Welcome to this Caring Connections newsletter. In this issue, you will find articles, ideas and perspectives from others to assist you on your grief journey. We respect the magnitude and individuality of your grief and invite you to participate in our support groups and educational programs.

We are very pleased to announce this year’s Grief and the Holidays event “Daffodils in Winter: Finding Peace in Sorrow” featuring Richard Paul Evans, bestselling author of The Christmas Box, and Marc Probst, Vice President of Intermountain Healthcare. They will share personal perspectives of loss and hope. We hope you will join us for an uplifting evening, Monday, November 3rd at the Annette Poulson Cumming College of Nursing Building.

Many good people have supported us in implementing a grief support group in Spanish for the Latino community. With funds from the Cambia Health Foundation and the efforts of University Neighborhood Partners, alliance community Services, Gabi Cetrola, Teresa Mora and Lehi Rodriguez, our next group will begin in October. Please see our calendar in this issue for these and other events, including our schedule of winter support groups.

We have had a gratifying and busy summer with the Spring Race for Grief, the fourth annual Larkin Charity Classic Golf Tournament and our participation in the American Foundation on Suicide Prevention Out of the Darkness Walk, and the Walk to End Alzheimer’s Disease. Collaborations with good people who understand and support our mission are a source of deep satisfaction for us and we are most grateful to be part of the larger community of care.

Kathie Supiano, PhD, LCSW
Director, Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program

I Will Light Candles This Christmas
By Howard Thurman

I will light Candles this Christmas;
Candles of joy despite the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

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To register for any class or location, please call 801.585.9522.

There is a participation 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.

SALT LAKE CITY
Wednesday, January 14 – March 4, 2015 from 6:00 - 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 15 – March 5, 2015 from 6:00 - 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 14 – March 4, 2015 from 5:30 - 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 death of a loved one to suicide beginning Tuesday, October 21 – December 11, 2014 from 6:30 - 8:00 pm
Wingman Advocate Program Suicide Survivors Group in Layton at the Weber State University Davis
WSU Davis, Building D2, Room 303

SPANISH GRIEF GROUPS
Wednesday, October 15 from 6:30 - 8:00 pm
University Neighborhood Partners
1060 South 900 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84104
In this study of the grief experience of family members of nursing home residents with advanced dementia, less than 20% of family members experienced complicated grief. Grief symptoms specifically related to feelings of separation were prominent and family members who lived with the resident prior to NH entry and those with higher levels of pre-loss grief were most likely to suffer higher levels of grief symptoms during bereavement. The pattern of grieving for some family members of NH residents with advanced dementia is prolonged and begins before resident death. Identification of family members at risk for post-loss grief during the pre-loss period may help guide interventions aimed at lessening post-loss grief.

Dr. Kathie Supiano is now conducting two research studies to evaluate care for those with Complicated Grief. One study of bereaved dementia caregivers and the use of Complicated Grief Group Therapy is funded by the National Alzheimer’s Association. A second study, evaluating Complicated Grief Group Therapy in survivors of suicide, is funded by the Groups Foundation for Advancing Mental Health.

Participants wanted for Grief Support Group 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.
My name is Thelma Parry, my husband Duane took his own life on September 16th, 2013. Needless to say, it was very heartbreaking for the whole family to lose him so suddenly. My son, Geno, found Caring Connections and we both went to the support group for suicide survivors from January through March 2014. Kathy Supiano was the facilitator for our group. She was very understanding, caring, and helpful. To be able to talk and relate to the other survivors in the group was the most helpful and made me feel like I wasn’t alone in my grief journey. I feel that if I had not gone to the Caring Connections support group, I wouldn’t be doing as well as I am. I would highly recommend any one going through grief to join one of the groups to help you get through your grief better. My whole family also attended two other group events that Caring Connections put on in the Fall of 2013 and late Spring of 2014. They were very beneficial for our family to get through the first holidays without Duane.

I was passionate about life and people from a very young age. Born and raised in Nashville, TN, I gained a love for music and sports, which I did competitively throughout my teenage years. When I wasn’t on the field or in rehearsal I was active in school clubs, church groups and other community outreach programs. After graduating from high school I left Tennessee to pursue my dream of traveling the world and providing health care services to those in need.

As an undergraduate student I sought opportunities to experience the world around me. While living and traveling abroad I saw the plight and goodness of men, women, and children from all walks of life. I learned very quickly that I had more to learn than I could ever teach. But, I knew I needed to pursue a career in nursing. This is how I first found out about Caring Connections. One day, as I was leaving class I saw the Caring Connections sign and several people forming groups in some of the study rooms. That night I researched the organization and determined to be a part of the organization.

