As fall turns to winter, the hearts of many grieving people may sink into sorrow as they anticipate Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah or the New Year without the one who died. Darker days are already burdened by the year’s difficult anniversaries; a birthday, a wedding anniversary, the day of diagnosis, the day of death. Holiday times formerly filled with family and celebrations may feel daunting. Each year, Caring Connections offers Grief and the Holidays, a community event designed to offer support and ideas for managing grief through the winter holidays, and opportunity to listen to edifying words and uplifting music in the presence of others who understand. This year’s event “In the Bleak Midwinter: Finding Hope” will feature Natalie McCullough, an interfaith chaplain who will address her many losses, and popular pianist and America’s Got Talent contestant Josh Wright. Grief and the Holidays will be held Tuesday, November 1, at 7:00 pm at the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building, 10 South 2000 East, Salt Lake City. We extend our appreciation to Larkin Mortuary for their generous support of this annual Caring Connections tradition.

While no amount of support or comfort can replace the love you shared with the one who died, please know that our educational programs and grief support groups are available, and we welcome your participation.

“All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.”
—Henry Ellis

“What do you say? There really are no words for that. There really aren’t. Somebody tries to say, ‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.’ People say that to me. There’s no language for it. Sorry doesn’t do it. I think you should just hug people and mop their floor or something.”
—Toni Morrison

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UPCOMING WINTER 2017 GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

SALT LAKE CITY
Wednesday, January 11th and ends on Wednesday, March 1st 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, January 12th and ends on Thursday, March 2nd 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, January 11th and ends on Wednesday, March 1st 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, February 6th and ends on Monday, March 29th from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm
Pleasant Valley Branch Library Conference Room
5568 Adams Ave
South Ogden, Utah 84405

SPANISH GRIEF GROUPS
Call Caring Connection for more Information 801-585-9522
University Neighborhood Partners
1060 South 900 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84104

As we have described earlier in this column, we are actively engaged in conducting research on the grief of the bereaved, including those who have lost a family member to suicide. We are careful to comply with standards for ethical research as required by the University of Utah Institutional Review Board. Sometimes, people wonder, understandably, if interviewing or studying suicide survivors adds to their distress. One recent study by Omerov and colleagues examined this question in 666 parents bereaved by suicide death. Only one parent felt distressed by the contact and several reported brief discomfort reliving the grief experience. The overwhelming majority felt their participation was valuable, facilitated positive memories, that they learned from the study and felt that they were contributing to the well-being of those who might experience this loss in the future. The authors conclude that a well-designed, ethically sound study has more benefits than risks to the participants and to society.

BOOK REVIEW

REVIEWED BY VICKI POND, BOARD CERTIFIED CHAPLAIN, PRIMARY CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

I am delighted to review the short but lovely children’s book The Invisible String by Patrice Karst as a valuable resource for families in grief. Just last week, I was talking with a woman now in her late 20s whose sister died from cancer when she was 5, her sister 7. She told me, “As a five year old with developmentally appropriate magical thinking, I always thought she would become better. Her death altered my spirit and certainly my innocence as the foreign concept that she was never coming back crashed into my life. I recall being read a book about birds dying and this being used to try to help me understand death. I was enraged that my sister, put simply, was not a bird. Although my mom reached out to appropriate resources, bereavement counseling did not touch my growing anger.”

In contrast to such authors who may draw comparisons to a dying bird or animal to try to help children understand death, Karst presents a deep and comforting book about love and its reach to “anywhere and everywhere.” In fact, the book is not written specifically about grief, but mentions “Uncle Brian in heaven” in a simple way that would surely open a gentle conversation. The Invisible String is a wonderful concept that helps us all know we are never alone, as long as we can love and remember. “When you’re at school and you miss me, your love travels all way along the string until I feel it tug on my heart.” “And when you tug it right back, we feel it in our hearts,” said Jeremy. To the far reaches of the ocean and space, and being even stronger than anger, this book brings honest feelings of love and connection, which as we who have experienced grief know, are the true elements of healing, and what bind us all together.

