We’ve got a packed newsletter this month, and I warn you now that the underlying theme is mourning and grief. But there's joy to be found here, too. It's the balance of a cancer support group. I'm happily surrendering the microphone this month, because this wonderful group wants to make their voices heard. With that, here's Katy.

Hello, everyone. My name is Katy Yost. I have been a member of Dallas YACS since attending my first meeting Oct/Nov of 2019. May is Brain Tumor Awareness month, so I thought it fitting, as part of the
“Brain Tumor Crew,” to throw my pen into the ring and share.

If you haven’t heard my story, I was in a minor car accident on Labor Day of 2015. I received a head CT after the accident as a concussion precaution, and that was when a spot was found on my brain, which we later found out was a tumor. I was monitored with MRI scans, participated in a study, chemo, and radiation, and am now monitored.

Now that we have been acquainted, I wanted to write something this month that would be inspiring, positive, and meaningful. But to be honest, I’m feeling a little heavy. Our group—and I as well—have had a hard month. We have lost a sweet member of our group, and this month is the anniversary and birthday month of a dear childhood friend of mine who passed. I feel like the older I get—and since being diagnosed with cancer—grief and death are just so much, and to be frank, hard. And I have found myself thinking... can there be a “positive” way to grieve? From the group, I have learned a couple things that have been helpful to me and I wanted to share them if you haven’t heard them.

During one group, Alex suggested continuing to mention the deceased by name or asking their loved one to share it. My childhood friend’s name was Evan, and I have so many sweet memories of growing up together. When a photo or a funny story comes up, it brings a smile to my face, and I think about how lucky I am to have known him. I think sharing stories and memories of our loved ones—and continuing to do so—helps keep them alive in our hearts. The other thing we talk about often is, “You have to feel to heal.” This is a hard one for me, especially because I think, by nature, grief “hurts.” You have lost something/someone very dear to you—be it grieving how you thought your life would go before cancer, or a loved one, or a pet—all loss is hard, and acknowledging that is very important.

Finding an outlet for your grief can be helpful, too. It can be through writing, journaling, art, visiting a special place (there is a tree dedicated to my friend Evan I visit often), or sharing with others in a group or others in your support system.
“Those we love never truly leave us. There are things that death cannot touch.”  -Jack Thorne

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DALLAS YACS CALENDAR

May 31st, Tuesday, 7:00 pm — May Virtual Support Group

June 1st, Wednesday, 7:05 pm — Texas Rangers vs Tampa Bay Rays game in the All You Can Eat seats, Globe Life Field, Arlington

June 28th, Tuesday, 7:00 pm — June Virtual Support Group

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IN MEMORIAM

Sierra Renay Haley
August 3, 1994 - April 13, 2022

We've been lucky for the majority of this newsletter's run because we haven’t had to mourn the loss of anyone in our group. But this is a cancer support group and death is going to be a part of it. Our previous losses—all of which had a deep impact on us—happened before we started this newsletter.

Unfortunately, that has changed. We lost Sierra in April. I don't have much to say because Alex words vividly encompass everything in its entirety below, but Sierra's loss hits us hard. She's been around since the group's beginning, a never-ending fount of positivity and smiles. It's like a piece of the puzzle that is our group has been removed. But now, we'll always be reminded of Sierra when we look at that puzzle and note the missing piece. A missing piece that will always look like the picture below. You'll always be a part of this group, so thanks, Sierra. We will miss you.
ALEX'S MEDITATION MOMENT

When someone I care about dies, it tears a hole through me, no matter the circumstances. A new hole formed last week when I learned about Sierra’s death. It’s extremely difficult for me to put the gravity or the force of grief into words; however, I’ll try because it matters. I don’t want it to be something that just passes. Our scars are a testament to the love and the relationships that we had for and with that person. And if the scar is deep, so was the love. So be it. Scars are a testament to life, and this community knows that intimately. Scars are a testament that we can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that we can heal and continue to live and continue to love fiercely. And the scar tissue is stronger than the original flesh ever was. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are only ugly to people who can’t see.

As for grief, I find it comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked after a loss, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the
magnificence of the ship that was and is no more. And all your nervous system can let you do is float. You find some piece of the wreckage, and you hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float to stay alive.

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to activate the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, a smell. It can be just about anything... and the wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is and has to be life.

Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or a holiday. You see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you trust that somehow you will come out the other side. Albeit soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, you'll come out.

The uniqueness of this group is that you found each other amongst the floating debris of the shipwrecks. While the waves never stopped coming (and they won't), we came together in the choppy water to realize that the place in which we suffer is also the same place where we care profoundly for one another. The sadness and suffering connected us. We helped each other find pieces of our wreckage, spot the waves before they peaked, and keep our heads above water to just keep breathing. Healing comes in the bittersweet recognition that in the darkness of those shipwrecks there is also light- healing happens in community, not in isolation.

A Meditation for Grief and Loss
1. To begin, take a comfortable seat and rest. Slowly, breathe deeply, in and out. Relax and settle, coming into a present-moment experience. What is really happening to you here and now?

2. Now bring to mind a personal loss. This could be the recent death of a friend or relative or a loved one; it could be a loss you’ve been carrying as a burden for a long time. It’s not something you’ve read about or something at a distance or abstract, but something personal, a person or experience or aspect of your life.