The University of Utah College of Nursing encourages students to participate in community engaged learning and throughout this program I will act as a co-facilitator to Gabriela Cetrola, LCSW. Together we are expanding the Caring Connections program to include Hispanic families in the Salt Lake area. This experience has opened my eyes to the needs of vulnerable populations locally and helps me understand how to overcome challenging healthcare disparities. These memories will make a lasting impression on me, especially as I continue on to nurse practitioner school.

I feel privileged to work with an organization dedicated to instilling hope and comfort to those who are grieving. As I learned through my experiences at home and abroad, grief comes in all shapes and sizes—so does the recovery process. The nature of the process may be singular but does not have to be solitary. I look forward to a great year with Caring Connections.
began my journey with Caring Connections as a co-facilitator while I was a Master’s in Social Work student and at the University of Utah in the fall of 2004. I was working in a Hospice organization doing my practicum at the time.

Grieving can be very emotional and complicated and it can flare up in an instant and catch us off guard at times. Currently I work in a Home Health/Hospice company and one family is struggling having lost their father on Mother’s Day and dealing with their mother who is currently on Hospice now. Sometimes we have to give ourselves permission to grieve even when others around us may be telling us we should be moving on.

Many years ago I was given a small placard that was on my sleeping bag as a youth. “Tears are the safety valve of the heart when too much pressure is laid on it” by someone named A. Smith. Not everyone cries when they grieve, and for others tears seem unstoppable. Some say they “just can’t”. And that is okay. It is okay to be angry. It is okay to be sad. It is okay to be afraid. How you feel is okay. Trust me I have seen that over time feelings transform to a different place. Allow people to “grieve differently” and allow you to let it take its course in time.

Being a facilitator is an honor. Monitoring those who grieve and inviting them to share with others the good and the bad of the relationships they had with the loved one they have lost is sacred, because that relationship is unique. Often someone in the room can relate to what is shared and know they really truly are not alone. I have seen dark heavy hearts in the faces of people at the beginning of groups shift to a lighter and brighter place by the end of the group session. People are sometimes surprised as someone shares a similar feeling or experience during the week. It is good to know you are not alone.

As a facilitator I am simply a witness. Watching the people who take the courageous risk to open up their sensitive hearts to complete strangers in the process of allowing themselves to feel their grief is tender and leaves me pausing in awe. After a few short weeks I have seen each participant’s growth in releasing a bit of a burden, and new relationships formed as the group connects.

Grief takes time. The relationships we have are built over a long or even a short time is still respected as a relationship. Each relationship has a piece in the puzzle of our soul that no one else can replace.

Dame Cecily Saunders built Hospice in England. When she was spoken to as the founder of Hospice, she replied, no Hospice found me. Her desire was to allow people to die better deaths than she witnessed in her early career. She approached it in the holistic way we use now. She was a nurse, an almoner (a Social Worker as we would know it today) and as a physician herself. I am grateful I have her as an example in my life to honor those who grieve and those who are dying. May we all find a little more peace and hope and comfort each day.

For the readers, please know there is hope for a brighter day for you, and grief support through groups in the Caring Connections are helpful and available, if perhaps you want a little more hope, I know it is a special place to find it.
Early in my journey following the death of my son, Brendon, I heard statements like, “This journey is survivable,” and, “There can be meaning in your life again.” If you haven’t yet, soon you’ll hear a healing parent say that their smile has returned. If your pain is still overwhelming, all those statements will probably roll off your heart like water off a duck’s back. “Smile again,” you say, “that’s never going to happen. How can I ever feel good again, my child is dead.” I felt the same way, as I suspect all bereaved parents felt at one point in their journey. After all, much of our happiness died when our kids died. To find it again seemed improbable—more like impossible.

When I speak to groups of bereaved parents about my journey and how my smile and meaning have returned, I always say that theirs can return too. They can laugh again; they can have more good days then bad days. And then I say what sounds completely unbelievable to them, especially the newly bereaved. I say, “Good can come from such a horrible experience as the death of your child.”

I get a lot of blank stares when I say that one. A lot of looks that say, “You’ve certainly lost your mind if you want me to believe that out of the death of my child I can ever find any good.” Some parents even seem offended or hurt that I could imply such a thing. In spite of it I push on because I know it can happen. It happened because of the love for my son.

What I never say to bereaved parents is that their smile, happiness or meaning will return; that it’s a fact. That can be kind of hard to hear. I say that because we are each on our own individual journey where we make our own individual choices as to how we will grieve and heal. I don’t know if theirs will return or not, but I do know that all those things can return. I say that because they’ve returned for me, as well as for hundreds and hundreds of other bereaved parents.

