

## In Memoriam

### **Elizabeth Ann (Betty) Rice 1931-2025**

There are thousands of current and former H.O.P.E. members who are indebted to Betty Rice. Many have heard about her involvement in the early days of H.O.P.E. For those that do not know Betty's involvement, let me share her story.



Betty was widowed in her early forties after losing her husband Joe. She moved back to NJ with her two sons (after many moves both domestic and international with her family while Joe served in the Air Force). After returning to NJ, she wanted a new life and went back to school and earned two degrees in Social Work (BSW and MSW) from Rutgers University.

In the summer of 1977, Bruce MacNaul, Esq., soon to be elected Camden County Surrogate, seeing his mother suffering from the loss of his father, wanted to help those who had lost their spouses but knew of nothing available. He soon met Betty Rice, and the two began a series of conversations about the issue. Soon others joined and in 1978 they formed a

501(c)(3) non-profit corporation; the seeds for H.O.P.E. were planted.

Not long thereafter Sunny Lawrence, a recently widowed woman who was a registered nurse with a master's degree in counseling, joined Betty.

The two attended workshops and read whatever materials were available to learn more about grief and the grieving process. Working together, they then revised the program into its present format, a series of four ten-week sessions, providing a year-long support system for those suffering the loss of their beloved spouses or partners.

These two women continued for years giving freely of their time, their energy, and their hearts to the organization they loved. They not only planted the seeds of an idea to help the grieving, but they also nurtured it, guided it, and grew it into what it is today — by far the largest and arguably the most effective provider of grief support to those who have lost a loved spouse or partner. It is estimated that well over 12,000 people have been helped by the H.O.P.E. program.

Today, H.O.P.E. is very different from those seeds planted in 1978. There is an office and Board staffed by volunteers, and there are now 13 Chapters spread throughout central and southern New Jersey. Having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, HOPE continued to meet via ZOOM to help the bereaved. We learned that the virtual meetings worked well and expansion beyond New Jersey was possible.

Weekly meetings are run by dedicated people who have suffered the same loss. These heroes of H.O.P.E. volunteer as group leaders, committing to one day or night a week for forty weeks per year. Many return year after year, paid only by the

**Continued on next page**

## Betty Rice (continued from previous page)

satisfaction that they get from guiding those along the path that others from H.O.P.E. have helped them walk in their time of need.

Modern day H.O.P.E. is a much larger organization staffed by over sixty volunteers dedicated to keep the dream of Bruce MacNaul, Betty Rice, and Sunny Lawrence alive and to stay true to their mission of providing as much support as possible to as many grieving spouses/partners as possible.

Betty's daughter Jane shared with me: "Betty looked back on her HOPE days as some of the best and I know she enjoyed continuing to keep up even after she was officially retired".

Betty's greatest joy was her family. She is survived by a very large family: sister, brother, four children (and spouses, sixteen grandchildren, twenty-seven great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren.

Betty was a true Phillies fan, so in her honor, always root for the Phillies. Betty honored HOPE by requesting donations to the organization she loved. Her daughter Jane told me that not long before her passing, she was planning her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party.



We must remember and honor Betty for years giving freely of her time, energy, and heart to the organization she loved. Betty was recognized by the Board of Directors as Director Emeritus many years ago.

Thank you Betty for all you have done for HOPE. It would not be the organization it is without your visions and dreams. Rest in Peace.

***By Carolyn Albertson***

## Hopeful Thoughts for the New Year

- I promise to let the remote-control rest ..... it's been through enough.
- This year I'll read more library books and especially restaurants menus.
- I resolve to stay young at heart even if my knees disagree.
- I'm stepping into the New Year with love in my heart and coffee in my hand.
- I'll continue to honor the past while more confidently courting the future and making room for unexpected grace.
- A New Year ..... a chance to grow around my memories, not away from them.
- I trust that love can remain and life can bring contentment again.
- The New Year will be welcomed with remembrance and new possibilities.
- With others, the New Year will provide the opportunity to pursue the things that I love.
- I will always be doing something important by responding to life in the best way that I can for as long as I can.