Five stars and two thumbs up for this charming book that truly succeeds better than anything I’ve read in a long time in giving me the experience of feeling the invisible strings that connect us to those we love and who love us.
I had the opportunity to become involved in Caring Connections through my program at the University of Utah as a Doctoral student in the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner program. I am a student co-facilitator in the support group for those grieving a death by drug overdose and am honored to have the opportunity to become involved with this group, since there is a great need to help those that are suffering from losses as a result of the growing epidemic of drug overdose deaths in our state. Individuals who experience loss from overdose, may feel a tremendous amount of guilt compared to that experienced with other grief survivors. This may unfortunately be exacerbated by the stigma surrounding drug use in our society. This specific group is unique in the sense that everyone there has lost someone to the overdose epidemic. This helps in the healing process since they can relate and understand each other in ways that may not happen in a mixed group. I have been learning a great deal while working with my group leader Amy Henderson. Her passion, presence, and compassion are very evident during her interaction with the group members.

Normal grief has several stages including, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, yet the most important thing that I have learned, especially while working with Caring Connections, is that there is no proper way to grieve. Each individual is unique, and the relationship they had with the deceased was unique. Grief is said to be “the price we pay for love,” and the complexity of grief, lies in the relationship one shared with the deceased. The closer the attachment, and the more sudden or tragic the death, the longer duration of grief symptoms are often experienced. Grief is universal, and everyone will experience grief and loss at some point in their lives. I am currently employed at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) treating a well deserving mental health population. After completing the Nurse Practitioner program, I plan to continue working at the VAMC at the next level of leadership, finding a niche in treating the severely mentally ill, veterans struggling with substance abuse, and other mental health co-morbidities. I have learned that through having hope, healing is possible. This healing includes processing individual thoughts and feelings, eventually readjusting to life, and reinvesting in relationships. My experience with this support group has helped me learn how to help facilitate this transition with my own therapy clients.

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**Singing**

**By Mickie Watts**

An iridescent ribbon floating free,
A single shining strand from deep in me.
It soars upon the ether pure and bright,
And carries forth my spirit with its flight.
My soul unfolds its wings and shimmers soft,
Then with a single thrust it sails aloft.

With joy unfettered now I reach the sky,
And touch each soul in passing as I fly.
And when at last my song has found its end,
With gentle grace, I settle back again.
I do believe that more than anything,
I love to sing.
MEET OUR FACILITATOR

EMILY ROBERTS, LCSW, PROGRAM MANAGER, DIVISION OF CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

When my parents died 7 years ago, I wondered if I was still a daughter. Through my own process in working through grief, I know I am more than a daughter, they live on in me. I carry them every day. Losing them and the grief afterwards was the hardest thing I’ve ever been through. But knowing I wasn’t alone and that what I was experiencing was natural, in time, I realized that I would find my “new normal” again.

Currently I supervise a team of social workers. I love working with young clinicians because I get to see their passion in working with families. This is a new experience for me in management, and while I enjoy learning this new role, I miss working directly with children and families. This is one of the many reasons I love facilitating these groups.

I reached out to Caring Connections after the death of my parents. They helped me understand I wasn’t going crazy and that all of these feelings were grief! At that time I also thought that once I got through “the steps” everything would be back to normal. Not so! Grief is quite the roller coaster. Several years later, I was interested in facilitating because I wanted to meet with other people that were going through the same experiences. Grief is unique to everyone. The support group is wonderful way for people to not feel alone and understand that their unique process is normal. I find it is really helpful for people that are in the middle of that process to just be in the room with others. I feel so fortunate to be a part of the road that leads participants to move forward in their walk through grief.

MEET OUR PARTICIPANT

SPENCER HAMMOND

I recently moved to Utah to pursue a dream—build a business with my younger brother, share a nice house with him and his teen sons, enjoy the outdoors regularly with them, and have my brother’s counsel in person, without incurring international charges. I was living abroad previously.

Within a few months of settling here and beginning to realize my dream, my brother committed suicide.

I didn’t see it coming.

Although I have tried many times, I cannot describe how deeply and broadly his suicide hit me. Since then, it appeared to me important to be strong for his sons, while maintaining and building his business for them. I probably did a fair job, at first. Yet, the business declined without my brother at the helm and I grieved his loss. His sons’ mother began really taking care of the boys and I found myself isolated; having been in Utah just a few months I hadn’t renewed old friendships or made new ones yet. Most areas of my life began to suffer.

One friend confronted me and challenged me to get help. I researched and located counselors and support groups specializing in loss-to-suicide. I selected Caring Connections based on recommendations from my new counselor, my advisor at the funeral home, and the online descriptions with participant comments.

The group surprised me. I discovered that every participant had many complications entangled with their own loss, as I did. That realization removes much of my isolation, and gives me better ways to break down the complications of my situation and tackle them one at a time.

Sometimes it feels difficult to attend the group meetings. Sometimes I look forward to the group. Yet each session has left me a little better able to move forward. Everything in my life changed that one evening, but now I can see a path ahead, a new direction. Now, I can carry that part of my brother and his loss with growing acceptance of what can’t be changed and more ability to appreciate the love of my brother.
BY KELLY FARLEY

A Gift from Another Father

LIKE MOST MEN I KNOW, I WAS RAISED TO BE “STRONG,” AND WHEN THINGS BECAME DIFFICULT, YOU EITHER DEALT WITH IT ON YOUR OWN, HEADED TO THE BAR OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH. I SUBSCRIBED TO THIS WAY OF THINKING FOR MOST OF MY LIFE. I CAN HONESTLY SAY I NEVER SAW A GROWN MAN CRY WHILE I WAS GROWING UP. I’M SURE THEY DID, BUT THEY DID IT WHEN THEY WERE BY THEMSELVES OUT OF FEAR OF BEING PERCEIVED AS “WEAK.”

As a result of this, I had always fought off the temptation to cry during sad times. Even after the loss of my first child, I tried to fight it off every day and when I couldn’t hold it in any longer, I would let my emotions break down when I was by myself. About eighteen months after the loss of our first baby, my wife and I lost another baby. I couldn’t hold in the pain, and I couldn’t be “strong” anymore. I had become a broken man.

I was at the point where the burden of carrying so much pain became too much for me to manage. I began thinking I had something physically wrong with me. I was having various physical symptoms that were unexplained. I would wake up crying, having feelings of dread, nervousness, headaches, and loss of interest in things I used to find intriguing. I decided to make myself go to my doctor to tell him about my condition to see if he could run some tests on me to find out what was going on.

As soon as he closed the door to his office and asked me how I was doing, I started to bawl. I couldn’t get my words out and it took me a minute or two to compose myself. I told him about all of the physical symptoms I was having and asked him what he thought it might be. He responded with a word I never thought I would ever hear as a description of me. “Depression.” I told him I didn’t believe him and I wanted him to run some blood tests on me. On my way out of the office he gave me a card for a counselor and told me to call them while he ran the blood test. The blood tests came back normal. I made a call to the counselor’s office for an appointment the following day.

I remember the sense of embarrassment I had the first time I walked in to the waiting room of the counselor’s office. I didn’t make eye contact with anyone sitting there out of fear of being recognized by someone I knew. I didn’t want anyone to think that there was something “wrong” with me. Even though I knew that there was something desperately wrong going on inside of me. I didn’t tell anyone other than my wife how I was truly feeling.

It took several months of weekly meetings before I had the courage to tell someone other than my wife and the counselor how I was doing. I was starting to see a correlation between telling my story over and over again, and the fact the anxiety was starting to lift. I cried every time I told my story. I even got to where I was telling strangers, but I noticed a compassion from others. I wasn’t looking for sympathy, but I realized some people were more than willing to listen—truly listen.

