



## **Cancer Survival Kit** continued from page 1

which you can walk this journey. It is important to bear in mind that there are many people who have been in your place who want to give you the benefit of their experience including the names of doctors or hospitals they went to, drugs prescribed to them, etc. This can all be very informative but not necessarily helpful. The amount of information you will receive can often become confusing. Be care-

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### **Loving someone does not mean that they are the best**

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ful, try to keep the initial journey simple by who you tell and what you tell them about your diagnosis.

The first tool in your survival kit is finding a doctor with whom you are comfortable. This selection process, whether it be a surgeon or oncologist, is critical. Your comfort level with your doctor(s) is as important as the credentials they bear and the experience they have in the field. Remember that your needs are unique to you.

There are many different things that are important to a person in selecting a team of doctors. Your needs may be entirely different than your friends. You are not hurting anyone's feelings but your own if you are not true and follow your own gut feelings and heart. Many people wish

they had gone for a second or third opinion. Treatment should be based on the things that are important to you.

The second tool is starting a medical journal. This journal will enable you to keep track of your questions regarding symptoms and concerns. Bring it with you every time you go to a doctor. This will be very helpful in relaying and recalling information—relying on your memory is not recommended. However, it is advisable to have someone accompany you on doctor's visits so that they can listen with you.

The language doctors use can often seem very scary. Understanding exactly what is being recommended to you, how procedures will be done, how long treatments may last and so on, are all important factors that will help to put your mind to rest. Additionally, knowing the possible side effects and limitations that may occur during treatment and its aftermath eliminates what is called catastrophizing. The unknown is far

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### **A Survival Kit Helps to**

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scary than the known! Questions about continuing to work or going on disability are critical decisions, especially in the beginning. This part of your survival kit needs to be

addressed so that you can be free to concentrate on your health. If not already addressed, putting your finances in order will create a sense of security about how you will proceed in the task of daily living.

Choosing a caregiver is probably one of the most important tools in your survival kit. Decide on someone you trust and keep in mind that one of the key elements in choosing a caregiver is knowing if that person is available and comfortable with the responsibility. Loving someone does not mean that they are the best caregiver. Often this area is where distress takes place.

Expectations of what loved ones can and should be able to handle are often false. If you have a large family or support system, caregiving can be split up among members. One person can escort you to doctor visits, another may help you with your children, another can file the insurance forms, etc.

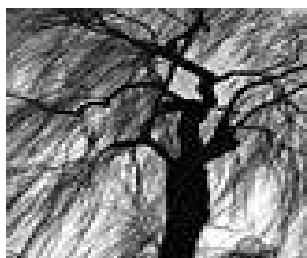
Role changes usually occur within the framework of families during the course of the disease. Defining new roles or changing roles is helpful if addressed in an open, communicative fashion. [\(continued on page 4\)](#)

## Weeping Willow

Grief is the heart's way of crying. The tears that are shed express the feelings of loss that we have incurred. The way in which we grieve and mourn the loss of a loved one is as unique and personal as each individual.

Grief has its own rhythm. Each movement has its own set of moods. There is no right, there is no wrong, there is only the pure expression of loss. Physical pain cannot be masked, it can be treated with pain medication until it subsides. Emotional pain cannot be treated in the same way.

Loss is experienced in a myriad of ways. The manner in which we cope with loss during our life cycle is a great indicator of how we will cope with loss at the end of our life. Death is the most major loss that we encounter during our lifetime. How we greet it and live with it is an extension of our very selves.



## Bereavement Support Groups

Bereavement support is offered in the form of support groups for both adults and children. The programs are designed to deal with the issues related to grief, death and dying. The adult groups are specifically geared towards individuals who have lost a loved one at least six months prior to the initial session.



**SONATA™** is a bereavement support group for those individuals who have lost a loved one to a long-term illness

**AVALANCHE™** is a bereavement support group for those who have lost someone through sudden death

**TEDDY BEAR CLUB™** is a four week program that explains death, dying, grief, bereavement and mourning to children ages 5-9 years old who have lost a loved one. The program is a combination of discussion and age specific activities designed to assist each child in understanding and moving through their grief process.

**KALEIDOSCOPE™** is a four week program that explains death, dying, grief, bereavement and mourning to children ages 10-15 who have lost a loved one.

**PEERING THROUGH™** offers an opportunity for individuals who have lost a spouse to cancer or another long-term illness to meet with "peers." It allows individuals to share their experiences through a unique blend of social activity and professional support.

## Cancer Programs







**HEART & SOUL™** is a support group for those couples who are living with cancer and AIDS related cancer. This program is designed to deal with the issues related to the affects on marriage, children, finances, and sexuality.

**BREATHING ROOM™** - The program is designed to meet the emotional needs of anyone who has been diagnosed with lung cancer.

**SANCTUARY - A Two Day Retreat for Women Living With Cancer™** is specifically geared towards meeting the emotional and physical needs women living with cancer.

## Comfort Corner:

### ***Make your bed a sanctuary during treatment***

-  use sheets that you save for special occasions
-  buy or listen to music that is gentle and creates serenity
-  burn incense or have an aromatherapy machine to emit a fragrance
-  color in a coloring book — allow yourself to feel young at heart
-  journal your thoughts and feelings — this will reduce overthinking.
-  Remember: treatment is temporary!

*(continued from page 2)*

If the changes in roles are not discussed and realistically orchestrated these changes will create unnecessary distress and havoc.

There are many sensitive issues like employment, finances, family responsibilities that need careful consideration. Taking the time to decide who you will need in your survival kit will give you peace of mind. Try to avoid thinking that you will hurt people's feelings with your decisions. If someone is to be helpful, they need to be helpful the way you need them to be. Once your survival kit as been completed, you can walk this journey with a sense of emotional security and independence.

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Should you wish to learn more about how you can become an active participant with *Living With Dignity* by donating your time, talents, gifts in kind, a direct donation to the organization or holding a fundraiser, please contact:

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## Heart & Soul™

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