***Submitted by Ralph Martinez, Contributing Writer***



## Christmas Surprise

The holidays are a special time of year when families gather and celebrate in various ways which usually includes many traditions like baking, decorating, shopping, wrapping gifts, listening to and singing favorite holiday songs, attending religious services, and finally ending with a festive dinner. Of course the main focus during all this is the children.

When our children were adults and had families of their own, we would travel to spend the holidays wherever they were living at the time.

December of 2010 was no exception. Our son and his family were living in North Carolina so several days prior to Christmas we drove down there to spend Christmas and then planned to drive back the day after. That gave us a good amount of time to enjoy their company in addition to helping them with any final preparation for the joyous occasion.



Since our grandchildren were then in their teenage years, getting up at the crack of dawn to see if Santa had arrived was no longer an issue. Instead, they liked sleeping later in the morning rather than being eager to open presents. That year was no exception. However, that's when circumstances started to change.

It was then that I received a phone call from a good friend wishing all of us a Merry Christmas followed by telling me not to even attempt to come home because they had gotten a snowstorm starting on Christmas Eve and continuing into Christmas morning, leaving about 24 inches behind. When the phone call ended, I shared the information with my family.

Shortly thereafter, miraculously it started snowing in North Carolina which, fortunately, is something that doesn't happen too frequently. Whenever a measurable snow does fall down there, it paralyzes the town because there is no equipment available to clear the roads and parking lots throughout the area. Of course no one had been checking the weather forecast since we had been pre-occupied with holiday preparations.



It didn't take long before the snow began to leave a coating of snow on the ground. With that, our grandchildren were extremely excited and announced that this was the first time they ever had snow on Christmas Day. They quickly donned their snow attire and went outdoors, taking the dog with them, twirling around and sticking out their tongue to catch the falling snow flurries while, at first, the dog didn't quite know what to make of the situation. They were suddenly like little kids. This snowfall brought the greatest joy to them, much more than any present they had received earlier in the day.

As the snow, which totaled about 6 inches, continued that day, we lost power for a brief period of time, but that didn't deter the spirit of things because it became such a beautiful, peaceful sight with all the outdoor Christmas lights peeking through the glistening snow covered shrubs and branches.

Finally we checked the weather forecast only to find that many of the roads and highways were closed due to a white out. Needless to say, it was necessary to stay there an extra couple of days before attempting to drive home.

Even with creating the necessity to alter plans, there is definitely something magical about having a **White Christmas**.

I hope all of you have a **HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!!!**

**Submitted by Kathleen Mitchell, Contributing Writer for the Beacon**

### **What You Need To Know (Fact checking)**

- Snow fell on December 25-26, 2010
- Most of North Carolina saw anywhere from five inches to over a foot of snow
- Snow on the ground for Christmas is very rare for most of the state

By Chief Meteorologist Gary Stepenson Spectrum News 1

## Honoring Their Memory: Turning Shared Dreams Into a Legacy Plan

*By Russ Nesovich*

Losing a spouse reshapes your world in ways no one can prepare you for. The dreams you built together for family, travel, retirement, or community may feel suddenly out of reach. But many people find comfort and purpose in creating a legacy plan that carries those shared dreams forward.

### Why Legacy Planning Matters

A legacy plan is more than documents, it is a way to honor your loved one's values, protect your family, and continue the meaningful work you once planned together.

#### It can help you:

- Keep their memory alive in purposeful ways
- Supporting children or grandchildren
- Continue charitable or community commitments
- Bring clarity and peace of mind as you move forward

### How to Begin

#### 1. Reflect on What Meant the Most

Ask yourself: *"What part of our life together do I want to preserve?"*

This might be a cause you supported, a family goal, or a meaningful tradition. These reflections become the foundation of your legacy plan.

#### 2. Update Key Documents

Review your Will, trust, beneficiary designations, and powers of attorney to ensure they reflect your current wishes. These updates protect your family and ensure your spouse's memory is honored in the way you choose.

#### 3. Create a Living Legacy

There are many heartfelt ways to celebrate their memory:

- A memorial scholarship

- Donations to a favorite local charity or place of worship
- A charitable trust or long-term fund
- A legacy gift included in your estate plan

Even small gestures can have lasting impact.

### 4. Share Your Intentions

Let family or trusted friends know your plans. These conversations bring comfort and clarity and help ensure your loved one's legacy is carried out as you envision.

### You Don't Have to Do This Alone

Legacy planning is a gentle way to turn grief into purpose, honoring the past while protecting your future. Our team is here to help you take each step with clarity and compassion.



**Editor's Note:** If you have any questions for Russ, please email them to: [calbertson719@aol.com](mailto:calbertson719@aol.com) They will be forwarded to him.

Russ has also agreed to speak at any HOPE Chapter in Burlington, Camden, or Gloucester Counties. He can tailor his presentation to meet your chapter's wishes. Please contact Melissa Yost (Director of Community Outreach) to schedule Russ. She can be reached at the following:

Nesovich Law, LLC (609) 707 0532



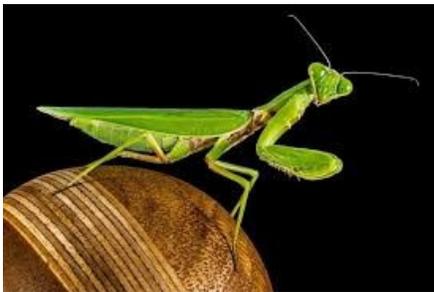
## Memories of a Christmas

It was Christmas Eve of 2005. We drove over to our daughter's house; the car packed with gifts. As soon as we stepped inside, we were greeted by the scent of pine - her family had bought a live Christmas tree from a local farm that week.

Dinner was the Feast of the Seven Fishes; a tradition started years ago by my mother-in-law in South Philadelphia. She had taught us that the meal wasn't just about the food - it was about family, memory, and gratitude.

Later, when the little ones were finally snug in their beds, we bundled up and drove home to do the same. The next morning we returned for the grand finale - the gift exchange. As soon as we walked in, the beautiful tree that had stood so proud the night before was gone and instead there was some commotion instead,

It turned out that overnight, in the warmth of the house, a hidden nest of praying mantis eggs had hatched. Dozens of tiny green mantises were now exploring the room, clinging to wrapping paper and ornaments. Everyone was scurrying around trying to catch them.



The tree might have been gone, but the laughter that filled the house made one of the most unforgettable Christmas mornings we ever had.

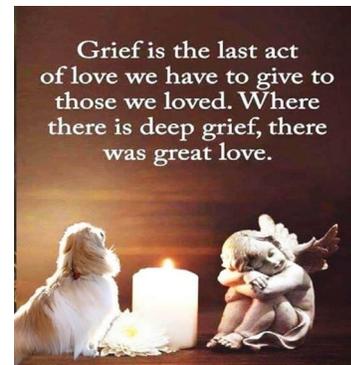
Even now, whenever we think back to 2005, we laugh remembering when Christmas came alive in the most unexpected way.

**Submitted by Nancy Gasbarro, graduate of the Pitman Chapter**

## Who Bart Wants to Be

I guess at the end of the day, the way I see it, is that I have to figure out who I want Bart Fair (with Mary always in his heart but not physically by his side) to be. I want to be the best "widower" I can be, the best friend, father, grandfather, uncle and sibling, without the love of my life to help me. And I want grief to be my friend.

I have become a strong proponent of this concept. I use a mobile meditation app and about seven months after Mary's death I had listened to a series of meditations on loss and grief. There were about eight sessions. I had listened to the first three and after each one, I kind of said to myself that they didn't make much sense to me. "Make space in my heart and mind for grief", "Sit on a park bench with my grief", and then "Take a walk with my grief". And then the presenter asked a rhetorical question: What's the first grief emotion in this moment that comes up? Obviously, there is no one correct answer. I imagine common answers would be "sadness, loss, fear, etc.". The first and immediate word that came to my head was "love". I subscribe to a website called Tender Hearts, attend the Marlton HOPE grief support group and have done a lot of independent reading. I very much understand the concept that intense love results in intense grief. My wife, Mary, and I had a 53-year love affair and marriage. We loved each other deeply. I was 75 years old when she passed away at the age of 82, fifteen months ago.



When I heard myself answering the rhetorical question with the word "love", it immediately changed my grief perspective. I have grief because I had love. And grief has become my friend because it represents my love for Mary. The love that Mary and I had during her lifetime is priceless. And if carrying some level of grief in my heart and head or sitting down with and walking with grief for the rest of my life is the price of that love, I'm ready to pay the price. This is probably what I would have offered to the discussion on Monday. After Mary's diagnosis of stage 4 cancer, she and I discussed the future and I promised her I would honor her and not curl up in a corner in fetal position, sucking my thumb. We had 20 months together after her diagnosis and fell even more in love. I miss her every day but my purpose in life going forward is to keep my promise to her and be the best "Widower Bart" I can be.

Thanks for reading.

**Bart Fair is a member of the Marlton Hope Chapter. We thank him for sharing this special story.**

## Random Thoughts

“Choosing to speak in person or on the phone instead of texting can remind us that human voices spark deep, human connections, boosting the immune system and uplifting our mood. Face to face interactions remind us that we are valued and heard, and that we are capable of providing that crucial validation for others.”

Marlaina Donato, author

“My secret to staying sharp is simple. I am constantly curious. .... Our brain’s chemistry changes when we become curious. Curiosity is what sharpens our intellectual powers and keeps us mentally active well into our golden years.”

Anthony D. Fredericks, Ed.D., educator, author

“Curiosity and humor are key ingredients to a meaningful life.”

Albert Einstein, Theoretical physicist

“A person’s uniqueness is not having nothing in common with others; instead, human uniqueness is based on openness to all others.”

Gabriel Moran, Ph.D., educator

“True fulfillment lies not in the applause of others but in the quiet moments of self-reflection and introspection when we confront the fundamental truths of our existence.”

Talia Pollack, writer, philosopher

“Happiness is not a solid object that we can pursue and attain. It is no more than the sign, the effect, the reward (we might say) of appropriately directed action: a by-product of effort.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, philosopher, paleontologist, priest

**Shared by Ralph Martinez, Contributing Writer**

**Editor’s Note: I am always amazed at all the thoughts that come from Ralph’s mind.**

## Holiday Reminders

1. Holidays after a loss are always hard. Go easy on yourself.
2. It might be a hard day, but you have survived hard days. You will survive today.
3. You have permission to change your mind about plans, take breaks, leave early, and prioritize taking care of yourself.
4. You are not responsible to meet anyone else's holiday wants at the expense of your own. You might disappoint people, but people will survive disappointment.
5. Guilt about enjoying holidays sometimes comes up in grief. If it does, remember:
6. Your connection to your loved one does not live in your pain. It lives in your love for them, your memories, and the way they live on in your life.
7. Your ability to find gratitude and make space for joy in a world without your loved one is not a betrayal.
8. Your grief and your love for the person you've lost will always live fully and deeply alongside your joy.

## Hanukkah



In 2025, Hanukkah begins at sundown on **Sunday, December 14**, and concludes at nightfall on **Monday, December 22**. The Jewish "Festival of Lights" is an eight-day celebration that commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

## Kwanzaa



Kwanzaa is an annual celebration of African-American culture from December 26 to January 1, culminating in a communal feast called Karamu, usually on the sixth day.

## My New Year's Eve Memories

**Young Child:** My parents who were active members at the Portage Post 496 American Legion (Kent, Ohio) always attended the New Year's Eve party there. The highlight was that our parents always brought us the party favors and hats from the party. The picture below is New Year's Day 1954. I was three years old, and it looks like I had done too much partying the night before. Don't you all love the 1950s red kitchen décor?



We would have an older woman (and neighbor) babysit my brother Jim and me.) If I remember correctly, mom would feed us dinner, (TV dinners to be exact.) We thought those were really cool, even though they were not very tasty. Mom bought snacks for us to eat during the evening. I doubt if we stayed up until midnight.

**Elementary School and Pre-teen Years:** My parents still went to the Legion party, and we still had the same babysitter. We had lots of snacks and would watch TV. This was before Dick Clark hosted the events in New York City. Guy Lombardo was the host, and the show was broadcast from the Waldorf Astoria Ballroom. As midnight neared, we would grab pots and pans to and went outside to bang them. Our neighborhood friends Paul and Janice, who lived across the street, were outside in front of their house making their own noise.



Banging pots and pans on New Year's is a tradition said to banish evil spirits and bad luck for the new year. The loud noise is meant to scare away goblins or other "bad" elements from the past year, creating a fresh start. As we grew older, my brother and Paul would light firecrackers that created more noise.

**Fast Forward to later years...**

After going out with high school and college friends to "nightclubs", I soon realized that the cover charge to get in was not worth it and everything was so loud, noisy, and seemed like I had to force myself to have a good time. I honestly did not like that era. It was more fun just to stay home and party with friends,

**Adult:** I was determined to pursue one item from my bucket list by celebrating New Year's Eve in Times Square. I do not remember exactly what year that was, but sometime in the 90's. Three friends shared the same idea. I booked hotel rooms for us, and we all met there. We determined that we did not need to be in the cold all day. We walked over to Times Square area around 10:00 PM and found a well-organized event. Police opened up areas, block by block and controlled how many people would be let into that block. We ended up about ten blocks north on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. There were no restrooms, so we had limited our intake of beverages. The only restrooms were in restaurants, and there was a requirement to make a purchase to use them. Also, once you left your "block", you could not go back in.



We did see the ball drop and screamed "Happy New Year" at midnight and then walked back to the hotel. The four of us were glad we did go to Times Square for New Year's Eve, but none of us ever felt the need to do it again. I was happy that one item was checked off my bucket list.

This year, as I have done for many years, I will try to stay up until midnight, but if that does not happen, it is no big deal to me.



No matter if you celebrate New Year's Eve or not, I hope you choose the way you want to honor the incoming year by remembering your blessings and looking forward with positive thoughts.

**Submitted by Carolyn Albertson**

## Guilt Traps

Would you ever want to deny a friend's chance at happiness? I'm thinking the answer to this question is, of course, not. Why would you wish a friend to be unhappy, especially if they had just lost someone they loved? Instead, you would want your friend to be able to work through their grief and begin a path forward to find purpose and a sense of hope for the future once again. Why then do we feel guilty as we work through our own grief and begin to forge a path forward to find happiness after our own loss of our spouse?

There are a number of ways we can fall into feeling guilty after losing our spouse/partner. There's the guilt that we didn't do enough to prevent the loss in the first place, we didn't speak up to doctors, or we didn't press to follow another form of medical treatment. We may feel guilty if we had to make the final decision to withhold artificial means to keep our spouse alive to end their suffering even when there was no hope of recovery. Perhaps we feel that we weren't supportive enough in some way or weren't there with them when they died. The list goes on and on. The problem is, we can't change what happened and berating ourselves over any of these issues doesn't accomplish anything except to make us miserable. Getting stuck in the endless cycle of guilt prevents us from breaking out of it and beginning to heal.

Then, there's another form of guilt we encounter as we begin to try to heal from our loss. Attending H.O.P.E., I found a way to connect with others who were all grieving after the death of their spouses. The stories were heartfelt and painful, but as time passed, I began to find strength in sharing this bond with the rest of the group. I was not alone in my grief and fears for the future. Members of the group offered suggestions and comfort to each other. I began to see a way forward out of my grief and to begin to heal. As the months passed, I formed new friendships and a social life emerged outside of H.O.P.E. with them. Was it possible to enjoy these times without feeling guilty? Wasn't I supposed to be in mourning now? If a friend said this to you, you would tell them of course not. Your friend would be happy for you so why aren't you allowed to feel that way because you are enjoying yourself once again? Shake off that guilt trap and go for it.

