



Lights of Life - The 20th Anniversary



Remembering the Life of a Loved One



Lights of Life Trees at Elijah Smith Building

Lights of Life provides an opportunity to honour and remember a loved one who has died with a simple but meaningful ritual.

A decorated Christmas tree is placed in a prominent location within the community where people can come and write a note or the name of their loved one on a Lights of Life tag and hang it on the tree.

Those who visit the tree may also take tags home to hang on their own tree, write in the memory book, or just sit for a few moments in quiet contemplation.

Christmas can be a difficult time for those grieving the loss of a loved one, and taking a few moments to reflect and hang a remembrance tag can be a very meaningful and healing ritual during the busy holiday season.

Compassionate End of Life Care and Bereavement Support

Ione Christensen ~ Community Supporter

Lights of Life - Lights of Remembrance



Ione 2010

Ione & her husband Art make their home in Riverdale. They have two sons, Paul and Philip.

She is an avid outdoor woman and gardener. Many will know Ione as the first woman Mayor of Whitehorse, a Member of the Order of Canada as well as a respected Senator.

Others will know her for her famous sourdough starter used in Chilkoot pancakes and muffins. Whatever Ione sets her mind and heart to... she is dedicated and passionate.

I have always strongly felt that those who leave us live on through us and we have a responsibility to keep those memories alive so that the wisdom of the past is carried on to the new generations.

Through our memories, stories, the special things we do, the recipes that were family favourites, the secret fishing hole, all the "do you remembers?". These all keep our loved ones in our lives in a good way.

I have taken advantage of the Lights of Life each year I have been in town. Making up a little card for each family member and dear friend, as well as departed pets, this helps to brighten the memories for both me and others who will see the names.

The tree for pets is important; our furry-feathered companions shared our lives and have brought us comfort. It is especially important for children to have this outlet, to be able to honour a life which was important to them; to learn it is good to grieve and to shed tears of love and thanks for the companionship so freely given.

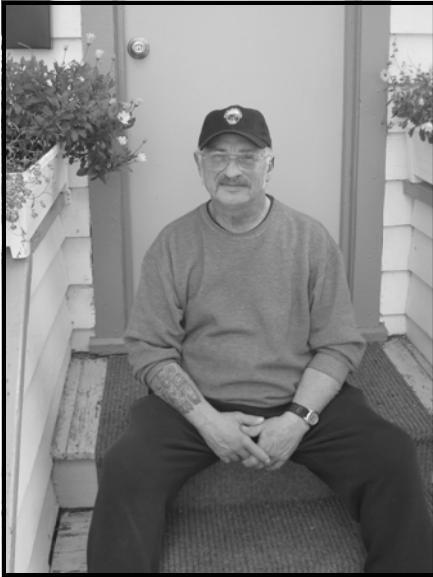
Christmas is often the one time of year when those we have lost are missed the most and these special trees, so beautiful, so bright, help to radiate that love and remembrance.

The Lights of Life trees are a wonderful way to bring forward those memories, not only for your family but for others in the community as well. A way each year of honouring all those special people who have contributed to what our communities are today.



Ione 1937

Ken Matthies ~ Hospice Client



Ken Matthies

My name is Ken Matthies and I've been honoured to have been both an active participant on two occasions, as well as an attendee at other successive Hospice Lights of Life Ceremonies since 2002, following the death of my daughter.

I had begun counseling with Hospice only a few months after her death when I was first invited to share my own experience of that loss and tell of the positive difference that Hospice had made for me to that point in time, which it certainly had. I can tell you that I was heartened and helped beyond measure in my own healing by the simple act of accepting that invitation and doing so.

As part of my personal healing path, a couple of years later I was inspired to write a book about my daughter and me detailing the experience of her loss and my journey of healing. And once again I was asked and encouraged by Hospice staff in the aftermath of its

completion to share a portion of those writings with everyone in attendance at another Lights of Life ceremony; again an occasion of great help and healing to me brought about by the simple act of sharing a portion of those grief and healing experiences in response to the unconditional encouragement received from them to do so.

The Lights of Life ceremony has made an enormous impact on me over the years and has now become my annual touchstone...a time of willing and loving remembrance on these occasions not only of my daughter but also of others close to me who have since made their own journeys beyond...and also a time of equally willing connection from my heart with others in attendance still enduring their own journeys of grief and recovery, in the hopes of perhaps being able to touch and to help them along those journeys by a simple word or gesture of understanding. My involvement will continue into the future for all of those good reasons and purposes of the heart.

The experience of human grief is universal to us all at some point in our lives, and the communal connection and healing purposes served by such functions as the Hospice Lights of Life ceremony is a crucial service to our healing from that grief. It allows us to see and experience the truth that we are never as alone in our own experiences as grief makes us feel we are, and by that single truth we become empowered to reach deeper into the wellsprings of our grieving pain to find the healing from it that awaits us all at the end of our journeys.

Hospice Yukon is to be commended for providing such a caring and insightful communal service to all those who are living in grief and searching for that healing.

Kip Veale ~ Mistress of Ceremonies

Kip's involvement with Hospice Yukon goes back to the planning days of creating Hospice in 1986 and on our first Board in 1988. Though now retired, Kip is busy in our community, with her family and traveling. Many look forward to her gentle voice at our ceremony.

Other faithful supporters of our yearly opening ceremony include: Suat from Alpine Bakery who provides goodies, Glenys from Chocolate Claim with Bean North Coffee, Westmark who gives us the skirts for our tables, Helen from Tents & Events who lends us chairs/tables. Unitech does an amazing sound system for us and the kind commissionaires watch over our event and support our tree sitters. Thank you all!



Kip Veale

Barbara Chamberlin & The Persephones



Barbara Chamberlin

Every year, we, the Persephones, sing for the Hospice ceremony. It's a lovely ceremony done at the Elijah Smith building. We have our place by the main door in the alcove where we sing to the changing audiences, the guest speakers, and the workers in the building.

Every year, different members (including myself) are affected in different ways. It's hard to lose a loved one or a pet and sing songs of hope and sadness. I've seen the tears well up as the ceremony gets to the place of remembrance.

That's what it's for, though, this ceremony - to think of those that have passed on and to celebrate the life they lived, even though we are left to cope with Christmas and the future years without them.

Every year, it's a new audience in addition to the regulars. Every year, we sing in our corner and hear the sound echo around the building. It's a pleasure for us to remember our loved ones this way and to let our music wind it's way into peoples' hearts, helping them to release their grief or hold it inside for a fleeting moment's peace. We look forward to this special ceremony every December.



Barbara Chamberlin directing the Persephone Singers at Lights of Life 2009

Jackie MacLaren ~ Hospice Clinical Supervisor



Jackie and Sandy Baron at the first Lights of Life in 1990

I first heard about "Lights of Life" when Sandy Baron and I were at Hospice Victoria for a three week mentorship. We were to learn all that we could and return home and start the training of the first Hospice Yukon volunteers. When the "Lights of Life" project was being described, we looked at each other, eyes wide open and smiling. This would be perfect for the Yukon, and for the techie generation this translates into text as "OMG"!

The Hospice Board was eager to set it up and soon we were training the first generation of "Tree Sitters" for the task at hand. There was no pool of Hospice volunteers to recruit from, but there were many interested folks who came forward to help.

On a more personal note, my father was a sitter whenever he was in Whitehorse for Christmas. That first year he sat with me in Horwood's Mall for a few shifts and became quite the recruiter. I recall one young man who approached tentatively three times and then would hurry outside for a smoke. My father went out for a smoke and engaged in casual conversation, returning with the young man. Dad had explained the process and over the next hour the young man talked of the pain of losing his daughter in a fire down south. I can still see him tucking the little silver Hospice tag in his jacket pocket for his tree at home.

There was a coffee and donut shop where North End Gallery now sits. Dad popped in for a coffee and was explaining the Lights of Life to the shop keeper. She wanted to visit the Tree, so she asked Dad if he would cover the shop while she ran down. He served coffee until her return and the rest of our shift sitting at the Tree comprised of coffee patrons dropping by. I like to think of Dad as one of the first Hospice outreach workers! He has since passed on and instead of placing a tag on the Tree, there is one hanging in his honour each year.

Over the years, Hospice has offered numerous services to Yukoners. The Lights of Life has become a yearly activity in Whitehorse and gradually the rural communities have embraced the tradition. What better way to honour a loved one while acknowledging the grief we all experience. As a counselor, it has been a real asset to be able to accompany some clients to the Tree and refer others as part of their grief work. It has been particularly helpful with former residential school students I have had the privilege of working with over the years.

It has truly been a joy to be involved for 20 years with such an invaluable healing initiative, and it continues to provide me with the opportunity to symbolically honour my own grief.

Bernie Richardson ~ Copper Ridge Place Volunteer & Hospice Yukon Volunteer

I've been a volunteer at Copper Ridge Place since it opened, and several years ago I was asked if I would like to put up a tree for Hospice's *Lights of Life*. The staff and residents have many losses at Copper Ridge and I agreed it was a good idea.

The residents, staff, many family and friends that come to visit seemed really happy to see the bright lights of the tree in the hallway, and the opportunity to write their thoughts, taking the time to remember their loved ones.

Christmas can be a sad time of year for many people and just to know they're not alone can make someone feel much better. Every year I have positive feedback and it gives me a good feeling to know I have helped them remember their loved ones.



Lights of Life tree at
Copper Ridge Place

When the Holiday Season Is Difficult

When bereavement is recent and grief is fresh, people often talk about "getting through" or "surviving" the holidays. This attitude may continue for years after a significant loss. It acknowledges and expresses the pain and distress of loss that wells up at special times of the year.

This deep ache and sadness is normal. Recognizing the grief you and your family feel is the starting point for developing new ways of living through the holidays.

There is no one right way of facing holidays when you and your family are grieving. If those in your family circle can share with each other the feelings that come up before or during the holiday, you can think together about how to approach the holiday differently.

Exploring ways of honouring old family traditions while creating new ones can give your family a sense of stability and hope in the midst of loss and change. Finding ways to include the reality of the empty spot, without making it the primary focus of the holiday, can help you to take new steps in the healing of your grief.

Ritual

Ritual is the act of honouring -
Honouring a loved one -
Honouring loss and sorrow -
Honouring difficult times of change.

In ritual we celebrate -
Our joys -
Our love -
The beauty in our lives.

Rituals contain the inexpressible -
What cannot be spoken but is felt down to our bones -
What we hold dearest to our hearts.

Lighting a candle with intention,
We carry the flame of what is essential.
Sewing a quilt stitch by stitch -
We sing the beloved songs of our life.
Releasing a memory into the river -
We enter the path of healing.

Ritual holds and releases -
It traps our attention and allows it to take flight.

Grace is the gift of ritual.
Grace lifts us into the sacredness of our everyday lives -
Reminding us of who we truly are.

The only feeling stronger than loss
Is love -
Ritual is one expression
Of that love

- Anne Macaire

Hospice Yukon Lights of Life

20th Anniversary 2010

We invite you to attend this meaningful event
whether your loss is new this year
or one that you have felt for many years.



Opening Ceremony

Elijah Smith Building - Main Street
Thursday, December 16, 12:15 pm

Tree visiting at Elijah Smith:

Thursday, December 16, afternoon
December 17-23, weekdays

Other Whitehorse Locations:

Hospice House, Whitehorse General Hospital, Macaulay Lodge
Copper Ridge Place, Heritage North Funeral Home
Youth of Today Society, Young Offender's Facility

You are invited to participate...

Every year we display different ways in which people
honour and remember their loved ones who have died.

This year we invite all of the public
to bring in a non-returnable copy of a photograph or picture
of the person or pet who has died
to hang in the atrium of the Elijah Smith Building.
Titles, stories, and poems are welcome to accompany them.

Hospice Yukon

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(867) 633-3796 • Monday- Friday 11:30-3:00 pm
www.hospiceyukon.net

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