



Fall 2011

Self Care



Hospice House, 409 Jarvis Street

Hospice staff are often asked: *"How can you work with dying and grieving people? It must be so hard."* And sometimes it is hard, very hard.

We have all learned that ongoing, meaningful and real self care supports us, heals us and allows us to show up each week. There is just not any evading or glossing over the deep truth; *if you are to help others, you must first help yourself.*

This issue of our newsletter will explore the idea of consciously contributing to your own health and wellbeing—and what some of the barriers are that prevent us from feeling it is necessary or even worthwhile.

Sit back, take 10 minutes and have a cup of tea while you read along—it's great self care!

Compassionate End of Life Care and Bereavement Support

Inviting in Self Care ~ Cathy Routledge, Executive Director

A while ago, I came across the notion of "*living our self care*" it sounded suspiciously like a lot of work to me. Reading on, the premise became clearer and more simple: *life offers up endless moments to savour; we just have to avail ourselves of them.* This is all well and good for those evolved few, but what might that look like in my own life?

Given how terms like "wellness" or "self care" can mean very different things to different people, how can we define it in a way that doesn't make us feel we're doing it all wrong? In the simplest terms, self care is *whatever makes us feel better, without doing more harm than good.* A glass of wine with a lovely meal may well be defined as self care—however, 2 bottles is probably excessive!

Wikiquotes attributes "*Moderation in all things, including moderation*" to Petronius, a Roman writer (27-66 AD), and to my way of thinking, he was right on the money. Our North American culture can be a hard taskmaster—often we feel our efforts are not good enough, no matter where we turn our hand. It shows up too, in the way we care for ourselves; in fits and spurts with plenty of guilt thrown in there for "*not trying hard enough*" or "*not getting it together*".

Good self care happens best with good self knowledge - requiring a clear and candid understanding of ourselves, shortcomings and all. This I believe, is the only way to get what we need from our self care; care that truly fits all aspects of who we are; emotionally, physically, spiritually and mentally. So then, what *are* those things that add richness, joy, peace, comfort and renewal to your life? And how do you invite them in every day?

Everyone's is going to look different, but make a list to help you get started —most of us have far more to be thankful for than we might think. Put anything and everything on it and then give some serious thought as to how you can consciously add a few in each day. Then make it happen. Intentionally. They don't have to be big or expensive; small and free work just as well. The power lies in our willingness to see, to experience those graceful moments as they cross our paths.

I love this photo; I think it's a good reminder of how hard it is for us to embrace absolute relaxation. We don't look at either the baby or the dog and think "*Hey! They shouldn't be doing this! They should be doing something useful!*" So why then, can we come up with a dozen reasons we shouldn't be curling right up with them?

Personally, I would not think twice—dogs, babies and naps are three of life's most delicious things and all the better for being wrapped up in a single package!



Just GO! ~ Barb Evans-Ehrlich, Manager, Volunteer Services



Barb and Eliza Armstrong at the CGC

Here I am during a busy day at Hospice House answering the phone, responding to emails, discussing a workshop we are working on with Anne, offering a Healing Touch session to a client when my husband phones and says it's time to drive up to the Canada Games Centre for our 40 minute workout in their wellness room.

Every fibre of my body feels tired and I have too much to do and it isn't convenient and it really isn't long enough etc.... But... I put down the phone and get my stuff together and go. I just go. I just do it.

I have found that in the last few years, *just doing it* has become so important to helping me stay balanced and in control of my life. I can't control the stresses and challenges I have with family and friends, endless home repairs, work and aging parents, but I can control exercising my body and I do feel better and calmer when I'm finished sweating. There isn't really anything else to satisfy this need. It just is. My body wants to move and needs to move and I've resisted for too many years but I'm listening now!

I have found the staff at the Canadian Games Centre friendly and helpful. I especially want to mention Adam and Eliza who both work in the Wellness Room monitoring machine use, giving expert advice on workout plans, leading workout classes. Eliza has a knack of relating to all personalities, all body types and ages- we are so lucky to have her at CGC! She usually has a quick word of encouragement for people as they stop by her desk. Just as I like to think I encourage people to heal from their losses, Eliza encourages people to learn to be in touch with their bodies and move them so they work better.