And as time goes on, sometimes an unexpected thing can happen for some people. A new relationship forms with someone from the past or present and the guilt trap kicks into high gear all

over again. How could this be? Am I diminishing the memory of my spouse? How can I possibly be feeling happy about this now? I am so confused by all of this. What will my family say? What will my friends think? There's a lot to unpack here, for sure. First and foremost, is there any reason why you shouldn't be happy once again? Would your spouse have wished you unhappiness? You know the answer to both questions is, of course, not. Chances are your friends will be pleased to see you moving forward and wish you well. Families may need time to adjust, no doubt. Be patient with them and give them a chance to get used to the new relationship. What is important is that you are finding enjoyment and hope for the future once again.

So, as the year winds down to a close and a new year comes upon us, an opportunity awaits. I'm not big on New Year resolutions, but I think that it's worth vowing to be kinder to yourself and to set aside the heavy burden of guilt. Lean on family and friends who support you. They will wish you happiness as your spouse would have. You would want a friend to find their way forward, so why shouldn't you?



I wish you peace in your journey forward and all the best in the new year.

***Submitted by Sue Van Sant***

***Editor's Note: This is Sue's second submission to the Beacon. Her stories are so well written well and really touch widows and widowers. I look forward to additional gems from her.***



## The Juke Box

This month's musical selection is "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby. It was recommended by Kathleen Mitchell, Contributing Writer for the Beacon.

With 50 million copies sold, not only is Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" the best-selling Christmas song of all time, it's also the best-selling single ever, according to Guinness World Records.

Year after year, artists and songwriters have been trying to go one better than Bing Crosby. His recording of "White Christmas" is ubiquitous. Kathleen stated, "Somehow it always brings tears to my eyes when I hear it."



To play this selection, click on the link below  
<https://youtu.be/gCaKsTKIzX4?si=iJLTBHSI8C83GMHE>



If you have a "favorite", send it to [calbertson719@aol.com](mailto:calbertson719@aol.com) Eventually, your song will be played...on The Juke Box. Please be patient as we place songs received in a queue (first come, first played). All genres of music are acceptable (rhythm & blues, soul, funk, doo wop, jazz, rock & roll, Broadway, Oldies, opera, etc.).

We hope that we will be hearing from you and that you will find yourself singing and swaying to the music on The Juke Box. Best of all no quarters (\$\$\$) are needed.

## The Senior Corner

I CONSIDER A SUCCESSFUL DAY  
ONE WHERE I DIDN'T SPILL  
ANYTHING ON MY SHIRT



All of my  
childhood punishments  
have become my  
adult goals:  
Sitting down & minding my  
own business.  
Eating my veggies,  
staying home, having  
a nap and going to  
bed early.



Just once I'd like to read  
a medication label that says:

**Warning!** may cause  
permanent  
weight loss,  
increased  
energy  
and  
wrinkle  
removal.



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**We Remember Them**

Have you ever  
missed someone  
so badly that  
even the thought  
of them makes  
you cry?

**Grief is Lonely**

I miss you  
enormously when I am  
alone...but I miss  
you even more when I  
am surrounded by  
everyone because  
I know you should still  
be here too.

**December Holidays 2025**

- National Pearl Harbor Day – December 7
- Hanukkah – December 14 - 22
- Christmas – December 25
- Kwanzaa – December 26 – January 1
- December 31 – New Year's Eve

**December 23**



(From the Seinfeld TV Show)

**THE DAY I LOST YOU**

+ I also lost me  
+ I've been trying to  
+ find myself again  
+ but it's hard  
+ it's hard because  
+ YOU WERE A HUGE PART  
+ OF MY LIFE +  
+ Not having you here is so painful  
+ I'M JUST NOT ME ANYMORE

