



Caring Connections

A hope and comfort in grief program

Volume 16, Issue 3

Summer 2012

Grief Line: (801) 585-9522

A Message from the Director Kathie Supiano



“Will it ever end? Will I ever be happy again?”

These are but two of the many questions griever ask and bring to our grief support groups. At *Caring Connections*, we try to create that safe place of acceptance where these questions are welcomed—though certainly not

always answered. We are grateful for the skilled and compassionate professionals who give their time to facilitate our grief support groups offering support and guidance on the journey of grief. In one of this issue’s feature articles, Amy Florian describes the elusive search for “closure.” Recognizing that grief is never “done,” Amy instead counsels growth toward acceptance.

We know that gathering with others fosters movement toward acceptance—not only in our grief support groups, but in other shared activities. We have just celebrated our annual *Seeds of Remembrance* event—a gathering of grieving persons who find hope in remembering. We have several important events in the upcoming months. We will be joining Lora Erickson (a.k.a. “The Blonde Runner”) in the Saturday, June 30 2nd Annual Race for Infant and Pregnancy Loss and the 2012 Larkin Charity Golf Classic will be held Wednesday, August 29. You can find more information about these events in this newsletter. Activities such as these support our programs and mission to provide excellent bereavement care to those in grief. Please join us for both events if you can—but certainly join us in thanking those who make it possible to offer our

programs: The Blonde Runner, the Clark L. Tanner Foundation, Bio-Clean of Utah, and our sustaining sponsor, Larkin Mortuary.

We welcome your feedback and ideas, and are grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely,
Kathie Supiano, Director

“Gratitude is the memory of the heart.”
- Jean Baptiste Massieu

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Grief Group Session Information
- 3 Announcements
News in Bereavement Research
- 4 Meet Our Participants
Book Review
- 5 Meet Our Facilitators
Meet Our Students
- 6 A Grief Primer
By Paul Moon
- 8 Chasing After Closure
By Amy Florian
- 9 Help for Helpers
- 10 *Caring Connections* in the Community
- 11 News in the Community

Upcoming Grief Groups Fall: Eight Weekly Sessions

Salt Lake City

**September 5 - October 24, 2012
(Wednesday Evenings)**
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (All groups)

**University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building**
10 South 2000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

This location offers seven types of grief groups, all in the evening:

- Children (7-11) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
- Adolescents (12-17) - Adjusting to the death of a loved one
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one (adult traditional)
- Adjusting to the death of a spouse or partner
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to suicide
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to murder
- Adjusting to the death of a loved one to perinatal loss

Midvale (South Salt Lake)

**September 6 - October 25, 2012
(Thursday Evenings)**
6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (Two groups)

UUHC Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (**traditional**), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to **suicide**.

Orem

**September 5 - October 24, 2012
(Wednesday Evenings)**
5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (Two groups)

University of Utah Parkway Health Center
145 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

Two adult grief groups for those adjusting to the death of a loved one (**traditional**), or adjusting to the death of a loved one to **suicide**.

Caring Connections Advisory Board

Kathie Supiano, Director
Shawna Rees, Administrator
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To register for any class or location, please call:
(801) 585-9522.

There is a fee of \$50. If this fee is a hardship, please notify *Caring Connections*. Scholarships are available.

Should there not be enough people registered for a particular group, the group may be postponed.

The mission of *Caring Connections* is to provide excellent evidence-based bereavement care to grieving persons in the intermountain west through clinician facilitated support groups, with particular attention to the care of families served by the University of Utah Hospitals and Clinics; and, in keeping with the academic mission of the University and the College of Nursing, to provide opportunity for clinical education in grief and loss to students in the health care professions, and to conduct research which promotes greater understanding of loss, grief and bereavement. **Visit us online at www.nursing.utah.edu/practice/caringconnections**

News in Bereavement Research

“Parental grief after a child’s drug death compared to other death causes: Investigating a greatly neglected bereavement population.” By William Feigelman, John R. Jordan & Bernard S. Gorman, *Omega*, 2011, Vol 63 (4), p. 219-316.