3. Start with your body and your immediate somatic experience. What bodily sensations do you notice? Do you feel grounded? Spacey, tight, hollow, full, edgy, dull, squirmy? What do you notice? Don’t interpret, just feel. What is your body saying to you right now?

4. Now, bring yourself to your heart, in the middle of your chest, and simply feel the heart holding the grief, being filled and heavied by that grief. Your raw, tender, loving, vulnerable, beating heart. And rest with that.

5. Now rest in your throat center. So often the throat is connected with grief. And it wells up in tightness and has a kind of ache that can arise when we’re about to cry, when we’re shocked or have a sense of loss. Notice where else your grief is being held in your body—it could be your heart, your throat, your stomach. They all hold something, they are processing something—without words, without direction, naturally, the body knows.

6. Then direct your attention to what emotions are arriving. Sorrow, anger, a quality of love, disappointment, there could be a sense of intensity or a sense of just being dull. Note what emotions are arising with an attitude of curiosity and nonjudgment. Just feel. Let your emotions manifest. Welcome them. Don’t suppress them and also don’t feed them. Emotions are the energy of our grieving. And they change. They’re always changing, like the waves of life itself. Be gentle. If you start to feel overwhelmed, take a break, rest, breathe.
Resettle. Allow yourself time to rest in your present-moment bodily emotional experience.

7. **Just rest, just feel, just be.** Let grief do its work. Let it heal you. Don’t push. Don’t be impatient. Let yourself grieve. Process this change in your life. Let it teach you.

8. **Reflect on grief in your life,** on the losses you’ve had and how your losses connect you with so many others. Just bringing your attention to that fact can be so healing. It happens to everyone. It’s hard to accept change. It’s hard to say goodbye and let go. But when you stop fighting the inevitability of loss and change, a new and deeper love and appreciation is possible. We liberate our love, liberate our joy and appreciation in a very powerful way, through loss, through grief, through sorrow, with a vulnerable and tender heart.

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**We are here for you!**

Help us recognize your milestones! Do you have an appointment, scan, or cancer-versary coming up? Let us know so we can send you a note of support! Just follow the link below.

Share your milestone!

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**Knowing The Group! Feat. Amy Stumbris**
This is Amy Stumbris, a newer member to the group who has fully embraced us. At the end of last year, 37 years of age, she was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma (breast cancer).

In her own words, here is how it has affected her life:

"In September 2021, Pathologists found a cancerous tumor in my breast tissue after an elective reduction. I had a rare experience in that I learned I had cancer from my plastic surgeon! I wasn’t set to get a mammogram for another three years, so happening upon it was serendipitous.

"Since I had already had breast surgery, I decided to get a double mastectomy with DIEP flap reconstruction (performed December 2021). Though I’m tumor-free now, I am undergoing chemotherapy to reduce chance of recurrence over the years. It was an easy decision, considering my children are now 6 and 2, and it will better ensure I’ll be healthy as they grow up."
"I’m not a health care professional, but I have been working at UT Southwestern for the past four and a half years in internal communications. It’s been one of the greatest joys of my life (how many people get to say that about their jobs?!), and getting to meet so many new caregivers and coworkers has made my work life even more fulfilling."

Amy has also alerted me that she handles UTSW’s newsletter, so there’s instant comradery there. Someone who understands what writing these newsletters feels like—the blood and sweat that goes into it. Ignore the fact that I didn't write the opener this month.

We are happy to have Amy as a member of the group and hope it provides the support she needs.

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I need more submissions!

If you’d like to be featured in a future newsletter—and let's face the facts, if you're reading this, we want to feature you—then send us an email through THIS LINK, bolded so you won’t miss it.

As we receive your responses, they're added to our supply and we pull one per month for the newsletter.

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Have Some Feedback?

If you have anything you'd like us to know that isn't covered in the survey or milestone link, tell us here.

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JAMIE'S JOKE JOINT

A guy asks a girl to go to a dance. She agrees, and he decides to rent
a suit. The rental store has a long line, so he waits and waits, and he finally gets his suit.

He decides to buy flowers, so he goes to the flower shop. The flower shop has a long line, so he waits and waits until he finally buys flowers.

He picks up the girl and they go to the dance. There is a long line into the dance, so they wait and wait.

Finally, they get into the dance, and the guy offers to get the girl a drink. She asks for punch, so he goes to the drink table, and there is no punch line.

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**A DIETICIAN APPROVED RECIPE**
(Thanks to Michelle Hamilton, an Oncology Dietitian with UTSW)

Because this was a newsletter focused on grief and mourning, we're going to provide a recipe to help replenish the mental and emotional energy.

https://www.foodandwine.com/recipes/hearts-palm-salad-cilantro-vinaigrette

From Michelle, “You can add grilled chicken to it or pumpkin seeds for a little crunch. I also think that it is easy to take to parties, as most of the ingredients can be prepped ahead of time. Just wait to add the dressing and avocados until the last minute! This recipe uses watercress, but Bibb lettuce, spinach and romaine all work well!!”

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**PROMPT OF THE MONTH**

You're super-secret space of peace has been invaded by someone or
something. How do you deal with this intruder?

If you'd like your response featured in next month's newsletter, simply include it in an email to the group's email, dallasyacs@gmail.com.

That's it! You've reached the end of our newsletter. Until next time...

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