What to do with all the possessions? by Tim Soucy, Bereavement Coordinator

After a loved one dies, we face a natural, unavoidable, and difficult transition. Our relationship changes from one of presence to one of memory. For many people memories of our loved ones are connected to possessions and deciding what to do with their things can be a daunting process that is a difficult part of grief.

Like so many other things in life there is no “one size fits all” approach when it comes to caring for our loved one’s physical possessions. Our unique circumstances will often dictate how much time we can take. For some, there will be the need to clean out an apartment, a room at a facility, or to prepare a home for sale as quickly as possible. Other time constraints may be geographic or may come from family, employment, and other responsibilities that are a part of life. For others, circumstances will allow them to take more time with deciding what to do.

Family members will often have differing opinions on how much time should be taken going through possessions, what to do with them, and who should get certain items. These differing opinions are impacted by the ways people grieve. Holding on to things is one way we try to hold on to the person who has died. That can be a strongly felt need for some people and not for others. For some, letting go of something may feel like throwing a bit of that person away, while for others it feels ok to let something go.

Here are a few possible ways to handle the decisions that must be made with our loved ones’ possessions:

- Find a family member who could use it.
- Find a charity or good cause to donate to.
- Take a photo and let it go.
- Allow yourself a limited collection of sentimental objects.
- Wait. What is hard at 3 months, might not be so hard at 15 months.
- Keep something close that helps you feel connected. Treasure it.

While writing this article, I have become profoundly aware of the many possessions I have in my office from deceased loved ones. I have photos, hand tools, books, trinkets, and other items that if placed in a yard sale I may not be able to even give away.

However, they continue to trigger memories of my loved ones. Holding something close can be a comfort for some while for others so can letting things go. Many of us struggle to find a balance. This can be especially hard when working together as a family deciding what to do, what to keep, and what to let go. This is one of the many challenges we face with our grief. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your Northern Light Home Care & Hospice Bereavement Coordinator for support if you are struggling with this or any other part of your grief journey.