Once, when I was meeting with a woman who owned a small public relations business, we started just talking about things we had been going through. She was dealing with a very bad divorce and a child with special needs, while I was dealing with the loss of two children. We shed tears as we told each other our stories, and she asked me if I minded if she gave my...
name to a group of men that did yearly weekend retreats for men dealing with difficult circumstances. I was hesitant, but she assured me she thought I would really benefit from the event. Reluctantly, I agreed.

A few days passed and I had forgotten about her offer when I received a phone call and an official invitation to the event. Within a couple of weeks I found myself gearing up for it. I had no idea what to expect and was a little uneasy about spending a weekend with a bunch of guys talking about their “feelings.” The event was held at a local church, and that also made me uneasy. Was it going to be a bunch of men sitting around all weekend reading the Bible? The thought of going away for a weekend retreat at a church was a little outside of my comfort zone. However, I had made a commitment to go, so I went.

That weekend, I met other guys who were dealing with all types of issues, and I realized I wasn’t alone in my emotional pain. I decided to attend weekly meetings in order to start preparing for the following year’s retreat. During that time, I was asked to be a facilitator and present at the next retreat.

For an hour, as the opening presenter in a room of about thirty men from all walks of life, I told my story of heartbreak at the loss of my beautiful babies. There were times I sobbed but, to my surprise, I noticed many of the men wiping away their own tears. When I finished my presentation, I left the room and walked into a vacant room next door where most of the refreshments were. I walked over to a window that was open to get some fresh air and compose myself. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that someone was rapidly approaching me. An elderly man grabbed both of my hands as he stood sobbing, tears streaming down his face. He said, “You’ve been to hell and back haven’t you?”

I just shook my head and said, “Yeah,” There it was; a gift from another father acknowledging what I had been through. He wasn’t telling me that I would get through it, that everything would be fine, to toughen up or to hang in there. He wasn’t trying to run from the uncomfortable discussion. He engaged me in the conversation. He was being human without societal rules on how you should converse with another man. He was simply acknowledging the pain and the journey I had traveled and survived.

What he gave me that day was the gift of acknowledgment, empathy and compassion. I suspect it had something to do with the fact that he had lived many years and had figured out that since we do not have to travel difficult journeys alone, we shouldn’t let others do it either.

_Grief Digest: Hope, Information, Support; Oct 2010; Vol. 8 Issue 2_
The Anatomy of a Support Group

BY JACK MUNDAY AND FRAN WOHNENHAUS-MUNDAY

What is a bereavement support group? To answer that we want to start out by saying what it is not. It is not a place that has all the answers. It is not a place where one learns to get on with life as though nothing tragic has happened. And, for at least two reasons, it is not a twelve-step program. Grief, unlike substance abuse, is not an addiction. Also, whether or not we are persons of faith, we don’t surrender to a higher being in our grief. We don’t want to turn over our love for that special person who is no longer present in our lives.

Please understand that we affirm the good work twelve-step programs do, and we encourage anyone who needs them to use them. That program works for addictions, but not for grief. A bereavement support group is a gathering of people with a common situation—the loss of a loved one, outside the normal cycle of life. We share the common circumstances of a loss.

There is a time when the pain of our grief has subsided enough so that our surroundings can come back into focus. We look around. We ask ourselves how can this be? Where are we? If our lives had a direction, if what we did used to serve as a compass guiding us toward goals and aspirations, often we feel as though we have lost our way. Where do we go? To whom do we turn?

Then someone suggests that we go to a bereavement support group. We think of reasons not to go, and we tell our friends we don’t need these groups. But, perhaps our pastor, rabbi or priest has sent another bereaved person to visit with us, to sit with us. We listen because this person knows how we feel. We are told that it is time to go to the support group, and so we go.

What happens at a meeting? Mourners need a place to go where they can leave behind the rest of their concerns and focus on the person they miss so very much. It is a place where it is safe to talk about our loved ones, and the rest of the world stays home. A bereavement support group is a place where others will get to know our loved one because where share our memories. It’s okay to talk about them, and to both laugh and cry as stories are exchanged. Knowing that we can introduce our loved ones to people who genuinely want to know more about them is essential if we want to walk the path to a good life—as different as that may be.

What will we have to do in a bereavement support group? One thing we can do to help work through our own grief and preserve the memories of those we mourn is simply to listen to others. We don’t have to talk unless we want to say something. We don’t have to voice the painful feelings we keep inside our hearts. If we listen, we will hear others
saying the things that we have been thinking—expressing tormented thoughts of guilt, anger, depression, and even fear—and we will discover that our emotions are a natural response to tragedy. In listening, we will hear hope expressed by others. We can take an interest in their stories, and we can begin healing by helping others who are more newly bereaved reach that same understanding.

What is a typical bereavement support group? It’s a gathering of people, some with fresh grief and others far down the path to healing. We are greeted as we enter. Someone introduces himself, leads us to a refreshment table. We may be asked to fill out a data sheet, recording our loved one’s birthday and the anniversary of the death. When you tell the greeter how your loved one died, perhaps they will introduce you to someone whose loss was similar. We feel better talking with one who knows what we’ve just begun to experience. Maybe we’ll even share our story, but no one will force us.

In time, people will gather in a circle in chairs we didn’t notice are nicely arranged. There is room for everyone and no one sits behind anyone else. A person may stand up and say, “We’re sorry you had to meet us this way, but we’re glad you found us.” That makes sense. Sometimes they add the request that we give them two or three tries, because the meetings can be quite different, depending on the makeup of the group. We are surprised when the leader sits down and the person next to him shares a bit of her story, then the next one and the next. The progression of stories is coming our way. Each story is different but somehow the same. Someone talks about going to the cemetery every day. I do that! And her husband won’t go with her. The facilitator says that each of us grieves in our own way, and that’s okay for him not to go. Soon it will be our turn. What will we say? We decide just to give our name, our loved one’s name, maybe the cause of death. What else is important? Then it’s over. Where did the time go? When is the next meeting? I want to talk to that woman. She knows how I feel. We make plans to return. We have found a support group and it helped.

Grief Digest: Hope, Information, Support; Quarterly Magazine July 2003; Vol. 1 Issue 1

New Grief Support Group to address the grief of death by drug overdose

Utah has the 5th highest rate of death by overdose in the nation. This type of death and the resulting grief are fraught with pain and uncertainty, guilt and shame. We at Caring Connections are realizing a dramatic increase in requests for grief support from those who have lost a family member of friend to drug overdose. As is the case with our suicide loss groups and our homicide loss groups, grief from drug overdose brings unique challenges and bereavement care needs.

This fall we provided our first grief group specifically focused on the grief that a death by drug overdose brings. We will offer this group again in January. If you or someone you love has been impacted by a death by drug overdose, please contact us at 801-585-9522 for more information about this grief support group.
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
We are proud to support non-profit organizations that support the care of grieving persons in our community.

On September 30, we presented a conference for clinicians, “CARING FOR THOSE BEREAVED BY DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH.” Our speakers included Dr. Todd Grey, recently retired Medical Examiner, Dr. Susan Sample, a Medical Ethicist, and Salt Lake City Police chaplain Bill Silver. We were especially edified by a conversation between Doug Shupe, whose son DJ died by drug overdose and his Caring Connections grief group facilitator Amy Henderson, LCSW. This conference, attended by social workers, police officers, psychologists and chaplains was generously funded by the University of Utah Education Resource Development Council.

We were pleased to participate in two important events on behalf of our community partners. In August, we joined hundreds of American Foundation for Suicide Prevention supporters honoring family and friends lost to suicide and working for suicide prevention efforts in the Out of the Darkness Walk. In September, we walked around the State Capitol in the Alzheimer’s Association Walk to End Alzheimer’s Disease. Each of these events attracts more participants each year and these efforts make important educational contributions to the community.
Grief and the Holidays

“In the Bleak Midwinter... Finding Hope”

With Josh Wright, popular pianist and America’s Got Talent Contestant

Tuesday, November 1, 2016 at 7:00 pm

SAVE THE DATE!

University of Utah
The College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building, 2nd Floor
10 South 2000 East in Salt Lake City

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