In this study, the authors compared and contrasted 571 parents who had lost children by various causes—suicide, drug-related deaths, accidental deaths and natural causes in terms of their grief difficulties, post-traumatic stress and other mental health problems and perceived social stigma. In comparing parents whose children died by suicide or drug-related death with those whose children died of accidents or natural causes, the suicide and drug-related death survivors had appreciably more difficulty in grief and with poor mental health. The authors conclude that powerful social stigma against drug use and mental illness remains a pervasive challenge for these parents as they experience less compassionate responses from others following their losses.

Announcements

Caring Connections to Release Third Edition of Dealing with Sudden and Unexpected Death: A Handbook for Survivors

Did you know that more than 43,000 North Americans die in motor vehicle crashes each year? That upwards of 29,000 complete suicide? That over 16,000 die from falls and more than 17,000 die by homicide? Death is never easy, but for families and friends affected by a sudden, violent death, grief is especially traumatic. Deaths caused by accidents, homicide and suicide typically seem premature, unjust, and wrong. Knowing what to do and where to go for help can make an important difference in the experience of grief due to a sudden death.

To assist in this effort, *Caring Connections* is publishing the third edition of *Dealing with Sudden and Unexpected Death: A Handbook for Survivors* written by Beth Vaughan Cole, PhD, APRN, Jan Harvey, MS, APRN and Leslie Miles, RN. The handbook, to be reissued this summer, includes a checklist of things to do in the first 24 hours after death, such as keep a notebook of information, make child care arrangements, notify friends and family, talk about organ donation and autopsies and locate a will. It also discusses initial grief responses like confusion and denial, what to expect of children at certain ages and how to help them understand death, and how to make funeral arrangements.

Caring Connections is grateful for the support of Bio-Clean of Utah and the Clark L. Tanner Foundation for their assistance in sponsoring the new edition. To reserve your copy today, contact *Caring Connections* at (801) 585-9522.

***Caring Connections* is able to carry out our mission thanks to the generous support of our sustaining sponsor:**

Over 125 Years Serving Utah Families



Mortuaries • Cemeteries • Mausoleums • Cremation Center

The melanoma that took the life of Janet Ellison’s husband Sandy on December 15, 2011 began with a tiny rough spot on his ear four years ago, and returned early last year with the appearance of two infected lymph nodes. A clinical trial for a promising new drug got their hopes up, but doctors found a brain tumor moving the diagnosis to stage 4, non-curable.

“The final months were bittersweet: increasing closeness and appreciation for each other—living each day as a gift while the news grew darker and more threatening,” says Janet. “I held Sandy’s hand as he took his last breath.”

During the first hours after Sandy’s death Janet carried out the necessary tasks: she called the mortuary once they were ready to let him go. She contacted family members and friends. She collaborated with Sandy’s daughter and sister on his obituary. Throughout, she wondered when the enormity of this life-changing event would hit her. “The symptoms of grief soon became obvious,” she says. “Trouble sleeping, inability to focus. I couldn’t find things. I couldn’t seem to finish anything. I felt happy remembering wonderful times, then felt guilty about feeling good. I was devastated, angry, upset and terribly alone and cried a lot. I had lost my life partner, my best friend, my anchor, and wondered if I was losing my mind.”

Janet’s hospice chaplain recommended she spend time with others experiencing the loss of a spouse and referred her to *Caring Connections*. “The group provided a safe, caring space where we could experience our loss and grief freely without the normal constraints of social, business or even family conversations,” Janet says. “We learned the value of actively ‘summoning’ our grief rather than holding it in. We cried together, we celebrated each others’ progress, we laughed together as we shared tips for dealing with friends and relatives whose sympathetic efforts had the reverse impact. We became more aware and realistic about our grief.”

Janet believes the group experience has provided her with a cushion of support for dealing with her loss. “I’ve become more grounded, more patient with myself and with others,” she says. “My grief is helping me feel more fully human, and for that I am grateful. I’m often reminded of my husband’s advice to friends during his last months: Be kind—to yourself and others.”

Book Review

***Here If You Need Me: A True Story* by Kate Braestrup, 2007, Back Bay Books**

Kate Braestrup’s memoir is an inspiring account of her husband’s sudden death and her own struggle with the necessary creation of a new and altered life. Braestrup poses the difficult questions all griever must ask, “How do we understand our lives? How do we understand that we have a sense of being; that we have a sense of self; that we know, create, anticipate; have relationships and ideas, memories and ambitions, and then die?” For anyone whose life has been irreversibly transformed in an instant, her tender-hearted and endearing account invites a shared exploration of the difficult questions of death and suffering. Braestrup herself grew into a new career as a chaplain to search and rescue workers with the Maine Forest Service, and has since accompanied many in their journeys of loss and devastation. Her story is one of finding a way to be grateful and giving despite tragedy.



Vicki Pond and her husband, Preston, have lived in Salt Lake City for five years. Though they have made homes in many states across the country, they raised their four children primarily in Denver, Colorado. Vicki's personal grief journey began in 1997 with her dad's unexpected death, followed closely by a car accident in which she broke her neck and her 17-year-old daughter was killed. As she recovered physically and spiritually she was intrigued with the grieving and healing process and drawn to help others understand and navigate this new path.

Vicki became a member of *Caring Connections* Advisory Board when she was working in the public education department at Intermountain Donor Services. "I had never attended a grief group myself, but I saw how much *Caring Connections* helped my niece who became a widow in her twenties. As I saw more and more needs for spiritual care, I felt impressed to look into Clinical Pastoral Education so I could be certified to facilitate groups and be with grieving people." She completed a year-long chaplain residency at the George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and is currently serving as an adjunct chaplain at Primary Children's Medical Center, and as a volunteer chaplain at Intermountain Medical Center.

"Some people ask me if working so much with pain is 'a downer,' but I find it to be quite the opposite," Vicki says. "To be with people who are hurting and watch them connect to their own feelings, to other people, and especially to their own spiritual resources is an exhilarating experience. I love to watch people own their feelings and open up to their sorrow, and see how it helps them better understand life and death and being human." She adds, "I feel honored and energized by the miracles of great love and healing that are all around us."

Meet Our Students

Age may bring a deeper wisdom and a richer bank of life experiences on which to reflect, but as Mary Martineau discovered while working with older adults in an independent and assisted living residence, managing the loss of a loved one is not something that becomes easier with age. Coping with a variety of losses, including the loss of a spouse, sibling, friend or adult child or grandchild, residents frequently sought tools to help them manage their grief.

"I wanted to be able to offer more than a shoulder to cry on," Mary says of her decision to set out on a journey to learn about loss and the grieving process. She spent two years volunteering with a local hospice, visiting hospice patients in their homes and recording their life stories and in 2009 completed a bachelor of social degree work from the University of Utah. Currently she is pursuing a master of social work with an emphasis in aging and an interest in bereavement and end-of-life care.

Recently Mary's journey led her to *Caring Connections*, where she co-facilitated the spousal loss group along with Kathie Supiano. "I learned so much from Kathie about supporting the group members as they moved through their grief," Mary says. "Walking beside them for part of their journey was an honor, and one I shall remember and call upon as I set out to help others in my career as a social worker."

A Grief Primer

By Paul Moon



This “grief primer” does not tell you all there is to know about grief, and it does not go into extensive detail about the various issues mentioned, but hopefully you will find something useful here—if not now, then perhaps in time to come. What you read below are contributions from griever I have spoken with over the years. These are some of the lessons they have learned from their grief experiences.

We grieve because loss and death are real. Yet a loss to one may not mean the same as it does to someone else. The significance and meaning of a death event will vary between perceivers. While it is no surprise that different people grieve differently, commonalities in grief do exist. Grieving will demand from us:

- Emotional attention
- Mental energy
- Physical energy
- Spiritual energy
- Time

Grief can be taxing; it is not something we can easily control or manipulate. Much of grief can feel abstract or surreal, yet the pain is palpable. When we grieve,

different aspects of our lives may be disrupted. For instance, we may find ourselves sleeping too much or not enough. Our appetites may become uncommonly voracious or suppressed. Our ability to concentrate may be compromised for a time. We may get disoriented on driving routes we have frequented for years. We may miss scheduled appointments of social engagements. We may easily lose track of things. It only makes sense that when we face significant losses, our minds become preoccupied with associated thoughts. This preoccupation eventually affects our interest and motivation, which in turn contributes to a sense of irregularity or disorientation concerning ongoing life activities.

There is no single formula or blueprint for how we grieve. None of us can grieve apart from who we are—our personalities, temperaments, stages in life, responsibilities, family backgrounds, religious beliefs and understandings of reality. The list can go on and on. We grieve in the way we are. This means that we should refrain from:

- Comparing our own grief intensity to other people’s grief intensity
- Comparing how long we grieve to how long other people seem to grieve
- Comparing our way (or ‘style’) of grieving to other people’s ways
- Comparing our pain to anyone else’s pain

To experience grief is to be human. As humans, we engage in life and build special attachments to people and things. As humans, we care for others and express our love to specific persons. As humans, we form habits toward certain relationships and establish expectations and assumptions about life. However, at the same time, we often take people and things for granted. We tend to push aside the fact that our human relationships will one day have to end.

Grief can reflect our love and care, our special attachments and our assumptions and expectations of reality. Grief can also reflect our regrets and guilt, our sense of missed opportunities and our denial of certain realities in the world (incurable diseases, fatal accidents, war, deadly crimes, etc.). Grief can be experienced with mixed emotions and an assortment of thoughts and memories. Some people have dreams associated with the loss, while other people don't dream at all. Grief can sometimes make us feel numb and at other times be poignant. Grief can be confusing and yet bring clarity. Some aspects of our grief experience may remain mysterious. There is still much of human grief that we do not fully understand.

When we grieve, we may be burdened with deep sadness, tearfulness or a sense of emptiness and helplessness. But in grief we are also presented with opportunities. You may be wondering what 'opportunities' can there ever be in grief?! Grief tends to afford us a special lens through which we see certain things anew. Issues from our past, present, and future can be re-evaluated and perceived in new ways. Our beliefs and values may also be reviewed and perhaps refined. All of this may lead to re-

“Someone once explained that grief is like a road sign along our journey through life that makes us re-think our direction.”

valuing our ongoing human relationships. Ultimately, our grief can nudge us to truly look at ourselves.

None of this is easy or necessarily inviting, but it is important. There are choices to make in grief. We can choose to be overwhelmed by our emotions only or we can choose to gradually allow our emotions to point us toward carefully re-considering where we've been, where we are now, and where we must go.

Someone once explained that grief is like a road sign along our journey through life that makes us re-think

our direction. It is as if we were oriented to a certain path, then become disoriented by losses. Though the reference to orientations (and life directions) may suggest grief experiences to be straightforward or linear, we must realize that grieving is much more complex. Indeed, grieving has been popularly promoted as a set of stages or steps to go through. It is not this clear cut, however. Rather, we are encouraged to view grief as being more of a back-and-forth process...somewhat like a see-saw with ups and downs characterized by unexpected and unpredictable fluctuations. The one sure thing about grief is that it cannot be totally planned. Grief is not something to be controlled or manipulated—as if we really could.

Our grief can eventually foster in us a deeper meaningfulness toward what we value in life. Some adult grievers have informed me that they learned the following lessons along the pathway of grief:

- Care and love more fully today
- Extend forgiveness today
- Ask for forgiveness today
- Show more patience today
- Minimize regrets by being gracious with words and deeds today
- Have conversations that need to be had with particular people today
- Express more appreciation to others today
- Say 'goodbyes' today
- Live and grieve and be grateful today

We may ask, “Why all today?” It is because this day may be the only ‘day’ for any of us. Tomorrow cannot be promised. Yesterday cannot be re-done. Today is given to us to live in.

Grief Digest Magazine, January 2011, Volume 8, Issue #3, page 13. Used with permission.



Chasing After Closure

By Amy Florian
Hoffman Estates, Illinois

I keep reading in the newspapers about survivors of tragedy or death seeking “closure.” Yet no one really defines what closure means, whether it is possible or how to get there.

For many in our society, closure means leaving grief behind, a milestone usually expected within a matter of weeks or months. Closure means being “normal,” getting back to your old self, no longer crying or being affected by the death. It means “moving on with life” and leaving the past behind, even to the extent of forgetting it or ignoring it. For we who have experienced death, this kind of closure is not only impossible but indeed undesirable.

Closure, if one even chooses to use the term, is actually more a process than a defined moment. The initial part of closure is accepting the reality. At first, we keep hoping or wishing that it weren’t true. We expect our loved ones to walk through the door. We wait for someone to tell us it was all a huge mistake. We just can’t accept that this person has died, that we will never physically see them again on earth, that we will not hear their voices, feel their hugs, or get their input on a tough decision. Usually it takes weeks or even months for the reality to finally sink in. We come to know, in both our heads and our hearts, that our loved one has died and is not coming back. We still don’t like it, but we accept it as true.

As the reality sinks in, we can more actively heal. We begin making decisions, and start to envision a life different from what we had planned before, a life in which we no longer expect our loved one to be there. We grow, struggle, cry and change. We form fresh goals. We face our loneliness. We feel the pain and loss, but except for short periods of time, we are not crippled by it. We also make a shift in memory.

Memories of our loved ones, rather than being painful as they were at first, sometimes make us smile or even laugh.

This healing phase takes a very long time, and involves a lot of back-and-forthing. We alternate between tears and joy, fears and confidence, despair and hope. We take two steps forward and one step back. We wonder whether we’ll ever be truly happy again, and often doubt that we will.

Eventually we realize we are taking the past, with all its pain and pleasure, into a new tomorrow. We never forget, and in fact we carry our beloved with us; he or she is forever a cherished part of who we are. We are changed--by the experience of having loved this person, by the knowledge of life’s transience, and by grief itself. We become different and hopefully better, more compassionate, more appreciative, more tolerant people. We fully embrace life again, connecting, laughing and loving with a full heart.

Still, there is no point of “final closure,” no point at which we can say, “Ah, now I have finally completed my grief.” Or, “Yes, now I have healed.” There is no point at which we will never cry again, although as time goes on the tears are bittersweet and less common. Healing is a lifelong process, one in which we often don’t even realize we are healing until we look back and see how far we have come.

“Closure”? I don’t think so. Acceptance—yes. Peace—yes. Hope—definitely. But putting a period behind the final sentence and closing the book on it? No! Life and love are much too complex for that. The story does not end; instead it awaits the next chapter.

Grief Digest, April 2007 Volume 4, Issue #4, page 4, used with permission.

Help for Helpers: Helping Someone Who Has Suffered a Loss

Most of the readers of this newsletter are intimately acquainted with loss and grief, and because of their life experiences, may be drawn to or reach out to others who are suffering. Yet, all of us can find ourselves at a loss for words, or uncertain about what to do when we learn of someone who has experienced the death of a loved one. We have learned from our participants how frustrated they feel at the well-intentioned but often thoughtless things people say or do in the time of grief.

Growing Empathy to Support Grievors

Why is it that we are able to help some people, and struggle to help others? Beyond the practical realities of our finite time and energy, it seems natural that as helpers we gravitate toward those who are most like us—either in personality, in values or in shared life experiences. This is an important feature of support groups: we gather as grievors who have experienced a loss, often a similar loss. But being a helping person may challenge us to move beyond the comfort zone of shared experience to broader horizons of helping. Dale Larson, in his book *The Helper's Journey*, describes this as extending our caring from the bonds of We-ness across the barriers of They-ness to a deeper form of empathy.

In support groups—participants initially feel the connections of similarity in loss, then some disconnect as they experience their differences—in coping, in available support, in styles of communication—and then reconnect with the shared experience of the grief journey. As individuals helping those whose lives or circumstances are quite different from our own—we too reach out, and perhaps perceive strong differences between those we help and ourselves. If we can overcome that sense of separation—and extend ourselves toward others, we can consider their perspective and concerns with greater understanding and provide heart-felt assistance.



“How does it happen that the deeper we go into ourselves as particular and unique, seeking for our own identity, the more we find the whole human species?”

- Carl Rogers

Caring Connections in the Community

Tuesday, May 15
Caring Connections
hosted *Seeds of Remembrance: Take Your Grief and Run With It*. Presenting on the critical link between healthy grief and physical self-care were featured speakers Edwin and Carri Lyons, who lost their son Christian and biked across the west to raise awareness of adoption, Lora Erickson, a distance runner, coach and organizer of Race for Infant and Pregnancy Loss, whose daughter Samantha was still born over 13 years ago, and Denny and Alyce Gross, outdoor enthusiasts and survivors of the loss of their daughter, Heather, to an avalanche.



The evening's speakers encouraged attendees to pursue active forms of remembrance. Top Row (From Left): Denny & Alyce Gross. Bottom: Lora Erickson, Carri Lyons, and Edwin Lyons.

“By contributing our story to *Seeds of Remembrance*, we are sharing with others who are battling grief, depression and anger that by putting loss and grief into action, it creates healing and therapy for the soul and honors the memory of the loved one,” said Carrie Lyons, who ran back-to-back marathons in order to restore her strength after battling cancer, and along with Edwin participated in a mid-continent cycling trip to raise funds to support their process to adopt a child. “Turning grief into action will not bring a loved one back, but it will allow you to move through life with meaningful purpose.”

The *Carma Kent Heart of Caring Award* was presented to outstanding facilitators Michael Gagnon and Natalie Peace, Wingman Advocates from Hill Air Force Base. The Utah Department of Health was recognized with the *Kind Remembrance Award* for their care of families who have lost a teen to a motor vehicle accident.

Upcoming Events

Saturday, June 30, 2012

Race for Infant and Pregnancy Loss 10K

West Bountiful Park

10K begins at 7:30 a.m., 2 Mile Awareness Walk begins at 7:35 a.m.

Details at www.blonderunner.com

Wednesday, August 29, 2012

2012 Larkin Charity Golf Classic

Eaglewood Golf Course

Registration begins at 7:00 a.m.

Details at golfclassic.larkincare.com

News in the Community

Suicide Prevention Bill Adopted in Utah

On April 4, the state of Utah took a major step forward in the prevention of youth suicide when Governor Gary Herbert signed into law House Bill 501, the Jason Flatt Act. The bill stipulates that Utah school districts and charter schools must require each licensed employee to complete two hours of professional development on youth suicide prevention. The Utah State Board of Education is also now required to develop or adopt sample materials to be used by school districts and charter schools for this professional development training.



Several members of the board of the Utah chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, including Taryn Aiken, Emily Hoerner, Jason Stark, and Chalon Stark, look on as Utah Governor Gary Herbert signs House Bill 501, the Jason Flatt Act.

In attendance to support the signing of the bill were several members of the board of the Utah chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide

Prevention (AFSP), which offers its educational program: *More Than Sad: Suicide Prevention Education for Teachers and Other School Personnel* to every school in the state at no cost. For information, contact Taryn Aiken, board chair for the organization's Utah chapter, at tarynaiken@gmail.com.

Remember Your Loved Ones—Caring Connections Memory Wall Order Form

Memory Wall (located in entry hallway to **Caring Connections**) 4" by 4" Tiles: \$35.00

Male: First Name _____ Middle Initial _____ Last Name _____

Birth Year _____ Death Year _____

Female: First Name _____ M. I. or Maiden Name _____ Last Name _____

Birth Year _____ Death Year _____

Send checks and information to:

Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program
University of Utah College of Nursing
10 South 2000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84112-5880



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Grief Line: (801) 585-9522

Address Services Requested

To Benefit Caring Connections

Wednesday, August 29, 2012

7:00 a.m. Registration/Breakfast

8:00 a.m. Shotgun Start

Four Person Scramble

Eaglewood Golf Course

1110 E. Eaglewood Drive
North Salt Lake, UT 84054

Entry Fee:

\$150 for single player; \$400 for foursome
Includes: breakfast, 18 holes with cart,
lunch, raffle, tournament prizes

Hole sponsorships still available

For more information:

Visit golfclassic.larkincares.com
or contact Lehi Rodriguez
801.809.1757 • lrodriguez@larkincares.com

2012 Larkin Charity Golf Classic