All you need to do is attend a few local, or regional or national meetings of the many wonderful organizations that put together such healing events. At those gatherings you’ll see smiles (genuine and true), hear laughter from a healing heart and feel the life that’s returned to those same parents who thought that after their child died, they would die as well. There’s a glow, enthusiasm and calm that a healing parent gives away without even knowing it. It’s inspirational; it draws people in; it helps others heal. And it continues to help them heal as well. Just as we will never stop grieving the deaths of our kids, we will also never stop our healing.

We can feel better, but it takes work for that to happen. Feeling better won’t happen just because we want it to happen; we have to make it happen. It’s just like anything we want to change in our lives, first we must decide to do it and then we must go ahead and do it. It’s in the positive choices we make as to how we do our grief work (I also call it healing work) where we can find our next breath, or a path to our next hour and then our next day. Our choices are what can move us forward or hold us back.

You may have heard someone say, “There’s no wrong way to grieve.” For the most part I believe that. But I would also add to that statement, “…unless you’re abusing yourself or others, or are stuck in chronic grief.” Physical or verbal abuse will stop your healing. Sure, you’ll most likely have arguments with others; we’ve all done that, but if those arguments become hurtful or abusive, it can be almost impossible to heal. If, after many years, you think about your child and sadness fills your life instead of joy, you may be stuck in chronic grief which can also hold back your healing.
In the beginning of your journey, many of your decisions about grieving will be made subconsciously. You’ll make them and not even know you did. Over time, your good decisions and your bad decisions can become habits. So, you will create good healing habits and bad healing habits. As you get further down the road, you’ll begin to make conscious decisions about the ways you grieve and express your suffering. When you make positive choices based on good healing habits, positive things will happen. Make negative choices and I think you know what will happen there as well.

Life does not have to be horrible. Yes, a horrible thing happened to you and your child, the most horrible thing you will probably ever experience. The deaths of our children are truly life-changing events. What I’ve come to know is that death did not take all when it took my son’s body. His physical death was huge, an event like no other I’d ever lived. The deaths of comrades in Vietnam, close friends and their children and members of my family have all been but a whisper compared to the scream of losing Brendon. But what I’ve learned is that even though death took my son’s body, death can never, and I mean never, take his life force (his spirit if you will), my memories, or my love. His life has given me those three things, his death took one. So, Brendon wins three to one. A victory for my healing and for Bren’s life.

It’s in our children’s lives where we can find our smiles and happiness. It’s in the joy of their living, and our love for them, where our meaning can return. Remember, for our children to have died, they first had to have lived. When we focus on their living, no matter how long that was, and let go of their dying, good things can happen. What’s so frustrating about this journey is that it takes time to start healing—a lot more time than we want it to take. The road is long, with many ups and downs and twists and turns, which is why it’s imperative that we’re good to ourselves and do good things for ourselves. Healing is only seen in hindsight, so it’s critical that we constantly search for ways to heal. If we do, and bring them in, there can be days when we say, “Hey, this has been a pretty good day. I let the life of my child into mine and that’s a good, a very good thing.”

As we heard our parents say, “It’s all about your attitude. Attitude is everything. Life is only as good as you want to make it.” I know those are clichés, but statements like that become clichés for a reason; it’s because they’re true. The altitude we achieve in our new lives, our new normal, will only be limited by our attitude. Decide to work on your grief through its positive expression and you will find ways to heal. Healing then becomes your choice and a habit. You can do it, now will you?

Grief Digest Magazine October 2007 Volume 5, Issue #2 pg. 4-5
When our loved one dies, we feel pain. There is not a detour around the pain. The only way to overcome it is to pass through it. When our loved one dies, we grieve. Grief is the physical and psychological expression of pain.

Grieving is a very painful process, and it can feel overwhelming. It is hard work and diminishes our energy, leaving us exhausted, without any desire to engage in our daily activities. Grief doesn’t have a set timetable. Individuals grieve in different ways, and members of a grieving family many times find it difficult to support each other.

Although it is accompanied by intense emotions, grief itself is not a feeling. It is a process that can take a lifetime, a slow journey towards acceptance and peace. Some people say grief is like a roller coaster. I believe it is true. When my daughter died, I was devastated. My life shattered and I had to force myself to get out of bed in the morning and engage in my daily routine. I consider myself a healthy person, but I thought I was losing my mind. My daughter’s death not only impacted my life, but our family life too. It was very difficult to communicate, especially with my son, who was only sixteen years old. For a whole year, we met with a therapist who helped us find new ways of communicating with our son, and helped us understand that we were a family heartbroken but still a family.

I have always believed in the healing power of the written word, so I sought solace in literature and books about spirituality. Some days, when I had some energy, I went for walks; some days I laid in bed and cried my heart out. I believe what has helped me the most is that I have taken one step at a time. Time, hard work, and the awareness and acceptance of my pain, have helped me reconnect with life again.

So be aware that this will be a long and difficult journey. Just when things begin to look better, the calendar slaps you with another reminder of your loss. Sometimes the pain will be deeper five years after the loss. As the old Chinese proverb says: “We can’t stop the birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from nesting in our hair.”

You must understand that your loss will never go away. You learn to live with it. You incorporate your loss into your life. There will always be a hole in your heart, a void that cannot be filled, because it belongs to your loved one. But slowly, as you walk that path of grief, you will start to reconnect with life again. You will fill your heart and soul with new experiences, with a new life. One day you will look at yourself and realize you have walked a long way. You have walked the dark tunnel of grief and found the light at the end.

Bereavement Magazine, 2003, used with permission.
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 group participants how frustrated they feel at the well-intentioned but often thoughtless things people say or do in the time of grief. This column continues our series of articles with suggestions on caring for those experiencing loss. We hope it will help our readers use their own experiences with grief to become more sensitive and compassionate to others.

AFFIRMATIONS: TRANSFORMING YOUR GRIEF

The use of affirmations is more than trying to have positive thoughts. It’s important not to use platitudes or clichés here...affirmations need to be truthful to you. Affirmations are statements that reflect your values and goals, and things that are meaningful to you. They could be quotes, scripture verses, supportive and loving comments people have made to you, and even thoughts from the sympathy cards you might have received. Affirmations can also reflect what you are trying to become for yourself or for others. Affirmations are written down, either in a journal, or most typically, on index cards that can be referred to and read during the day. When used effectively, affirmations are statements that positively impact thinking, guide behavior and transform grief in a way that imparts meaning to this life-changing loss.

Here are a few thoughts to offer hope for the future:

“Promise me you’ll always remember: You’re braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem and smarter than you think.”
– Christopher Robin to Pooh, A. A. Milne

“We fail to realize that mastery is not about perfection. It’s about a process, a journey. The master is the one who stays on the path day after day, year after year. The master is the one who is willing to try, and fail, and try again, for as long as he or she lives.”
– George Leonard

“Start by doing what is necessary, then what’s possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”
– St. Francis

“The future is not some place we are going to but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.”
– John Schaar
2014 LARKIN CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC

Over 150 golfers and hole sponsors enjoyed a beautiful late August day at Eaglewood Golf Course in our most successful golf tournament yet. The proceeds of the tournament support the program activities of Caring Connections. We are deeply appreciative of Larkin Mortuary for coordinating this event and invite you to save August 26, 2015 for next year’s Larkin Charity Golf Classic.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

The Caring Connections team—Kathie Supiano, Shawna Rees and Claire Peterson—participated with hundreds of walkers supporting the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention walk on Saturday, September 12. Every year, suicide claims 800,000 lives. That is approximately one suicide every 40 seconds. Caring Connections provides care for those bereaved by suicide and actively supports prevention efforts.

WALK TO END ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Kathie Supiano, Shawna Rees and Christina Triptow joined The University of Utah Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program’s TEAM GERON in the September 12 walk sponsored by the Alzheimer’s Association—an important partner in the Caring Connections research and service missions.
SPANISH GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

La muerte de un ser querido es una experiencia emotiva y poderosa. Tiene el poder de estrellar la vida como uno la conocia. Tres actividades parecen ayudar a personas tratar del duelo que sienten despues de la perdida de un familiar o amigo:

- Recibir informacion pertinente de expertos y profesionales
- Hablar con otros sobre su perdida personal
- Escuchar de experiencias similares que han tenido otras personas

Este grupo sera dirigido por Gabriella Cetrola, LCSW y Teresa Mora

Our groups for grieving Spanish speakers will begin on Wednesday, October 15 from 6:30 - 8:00 pm at University Neighborhood Partners, 1060 South 900 West, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104.

Please call Alliance Community Services at 801-265-1111 (Spanish) or Caring Connections at 801-585-9522 (English) for more information. There will be no fee for this group.
Grief and the Holidays
Daffodils in Winter: Finding Peace in Sorrow

Featured Speakers:
Richard Paul Evans   Marc Probst

Monday, November 3, 2014 at 7:00 pm
University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building, 2nd Floor
10 South 2000 East, University of Utah Campus

Refreshments will be served following the program.

Grief and the Holidays is an opportunity to gather tips for managing grief during the holiday season. The event is free and open to the public thanks to the generous support provided by: