Welcome to the summer edition of the Caring Connections newsletter. Our guests attending the spring Seeds of Remembrance event were fortunate to hear from Chris and Mikkel Williams. Chris Williams lost his first wife Michelle, his unborn child, 11 year old son and his 9 year old daughter in a car crash caused by a drunk driver in 2007. Mikkel lost her husband Rusty to bone cancer in 2006. They shared a powerful story of forgiveness, hope, and the new life they have created together. They spoke of the many of the challenges grieving people face—how to face the loss, how to remain in relationship with the deceased, how to love again…how to keep going. In his book “Let it Go: A True Story of Tragedy and Forgiveness,” Chris shares this observation, “it’s hard to think of an experience I’ve had that hasn’t involved revisiting the lesson that we need to ‘keep moving forward’ in order to get through our trials’(p. 144).” In a culture that demands grievers get over it, and snap out of it, it’s easy to feel the push-pull of “move forward—stay in the past.” Move forward, we must—but how?

Despite being a solitary experience, after all, each of us has a unique relationship with the one who died, grief is better shared. It is a journey filled with stories to be told, memories (pleasant and unpleasant) to be revisited with caring others, pictures and mementos to share—lest we forget that individual relationships form the fabric of community. In one of our recent suicide support groups, one member quoted Winston Churchill’s famous line, “if you are going through Hell, keep going.” True words that describe the hard, hard work of grief—a work that is vastly more achievable if we “keep going” together.

We, at Caring Connections are privileged to create community in our grief support groups and programs. In this newsletter, we offer words of support and information about our upcoming activities. You are welcome to join us.

Kathie Supiano
SALT LAKE CITY
Wednesday, September 9th and ends on Wednesday, October 28th from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Weekly meetings on Wednesday evenings for 8 weeks
University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East

MIDVALE
Thursday, September 10th and ends on Thursday, October 29th from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Weekly meetings on Thursday evenings for 8 weeks
UUHC Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

OREM
Wednesday, September 9th and ends on Wednesday, October 28th from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm
Weekly meetings on Wednesday evenings for 8 weeks
University of Utah Parkway Health Center
145 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

LAYTON
Adult grief group for those adjusting to the suicide death of someone close beginning Monday, October 8th and ends on Monday, November 23rd from 6:30 - 8:00 pm
The group will meet at Jessie Jeans Coffee House (which is closed while the group meets) at 5128 South 1900 West in Roy, Utah

SPANISH GRIEF GROUPS
Call Caring Connection for more Information 801-585-9522
University Neighborhood Partners
1060 South 900 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84104
In this review of the current understanding of treatment for complicated grief, Naomi Simon summarizes the recent successful work of Dr. Katherine Shear in providing individual psychotherapy for older adults with complicated grief, as evaluated in a randomized clinical trial. Complicated Grief Therapy produced both clinically and statistically superior treatment response than comparative approaches. Complicated Grief is increasingly recognized as a unique debilitating condition apart from depression, and specialized care is proving effective in facilitating a transition to a healthy and productive grief process. Simon emphasizes the need for physicians and other health care providers to recognize complicated grief and refer to appropriate care.

We are presently conducting two randomized clinical investigations of complicated Grief Group Therapy—a group psychotherapy adaptation of Dr. Shear’s individual counseling approach. Please see our announcement below inviting interested persons to be considered for participation. Please call Kathie Supiano at 801-585-9522 with questions.

**Participants wanted for Complicated Grief Studies**

Adults who have been **Caregivers for a family member or close friend with dementia**, and are struggling with grief or experiencing distress since the death of the person with dementia are invited to contact Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program to discuss participation in a research study. For information contact Kathie Supiano or Shawna Rees at 801-585-9522.

Adults who have experienced the death of a close friend or family member by **suicide** more than 6 months ago and are struggling with grief or experiencing distress are invited to contact Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program to discuss participation in a research study. For information contact Kathie Supiano or Shawna Rees at 801-585-9522.

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**“GRIEF IS A JOURNEY, OFTEN PERILOUS AND WITHOUT CLEAR DIRECTION, THAT MUST BE TAKEN. THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEVING CANNOT BE ORDERED OR CATEGORIZED, HURRIED OR CONTROLLED, PUSHED ASIDE OR IGNORED INDEFINITELY. IT IS INEVITABLE AS BREATHING, AS CHANGE, AS LOVE. IT MAY BE POSTPONED, BUT IT WILL NOT BE DENIED.”**

**MOLLY FUMIA**
I am a 2nd year student in the Psych/Mental Health APRN program at the College of Nursing. I graduated with my BSN from the University of Utah in 2007 and have primarily worked in critical care nursing in the Burn/Trauma ICU at the University Hospital. Many of my experiences in working with this population led me to purse a career in mental healthcare. For the past six months I have been working at a substance abuse treatment center run through Volunteers of America, providing group and individual therapy. I plan to continue working with this population, along with those that have chronic and serious mental illnesses when I finish my degree.

Kathy Supiano first introduced me to the Caring Connections program. Her enthusiasm for this program along with my desire to learn more about complicated grief compelled me to participate. The knowledge and skills I gained from co-facilitating this group have already proved to be invaluable, as I have begun to work with a population that is highly vulnerable to grief and loss. I am grateful for the experience I gained from working with Paula, the facilitator of the grief group; she demonstrated how to be present in the moment, while maintaining the structure of the research program.

One aspect of nursing care that I love is being able to hear others’ life stories and understand individuals on a personal level. This connection was even deeper in the suicide survivors’ complicated grief group. Each week I was impressed with the each participant’s willingness to be vulnerable as they shared their stories and supported one another. It was in these connections that I was able to witness healing take place. I learned that grief has no boundaries and does not discriminate; I also learned that it must be experienced in order for one to heal from significant losses. I hope to continue working with individuals that need additional support in dealing with their losses.

Brittany Garey, APRN student

After the loss of my husband, Rex, from a traumatic brain injury life was anything but normal. People say, “you will find a new normal.” After tears, prayer, reading grief books, lunches and dinners with friends, my journey brought me to Caring Connections. It was comforting to talk with people who had lost their spouse. Our facilitator, Amy, was patient, kind and thoughtful to each of us. Sharing memories, sharing feelings and sharing dumb things people say to you were all healing moments. Realizing I am not alone has made my journey bearable. I want to express my gratitude to Amy and the ladies and gentleman in my grief support group. Caring Connections has made a difference in my life.

“There are moments when I wish I could roll back the clock and take all the sadness away, but I have the feeling that if I did, the joy would be gone as well.”
– Nicholas Sparks, A Walk to Remember

Meet Our Student

Brittany Garey

Meet Our Participant

Susan Wilcox
I was born and raised in Spanish Fork, Utah at a time when it was still a relatively quaint town. I moved to my grandparents’ hometown of Ogden, Utah and completed my Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology at Weber State University in 2004. I took several years off from school and focused on diversifying my professional experiences, working with adolescents in residential treatment, adults in inpatient psychiatric treatment, adults in substance abuse treatment, children in foster care, and research on autism. I returned to school in 2010 and earned my Master’s of Social Work at the University of Utah in 2014. During my Master’s program internship with Millcreek Home Health and Hospice, I discovered that I was drawn to working with older adults and their families, specifically joining with them through the difficult journey leading up to, during and following the dying process. During my internship in the Homeless & Justice Outreach Program at the VA, I co-facilitated a grief and loss group where I deepened my understanding of the uniqueness of each person’s grief experience. I also began to realize that our culture is often full of fear and confusion surrounding death and grief work and that fear can lead to further suffering for those who are already walking the challenging path of grief.

Currently, I work as a Social Worker and Therapist in the Patient Support Program at the Moran Eye Center. Here, among other marvelous experiences, I have grown to understand that loss comes in many forms - losing one’s eyesight, independence, sense of safety, identity – and the path of grief for these losses has many parallels to grieving death. “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Maya Angelou’s quote perfectly summarizes what, for me, is the importance of journeying through grief. When you choose to walk through grief, I find beauty in knowing that my small role in your process is to create an environment of safety and trust and then invite you to walk your unique journey with others.

