

Volunteer Newsletter

December 2022

A note from Ali Maguire Volunteer Coordinator



Wearing a crimson dress lined with white, fur, a matching floppy hat adorned by a fleecy, white ball at its tip, and a pair of tall black boots, I sat at a local eatery into the evening on December 24th. My Mrs. Clause outfit was initially purchased to keep me warm while running in winter road-races and had morphed into a holiday spirit staple. I am a determined winter cheer-spreader which takes people closest to me aback, as I am equally vocal about my dislike of the cold, chilly, winter months. If I can't *will* mother nature into a change of plans then I might as well embrace the beauty she provides.

Kennebunkport is similar to every other small town in Maine in the winter; the sidewalks receive fewer steps but the voices attached carry a louder echo through quiet streets. As the chilled atmosphere holds tight to wisps of warm air their bodies release, vocalizations turn into harmony. There's an undeniable comfort that winter brings. A sense of community, a togetherness that binds us when the masses of tourists have left. An irony appreciated by every local community in which closeness lives.

As I sat at the horseshoe shaped bar enjoying a wintery night out with my husband I tuned into a family behind me. Mom, dad, and four small children dressed in festive clothing. Dad stopped and whispered to his youngest "Look, do you see Mrs. Clause?" Vanity edged to my emotional forefront and before having time to think, I turned and knelt to meet the young toddlerface-to-face. He was

joined by his siblings and introduced myself, 'I am actually Santa's niece.' In imaginative whim I fabricated an epic story about the North Pole, the lives of elves, reindeer training, and threw in at the very end a reminder to be sure to go to bed early so that, "Santa" can stay on schedule.

The following year dressed again, in the same manner and in the same location, the very same family recognized me instantly. The tale I spun the previous year grew. And with each following year we continued to meet until a five year tradition had weaved itself into our fabric. A bit of magic dust spread both figuratively and literally. An act designed for jolliness masked a responsibility I had not pondered until those four sets of eyes looked upon in with awe.

My children and I have never had a real conversation about Santa - or who fills the role; his presence morphed into an essence without ever really speaking of it. When they were young they would ask, 'Is Santa real?' I would respond, 'Only if you believe.'

There is a sweet and bitter truth that I never really let myself settle into thinking deeply about. Consideration of what it means to believe and the choice to do so. The choice to believe gives credence to possibility and when that passes, a death follows - *to give up an idea is also to mourn its loss*. I imagine they never revisited the topic seeking a more definitive answer because the glimmer of hope imagination brings nurtures the heart and beckons the soul to look upward.

When I looked at myself through the eyes of the children awed by their encounter with a close relative of Santa, I saw their eagerness to accept this interaction as real. In their minds, I was every bit a piece of the season's magic as their beloved St. Nick. In that spirit I realize the responsibility of the spritely ensemble I don each year. To me it's a fun way to beckon the holiday season, for a child it is an ethereal encounter welcoming them into a magical world, one in which they believe to their very core.



When I first started writing I had intended to talk more about the challenges of allowing yourself to feel joy and abandon guilt when others are feeling lost but I find myself pivoting to a different ending. The holiday season seems the most appropriate time to pay homage to the enchanted robes *you* each wear to make the lives of others better.

You bring a piece of joy and lift the spirits of our patients and their families; sometimes amidst a backdrop of your own cloaked personal struggles.

I feel as though I can speak for the families and for the entire team at Northern Light when I say, though the colder months of New England are ones we actively engage in willing good cheer, yours is a vocation dedicated through all seasons. For that, a humble, 'thank you,' is inadequate. - Given with genuine sincerity never-the-less.

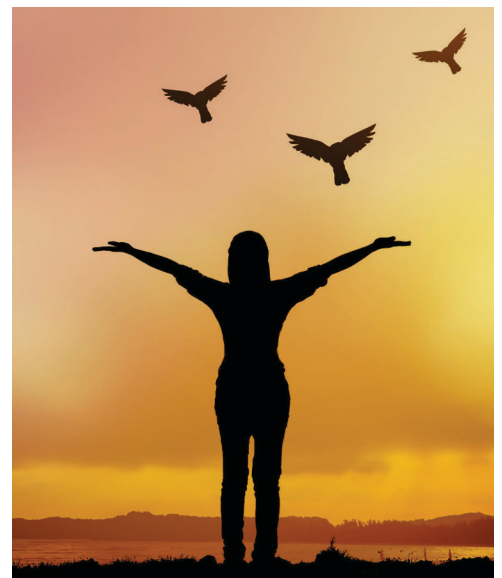
The crimson outfit, lined in white fur with matching hat, tall, black boots evokes a symbol that is a part of our culture and recognizable without needing introduction- a piece of collective experience. - It'll never be quite as tangible if one has not encountered the true generosity of someone's presence, their gift of time. *To all our volunteers* - while the holiday season is designed to evoke merriment, your magic is spread through acts of kindness throughout the year, without decoration, and without disguise.

May this season of festival bring blessings to you and all your loved ones.

A note from Jane Cornman Bereavement Coordinator

The darker days can make life harder for people who are grieving. Here are some upcoming grief support opportunities. Please spread the word if you know anyone who would benefit:

- **Thursday Morning Drop-In Grief Support Meetings:** Bangor area online meetings continue on the first and third Thursdays of the month, 9-10:30 am. Upcoming meetings will take place on December 1 and 15 and January 5 and 19. If you are interested in attending, contact Jane Cornman (207-944-5534 or orjcornman@northernlight.org).
- **6-week Tuesday Evening Grief Support Group - Starts January 10 on Zoom:** The early months of a new year can be very hard. To help with this dark time of year we are offering an online support group starting January 10th and meeting weekly for 6 weeks. We will meet on Zoom from 6 to 7:30 pm. Attending all six meetings is recommended. To sign up for this group or for more information please speak with Linda Hopkins (207-400-8714) or Jane Cornman (207-944-5534).





A note from Robin Haynes Volunteer Coordinator

Aroostook County Volunteer support meeting

Monday, December 05

6:30-7:30pm

Via MS Teams

COVID Updates

Current Northern Light Home Care & Hospice safety guidelines:

- If a Patient and family can remain masked during a visit, a volunteer may wear a medical grade mask.
- If a Patient and family cannot remain masked for a whole visit, a volunteer must wear an N95 and goggles or shield.

Reminders

Please be cognizant of any compliance paperwork or documentation that your Volunteer Coordinator has asked for and send it along in a timely manner.

Reflection

What are you grateful for?

We encourage you to share your thoughts with your region's volunteer coordinator for future publication in Volunteer Newsletters.

Fun Fact

' Reindeers Can See in the Dark

Reindeers that live above the Arctic circle live in total darkness for weeks at a time. According to the Meteorological Office of the UK, reindeer have adapted to this in a unique way. A small area of tissue behind the animal's retina changes color from gold in the summer to blue in the winter and this allows them to detect ultraviolet light and to see in the dark.'

[9 Heart-Warming Winter Fun Facts - Goodnet](#)



Bangor area Volunteer Support Meetings will reconvene in January.

Happiest of Holidays!

Volunteer Reading Recommendations

When Breath Becomes Air - Paul Kalanithi (225 pages)

If faced with needing a neurosurgeon, I think everyone who reads this memoir would agree that Dr. Kalanithi would be the doctor they'd want in charge of their care. As well as being a compassionate physician, Kalanithi was an extremely gifted writer. While I felt sadness as this young, gifted man declined, I still thoroughly enjoyed reading this book.

As the author transitioned from health care provider to health care consumer, he takes the reader through a myriad of challenges he faced after his diagnosis of stage IV lung cancer. A non-smoker, Kalanithi's medical training came to the forefront as he began to notice his labored breathing, weight loss, and chest pain. He knew intuitively what he was facing.

As his wife, Lucy (also a physician) detailed in the book's Epilogue, the cancer journey so eloquently chronicled is NOT the experience of an individual, but rather that of a family.

With grace and poignancy, Kalanithi is able to have his readers, too, sit vigil as his life comes to its inevitable close. The strength with which he lived – and died – was moving. The urgency of racing against time (to be cured? To finish this memoir? To spend time with his infant daughter?) was present throughout. Sad, yet enlightening, When Breath Becomes Air teaches us what true courage is.

Recommended by Margaret H.- Volunteer, South Portland

Survival Lessons - Alice Hoffman (83 pages)

In this easy read, the author writes of her experience with breast cancer. Like so many who are suddenly forced to face their mortality, Hoffman finds her diagnosis difficult to believe. As a mother of two young children at the time of diagnosis, Hoffman turned to writing to remind herself, "of the beauty of life, something that's all too easy to overlook during the crisis of illness."

Among the survival lessons offered TO HELP WITH LIVING in the face of death are: Choose Whose Advice You Take, Choose To Plan for the Future, Choose To Accept Sorrow, and Choose To Dream. In recognizing she still had choice, in spite of her diagnosis, Hoffman, I believe, felt empowered. Like those of us who enjoy good health, the author came to realize that options helped her feel more in control. And feeling somewhat in control can be infinitely comforting when facing a serious illness.

Recommended by Margaret H.- Volunteer, South Portland