Here are other ways of caring for myself which also means enjoying myself, in no particular order:

Sipping a foamy latte at Bean North Café enjoying the birds and flowers

Walking on the trails around our property with our new dog Oscar

Reading inspiring stories of people making a difference in magazines/newspapers

Laughing until I cry with family and friends

Being quiet in the mornings...counting all my blessings, saying random prayers and sending healing thoughts to those that come to my mind when I'm settled.

You can see that there is nothing mysterious or new in my self care package...but it works for me!

A Taste of Life ~ Carlotta Smith, Administrator

My response to paying attention to self care was moving to Whitehorse from Vancouver in the fall of 2009! I had spent most of my work life in the hospitality industry, motivated by a sincere calling to serve. After 40 years of offering food and drink to guests, my service calling found its next expression at Hospice Yukon. The root of the words *hospitality* and *Hospice* have the same meaning; *to meet 'guests' along the path and offer nurturing, sustenance and care.* Serving guests on a culinary path has transitioned into serving grieving and dying people as they find themselves on a very new and uncertain path.

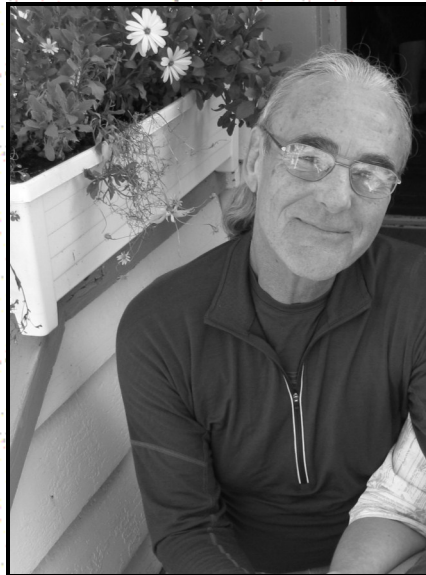


Increasingly, I think about our relationship to the food we eat. In my experience, when I take time to connect with the food in front of me, I begin to glimpse the vast relationships that are involved in bringing this food to my table. Elements of earth and water, plants, animals and humans are all connected to what is on my plate. The realization that a vast world of interconnection is a part of my everyday food experience opens my heart. This is the best preparation for my body to open, receive and assimilate the nutrition, comfort and sustenance that food provides. I sincerely believe that this awareness of our relationship to our food is the most important factor in our diets. A quote from the book, *Diet for a New America*, puts it this way:

*"the person who eats beer and franks
with cheer and thanks
will probably be healthier
than the person who eats sprouts and bread
with doubts and dread"*

Our relationship to food will continue to change over our lives, but allow yourself to take a moment to connect with the web of life that is both your food and a part of you. It is the secret ingredient to making your food a source of both nourishment and comfort.

Holding Ourselves Tenderly ~ Anne Macaire, Lay Counselor



Anne and Anthony

It has been just a year since Anthony embarked on his Haida Gwaii adventure and I slipped into his shoes at Hospice, beginning my own new journey - a very rich year for both of us.

And the *Wellness Wheel* that Anthony developed as a way to explain the importance of balance and self care to his clients, has never been far from either of our minds as we embraced the changes and challenges life has offered up to us. We talked about this over the phone recently while he

watched the ocean waves lapping on the beach of his island home and my gaze settled on the extraordinary reds of the changing fireweed leaves outside my cabin window.