OUR MISSION

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/caring-connections
April in central Arkansas is one of the glory times of year, along with late October and early November, when nature puts on a colorful show of change. In the spring, daffodils come early with sunny yellows, golds and greens out of brown earth and brown grass. Azaleas show off reds, whites, pinks, purples, corals and more. Dogwood blooms in the woods look like floating white flowers amongst the browns of fallen leaves and trees just beginning to bud. Redbuds decorate forests and yards with their purple-red blooms. Winter turns into spring, black and white to living color; life bursts out of dirt, pods, buds and dead-looking limbs. What a strange time to die.

Last night, I received a call. My favorite uncle, eighty years old, was found dead in a chair on his back porch. There are worse ways to go than looking out on your yard as it comes alive. But death and spring just don’t seem to go together. Death in the spring certainly feels out of season.

Of course summer is also not a good time to die. From childhood, summer has mystical place in our lives as it is a time for re-creation—vacations, playing outside, swimming holes, camps, sleeping in, lawn chairs, cookouts, fireworks and lemonade on the porch. Plus there’s the summer harvest of fresh fruits and vegetables, strawberries, blackberries, corn on the cob, green beans and new potatoes. Who would want to miss all this? Summer is a lousy time to die.

But then fall isn’t good either. Fall is a sentimental time when the change in the air brings sweaters and memories out of the back of the closet. With fall comes relief from the dog days of summer and hopes for “this year: as school begins again. The leaves sing their gorgeous swan song, and we prepare for more cozy days inside. Who want to say goodbye now—either the one to go or the ones left behind—when we are gathering together to be thankful for all our blessings?

Okay then. How about winter? Perhaps that’s the time. But, perhaps not. We need each other in winter more than any other time of year. In winter there are no distractions of the other seasons, and we look sometimes inside, and even the old wisdom writer of Ecclesiastes wonders how one can be warm if one lies down alone? For a funeral on a winter’s day, we wrap ourselves up from the cold and wind and the ground is as hard as the reality that we are facing. No, death is not welcome in the winter.

“Death comes, but always out of season.” It used to be thought that the suicide rate went up during the holiday seasons in and around December, but now we know that the suicide rate is highest in the spring. Perhaps the contrast is too great; the world is coming alive with vibrancy and optimism, yet the burden of despair continues, and this may be too much to bear.

In season or not, death comes. Death comes and goes, but life goes on, ever inviting us to join in whether or not death decides to come.

The book was well written. The chapters move back and forth from the past to more present moments in her personal healing journey from the long buried, unresolved grief. She was very open and honest about the feelings and life experiences throughout her life. I appreciated how she had done that. Many people will resonate with her description of a glass mask she showed the world, the mask that holds the smile in place when it is all pain on the inside. She also aptly describes the rock and dirt placed over the hole inside her. This is the unresolved grief and deep emotional wound that has been buried for decades. I know that reading the story can inspire people to pursue that journey of healing even after so many years.

This book may not appeal to someone who is not working through their loss with a strong Christian methodology. She clearly has worked to generalize the specific religious references. She speaks of things like her church’s temple and explains her father’s position in the bishopric with enough detail that someone not in the LDS faith can understand. She found her healing through her work with her therapist, her “angel mom,” (the reference she uses for her mom that killed herself) and her Savior, Jesus Christ. If the reader can read the story understanding that everyone’s grief journey is unique, the story is raw and honest about how suicide deeply impacts all those involved that are left to figure out how to live. It may not appeal to someone who is not on the same religious path.

She openly discusses the affect mental illness has on those that complete suicide and those that struggle with living with mental illness. This story includes her mother that suffered severe depression and her stepmother that struggled with severe anxiety. This is beneficial for others that experience this within their families. It is brave to be so open and honest about such a personal and difficult journey.

I felt that it may be a good book for a young teenager to read that has lost a parent to suicide. It can help them to realize that working through the grief now is healthier than waiting until later in life. It may help a child understand that the surviving parent is also struggling with the loss.

Author Wendy Parmley
“Wow,” you say, “I’ve never heard someone say that.” All you’ve heard are things like, “Get it out,” or “You’ve got to express yourself,” or “Don’t keep your pain inside.” All of those are true, but I don’t believe they’re true all of the time. Yes, it’s critical to bleed out the poison of your loved one’s death. Death is an absolute horror that we don’t know how to handle, especially if we’re newly bereaved. Grieving is hard work. It’s exhausting, draining and essential work if you want to ever smile again – but you can’t do it all the time.

Have you ever worked seven days a week for a month, or even longer? Not one day off. You get up, go to work, come home, go to bed; get up, go to work, come home, go to bed… At some point you say, “Enough already, I need a break from my job.” You may do that with a reward of a night out, a massage, a vacation or just a quiet evening with a good book. Whatever you do, it’s a way to get away from the work of doing your job. You may love what you do, but at times need some emotional distance from doing it. It’s the same way with your job of grieving. Getting it out, letting go, crying, beating up a pillow, talking, and the myriad of ways to express yourself are healthy and constructive, but they can also be exhausting. The grieving/healing soul can only handle so much.

When death happened in your life, you may have felt like you had been tossed into a blender and switched on high. Around and around you spun, confusion reigned – and may still. You were doing grief work, but you probably didn’t know it. What you knew for sure was that at the end of each day you were exhausted, not knowing if you could go on. When the blender slowed down a bit and you found your pain was still with you and you made the decision to feel better, your work began in earnest.

How you heal is up to you. Healing is a lifelong process, full of bumps in the road, falling down and getting back up. While it’s hard work, it’s doable work and it can actually be rewarding when done with enthusiasm and optimism, both of which are in short supply if you’re new to your journey. A “can do” attitude can take a while to find, but if you do your work, that attitude can enter your life and you can heal. Time, and what you do with it, and being good to yourself, will help you once again find your smile. This journey is survivable; joy can return, but you will need to invest yourself in the process for that to happen. But it’s also important to back off, get some perspective and sometimes take a break from grieving.

The work of grieving and healing is done in many different ways. Sometimes you’ll hear, “There are no wrong ways to grieve,” and for the most part I believe that’s true. But if you’re abusing yourself or others, your grief is moving in a dangerous and unhealthy direction. There are no good ways to run from your pain. It can be difficult to express how you feel and you may try to bury your suffering in ways that are destructive and hurtful, but that behavior will not make your pain go away. It will still be there when you return.

If you find yourself walking down that path and feeling helpless and alone, search for help. You are never, ever alone in your journey. There are many ways to help yourself and many understanding and compassionate people to help you. You can get better, you can move in a positive direction, but you might need assistance in finding that path. Seeking help is a sign of your strength to get better. You’re saying, “I don’t know what to do here, I need help.” Reach out for help; it can only do good things for you. The work of grieving in negative ways can be a lot harder than working on your healing in positive ways.

As you do your grieving and healing work you’ll find many ways to do that work. Grab as many of those ways as you can, throw them into the mix of your life, take what works and throw away what doesn’t. In other words, do what’s best for you, not necessarily what others think you should do. Try not to be a “pleaser – griever.” Actively participate in your healing and express it in positive ways.

There are books and magazines to read, people to talk to, conferences to attend and support groups to join. There are many ways to heal. But just as your grief can overwhelm you, so can the process of grieving.
At some point you may say, “Enough already, I need a break!” That’s fine.

Try not to feel bad about taking a break from your job of grieving. If you leave grieving behind for a while, you’re not leaving your loved one behind. Try not to think of taking a break from the love you have for the person you miss most. You will always love them you will never forget them whether you’re expressing your pain or getting away from it for a while.

There’s healing in routine and normalcy. Before your grief, you probably went to dinner, a show, a sporting event, bowling or dancing. Those activities filled your life with laughter and joy. They won’t fill your life like they used to because your life is so different now, but if you let them, those fun activities can take you away from your pain for awhile. Getting away from grieving can be healing. When you take a break from grieving, don’t stay away too long, but stay away long enough to recharge your heart and your enthusiasm for your healing work. Escape to a world where death isn’t on your mind all the time. Let yourself feel true and genuine laughter. You’re not forgetting your loved one or disrespecting his or her memory. To the contrary, you’re embracing your healing and memorializing that life in a positive way.

Life is very difficult after our loved ones die. It will never be the same, but it doesn’t mean life has to painful and filled with suffering. Healing work takes time and at times it can consume us. Smiles and joy are out there to be found. They’re found in our healing and in the lives of those we love who are gone. When grieving becomes overwhelming, take a break; it’s also okay not to grieve.

Grief Digest: Hope, Information, Support; October 2006; vol. 4 Issue 2.

