Dear Friends,

Another year is upon us. Does it seem possible? Yes and no and it depends on the day. At the end of a year we reflect back on the memories made. January is a time of looking ahead and anticipating things to come in our future; things known and unknown at this time. We await weddings, births, health news, kids growing up, job changes or what the future looks like without this special person in our life. Waiting is time consuming.

What are we waiting for? To go back to “the way it was” before this horrible intruder called grief came to visit and decided to stay awhile. No one asks to join this club but you will pay your dues with your grief work. You are not alone in this club, either. You don’t have to look far to see others experiencing their own losses, their own grief.

It is hard to imagine facing another year without your loved one. As you `wait and figure out what this new future and new year has in store for you, be mindful of the things and people important to you. Priorities shift during times of crisis and change. What kind of person are you becoming today? It is for you to decide. Be patient with yourself during this time of waiting for things to change. Take time for personal reflection. Reflection can help you decide who you are and what you want for your future.

Remember, you don’t have to go through this alone. The bereavement staff is available for extra support. Contact us at 641-428-6208 or 1-800-297-4719.

Thinking of you,

Amber, Joyce & Autumn
Bereavement Coordinators

Poem...

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion,
Who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement,
Who can tolerate not knowing....
Not healing....not curing....
That is a friend who cares.

~Henri Nouwen
Understanding Grief & Loss
Support Group

This program provides grief education and support to any adult who has experienced a death of a family member or friend. Your loved one did not have to have received Hospice services in order for you to attend.

6 Monday mornings ~ **Mason City**
January 14 - February 18, 2019
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Hospice of North Iowa
Conference Room
232 2nd St SE, Mason City

6 Thursday mornings ~ **Iowa Falls**
January 24 - February 28, 2019
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
First United Methodist Church
619 Main Street, Iowa Falls

6 Thursday evenings ~ **Mason City**
March 14th – April 18th
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Hospice of North Iowa - Conference Room
232 2nd St SE, Mason City

There is no charge for these groups, but space is limited. To register, please call:

**Hospice of North Iowa**
1-800-297-4719 or 428-6208

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**Touched by Suicide**
Support Group

What: Support Group for those affected by suicide or with lived experiences
When: Third Thursday of each month
Time: 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Where: First Baptist Church – 125 East State St.
Mason City – Room is upstairs toward the left

For more information contact facilitator:
Wendy Martinez • 641.420.0049 •
touchedbysuicidemasoncity@gmail.com
Keeping and Letting Go
by Sharon Randall

What do you want to keep and what do you want to let go? That’s high on my list of Life’s Hardest and Most Important Questions. I am forever trying to answer it. Especially lately.

Next week, total strangers will bring a truck to our door and haul off everything we own. Except the clothes on our backs, the car we will drive 500 miles to our new home, and as much stuff as we can pack in it.

It’s called moving. Some people, God bless them, do it often. For others, like me, it’s a rare and sobering adventure. In all my adult years (never mind how many) I’ve moved only three times.

My first husband and I moved into our first house with a bed, our clothes and a few wedding gifts. The next day, I went to a resale shop to look for a dining room table. Instead, I bought an old bench that had seen better days as a church pew. It cost $20. When my husband saw it in our empty dining room, he winced and said, “I’ll refinish it.”

“No,” I said, “it tells stories.”

That was a lifetime ago. Over the years, I packed that house to the roof with three children, a few dogs and enough assorted stuff to furnish a subdivision.

Then the kids grew up, we lost their dad to cancer and I began to learn about letting go.

First, I let go of the illusion of being in control. Life isn’t about being in charge of what happens. It’s about being in charge of what we do with it.

Next, I let go of putting off until “tomorrow” things I care most about: Keeping in touch; saying I love you; being truly and fully aware and alive.

I let go of the kind of people who cling to anger or hatred, and tried instead to surround myself with those who shine with kindness and grace.

Finally, I let go of being alone. And then, when I fell in love, remarried and moved out of state with my new husband, I let go of more stuff than I kept: Clothes I liked, but couldn’t wear again unless I lost 20 pounds. Dishes I never used and never would. Toys my kids loved, but didn’t love enough to take with them when they left.

After that move, I swore I would never again amass meaningless possessions. But 12 years later, here I am, still learning about letting go.
Yesterday, while cleaning out a dresser, I sorted through an old box of keepsakes. Among the many things it held were:

- A flower-shaped brooch my grandmother wore that is now speckled with rust.

- A photo of my dad before he left to fight the Nazis in WWII.

- A toy pistol I was given by my college dorm mates to help me “keep order” after they elected me dorm president.

- A letterman patch presented by a coach (my late husband) and his team in honor of my “contributions” to their winning a championship. (I had washed their sweaty towels.)

- And a poem by Anonymous: “When I’m dead I hope it’s said, her sins were many, but her columns were read.”

Nothing in that box may mean much to anyone, except me, but keepsakes are treasures for the memories they preserve. We keep them, hold them close and never want to let them go.

That’s why I keep that bench, for its history, the stories it tells me, all the people and moments and happiness it recalls. It’s a keepsake that won’t fit in a box. I’ll ask the movers to take good care of it next week when they move it back into a house where it sat for more than 30 years.

We will all move someday from this world to the next, and we won’t need a truck to do it. We’ll take nothing with us and leave behind a memory of the life we lived, the mistakes we made, and all the love and kindness and grace we tried to show.

That memory might not be a treasure in the eyes of the world, but maybe, if we’re lucky, someone will keep it and hold it close and never let it go.