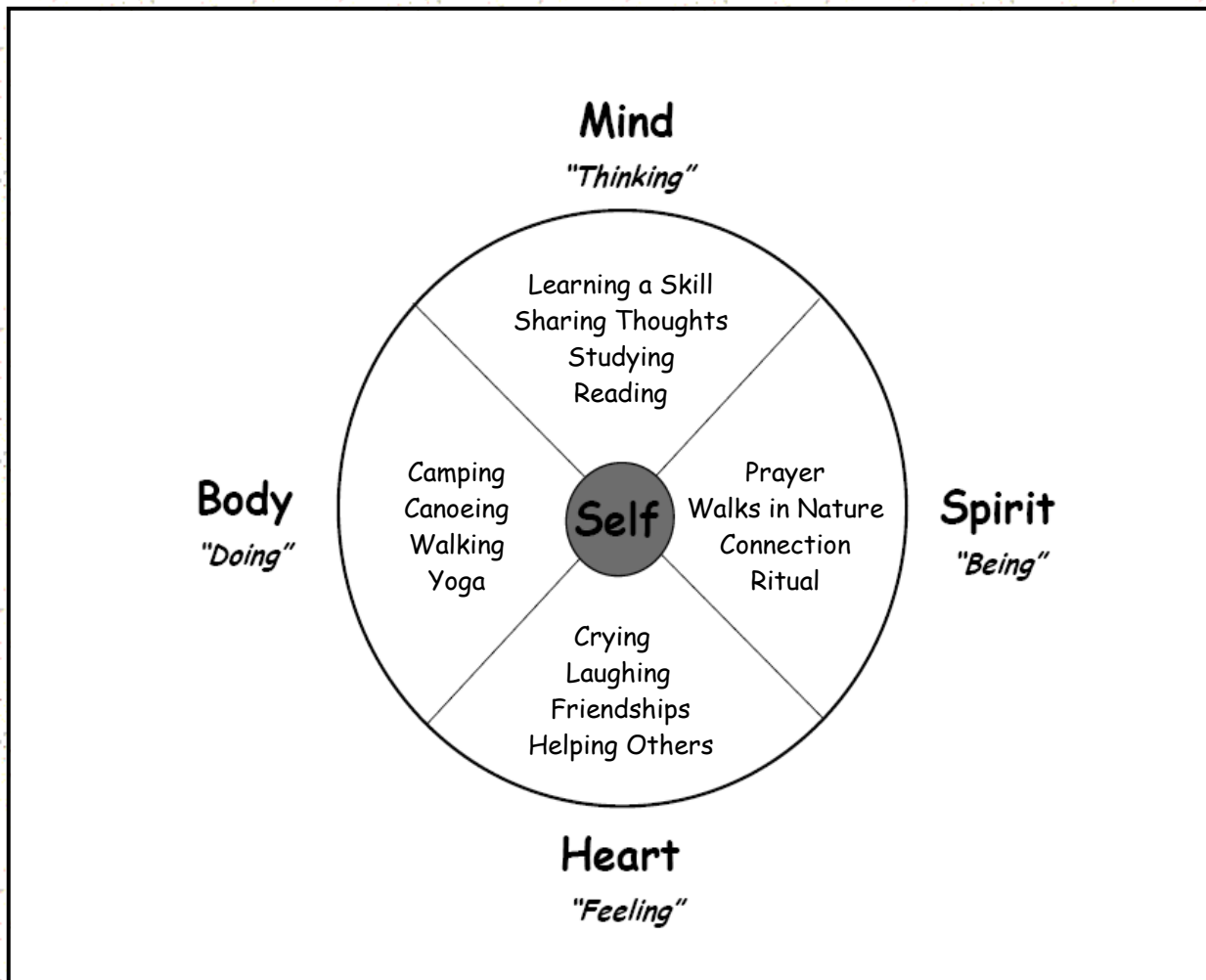
In the short year I've sat with dozens of bereaved, I have seen how the conversation turns again and again to the question, "*How are you taking care of yourself?*" It is the foundation from which we live our lives. Anthony too, found this to be true and it moved him to create a "tool" that could help to reflect more completely on this question.

Because change, and especially grief, tips us over, the more we have a foundation of balance, the more quickly we can right ourselves. When we are balanced it is a little more like surfing the waves of change than being engulfed by them.

I love the "wheel" because it is such a good visual reminder of all aspects of who I am and how those aspects are being nurtured. Really, self care amounts to self love and another way of asking the question is "*How much are you loving yourself?*" Several years ago, in fits and starts, I was attempting to re-establish a yoga practice. It always felt great to do, yet I couldn't seem to get in the groove. Then one morning after a good session I thought to myself, "*I deserve to feel this good, deserve to give myself this gift of yoga*". It changed everything. I put away the "should" whips and started a new practice. And even still, when I inevitably balk at having to make the effort it helps to remember this.

Self care is a gift we can give to ourselves everyday in small and big ways; as simple as stopping for 5 minutes to enjoy a sunset and as complex and challenging as facing life long addictions. Above all, it is remembering to hold ourselves tenderly in our daily lives.