Woman In The Doorway
(For Emma)

She waits in the doorway. Does she even know why?
She sits and she stares. She drinks and she sighs.
Does she think . . . how did I get here and does she really care?

Oh woman in the doorway, what brought you there?
I have heard you laugh and cry and complain.
I have seen you suffer and I know you’re in pain.
But still, you curl up in your blankets at night,
Asleep in the doorway, hoping that you’ll be alright.

What cruel fate left you on these concrete shores
And what happened to your soft, carpeted floors?
Did the world pass by between the bottle and your lips?
How did you get started on this dead end trip?

Did our modern plague force you to the cold, hard ground?

Has your spirit died no more to be found?
But there are no easy answers to a suffering soul.
Which came first – the bottle, the pain or the plague – we may never know.

I suppose that we must accept life and all of its mystery.
Still, I wonder why some live and some become part of our tortured history.

Life doesn’t always agree with our youthful dreams.

Will we have another role in the Grand Scheme of things?

The Woman in the doorway asks why she has to suffer.
But I have few answers, more questions of my own.

My heart, my hands and my compassion are all that I can offer.

Copyright 01.95, Monte J. Hanks

Monte Hanks reciting poem
The Caring Connections Memory Wall is on permanent display at the Annette Poulson Cumming Building in the College of Nursing at 10 South 2000 East on the third floor. The Memory Wall features 4” x 4” handmade tiles with calligraphic names commemorating friends or family members who have died.

This beautiful display is a lovely way to honor the memory of someone dear while supporting the programs of Caring Connections. Proceeds from the sale of the tiles provide scholarships for grief support group participants unable to pay the $50 fee.

We hope that the Memory Wall will be a special place to come and reflect on the person you loved.

REMEMBER YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS—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 _______________________ Middle Initial _____ 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
Seeds of Remembrance 2015—Letting Go of Sorrow: Holding on to Memories was held Tuesday May 5 at the University of Utah College of Nursing-Annette Poulson Cumming Building. Featured speakers, Chris and Mikkel Williams shared a moving perspective on forgiveness and hope. We enjoyed the beautiful music the Crimson Harps. We presented our annual Carma Kent Heart of Caring Award to Steve Andrus, who was honored as facilitator of the year. The Kind Remembrance Award was presented to the Fourth Street Clinic’s Memorial to Homeless Persons who have died on the streets of Salt Lake City. Receiving this honor on behalf of the Fourth Street Clinic was Monte Clark, who recited his lovely poem of commemoration (see page 9). The evening concluded with a time of remembrance where attendees received roses to honor their family and friends, provided by Larkin Mortuary and the Rose Shop. To view this program please visit our website at www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections.

RACE FOR GRIEF-2015
Kathie Supiano and Shawna Rees joined other dedicated but soggy runners in this year’s Race for Grief, benefiting Caring Connections, Share and the Sharing Place. Organized by star runner and coach, Lora Erickson www.BlondeRunner.com, the race course is the flat and fun Legacy Trail in West Bountiful. Please join us next year on Memorial Day for this very fun and certain-to-be- drier event. Run off some of that grief---either the sluggishness or the anxious doubts, and plan on running or walking in next year’s event.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2015 SALT LAKE CITY WALK TO END ALZHEIMER’S
Saturday, Sept 12th at 10:00 am at Library Square, 210 East 400 South. Visit www.alz.org/walk to register, there is no charge.

SALT LAKE WALK TO FIGHT SUICIDE
Out of the Darkness Community Walks, Saturday, Sept 19, 2015 at 11:00 am at Liberty Park, 6th East and 9th South. Registration: 9:00 am or online at www.afsp.org/walk

GRIEF AND THE HOLIDAYS
Tuesday, November 10th at 7:00 pm at the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building, 10 South 2000 East, second floor. More information will be made available.
Each year, we see an increase in the number of deaths due to COVID-19. This year has been particularly challenging, and the holidays are no exception. With the closure of businesses and decreased social interaction, the holiday season can be a difficult time for those who have experienced loss.

Grief and the Holidays

Tuesday, November 10, 2015 7:00 pm.
More details to be announced.

University of Utah
The College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East in Salt Lake City

This event is free and Open to the Public

Contact Caring Connections at 801-585-9522 or visit www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections