aspirus Hospice House for the past 25 years. Thank you for your special gifts and caring hearts!*