The Wellness Wheel ~ Looking at the Whole



We are familiar with the benefits of physical fitness, of keeping the body active. Besides making us feel good about ourselves, it makes us stronger and gives us greater resilience in the face of illness or accident. It even helps us to think more clearly. When we activate our physical side like this, it aids the whole self.

Although it is not as common to hear about emotional fitness, mental fitness or spiritual fitness, the very same principles apply. In other words, when we activate any of these areas in healthy ways, we help to strengthen and balance our entire structure.

Emotional fitness is about *feeling deeply* and finding some expression for those feelings. Having a heart to heart talk with a friend, being artistically creative, having a good laugh or cry - this is all great exercise for the "heart".

Mental fitness is about toning up our *thinking*, flexing the muscles of the mind by learning, by teaching, by exploring ideas, by figuring things out.

Spiritual fitness is about deep *connection*, to our self, to God, to nature, to our life force. Meditation, prayer, walking the dog, being in nature, finding time to rest in the midst of things - these are all good "cardio" for the spirit.

Mama Time ~ Deb Higgins, Program Coordinator



Deb and her family hiking at the summit

Raising two kids is rewarding beyond words, and at times is also the most demanding job I've ever had. Their needs are constant - hungry tummies, scraped knees, sibling quarrels, questions about everything, needing a cuddle or a story - and easily fill every waking minute of the day. They challenge me to stay present in each of these moments, and after five years of parenting I have realized that I am better able to do this when I regularly take time to look after myself.

When my daughter, Sylvie, was a baby creating time for *me* felt like a luxury. Getting out for a run, having tea with a friend, or curling up with a book seemed to take time in the day that just was not there. It is the times of complete exhaustion and losing my patience that have helped me realize that these windows of self care are not luxuries, but necessities. If I don't create time to do the things that renew my own energy I am not able to be the parent, or the partner I want to be. I try to find that magic balance where everyone's needs get met, including my own. As my wise sister-in-law and mother of three says "*If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!*".

My "recipe" for self care is inspired by Anthony's *Wellness Wheel*. In his model the idea is to balance self care activities in these four areas: Emotional, Physical, Spiritual, and Mental. I try to do something to nourish myself in each of the four areas over the course of the week. My staple in this self care recipe is exercise (physical). Without it I'm not as robust emotionally, mentally, or physically.

In an average week my self care routine might look something like this: go skiing/running three times (physical), Friday night movie and glass of wine with Pete (emotional), have two nights of early bedtime (mental and physical), and keep up on news and reading my book (mental and spiritual). It isn't much, but it is realistic and manageable (most of the time!). Some weeks I can fit in more - like a tea with a friend - and in others less. The icing on the cake is that my kids see me looking after myself. They understand that "mummy needs her run" - that I have my own needs, and that it's healthy to recognize what you need to be happy and go out and make it happen!

Grief Support Groups and Public Education

Living With Loss ~ Introduction to Healthy Grieving

September, November, February and April

When death and other types of loss touch us, our grief is often unrecognized and unsupported. This educational workshop gives an understandable overview of the grief process and is applicable to our lives on many levels.

The evening will include an overview of Hospice Yukon services, information about healthy grieving and the importance of self care. You will receive a handout package that will be helpful to you and those you support.

Please be aware that this is a grief education session and not a grief support group.

Grief Discussion, Walking and Art/Journaling support groups are offered on a regular basis. Please us for dates.



Lights of Life December 15-22 Elijah Smith Atrium

Christmas can be a bittersweet time when you miss people who have died. **Lights of Life** allows you a few quiet moments to remember them, by writing in our memory book & hanging a special tag on our trees. This simple ritual of acknowledgement has been supporting Yukoners for more than 20 years.

Trees will also be available at Copper Ridge Place, Macaulay Lodge, Whitehorse General Hospital, Heritage North Funeral Home & Hospice House.
A beautiful pet loss tree is also at Elijah Smith.

Opening Ceremony Thursday, December 15th 12:15-12:45

Contact us for support, more information or to register.
Please call 667-7429 or email administrator@hospiceyukon.net

You can also drop in and check out our great resource library at
409 Jarvis Street, Whitehorse, Monday to Friday 11:30 am to 3:00 pm
Join us on Facebook!

www.hospiceyukon.net