

# Caring Connections

*A hope and comfort in grief program*

Volume 15, Issue 4

Summer 2011

Grief Line: (801) 585-9522

## A Message from the Director Kathie Supiano



As the winter becomes spring, we at *Caring Connections* turn our hearts and our efforts toward those remembrance activities that allow grief to be transformed by gratitude. In mid-May, our annual *Seeds of Remembrance* event was graced by the violin music of Meredith Campbell, the paintings of

Sue Martin, and the poetry of Emma Lou Thayne. Each shared memories of loved ones who had enriched their lives, and the losses voiced in artistic expression. If you were unable to join us, video of the event is on our website. One of the amazing parts of grief is the painful but heartfelt gratitude a griever may experience for the life lived...even though that life has ended in death. Grievers never truly complete the journey of grief...there is no finish line; but there are milestones on the journey. For many, a particularly poignant milestone is an abiding sense of gratitude that the person, now deeply missed, was part of the griever's life. Grateful grievers acknowledge the magnitude of the loss and of their own suffering, but would not exchange the deceased's life lived for the relief of their pain. The emergence of gratitude cannot be forced or hurried, but adds immeasurable comfort to the sorrow of loss.

G. K. Chesterton has said, "thanks are the highest form of thought." We continue to be thankful for our many supporters, notably Larkin Mortuary, whose financial support sustains our grief groups and the distribution of this newsletter. Our friends at Larkin Mortuary are hosting a charity golf tournament Wednesday, August 31, benefiting *Caring Connections*. There are many

ways for you to get involved and support our efforts—please refer to the announcement on the back of the newsletter for details.

We are grateful for your readership and support. It is our hope that this newsletter and our efforts remind you that you need not face your grief alone.

Sincerely,

Kathie Supiano, Director

**"Praise the bridge that carried you over."  
George Colman**

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Upcoming Grief Groups  
FALL: Eight Weekly Sessions

Salt Lake City

**September 7 - October 26, 2011**  
**(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 8 - October 27, 2011**  
**(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 7 - October 26, 2011**  
**(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

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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.

Visit us online at:

[www.nursing.utah.edu/practice/caringconnections](http://www.nursing.utah.edu/practice/caringconnections)

## News in Bereavement Research

NANCY L. MALCOM, *OMEGA*, Vol. 62(1) 51-76, 2010-2011

### *Images of heaven and the spiritual afterlife: Qualitative analysis of children's storybooks about death, dying, grief, and bereavement.*

The use of children's books addressing issues of grief and loss have long been used by parents, teachers, faith communities and grief counselors to provide age appropriate, accessible comfort to grieving children. In this study, the author examined 49 children's books, analyzing the thematic portrayal of heaven and an afterlife. Heaven was typically portrayed in a simplistic, highly visual manner and many symbols—light, clouds, angels were consistent across many books. Interestingly, the books varied widely in their depictions according to the book character that died—grandparent, parent, child or a family pet, with greater specificity of an afterlife in stories about pets than grandparents. The article includes thorough reviews of the children's books. We will feature a review of recent additions to the children's grief bookshelf in an upcoming issue of the *Caring Connections* newsletter.

## 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.

### Taking Care When Offering Spiritual Care

The death of a close family member or friend may challenge one's religious or spiritual beliefs. Some people will feel anger toward God for the death of their loved one, or they may feel that God is punishing them for some misdeed they had done in their life. One's faith in God may be particularly challenged at this time. Even people who had been "devout" before this loss can feel far from the anchors of earlier faith.

Too often, these feelings of doubt or anger are met with well-intentioned, but hurtful spiritual or religious platitudes. Sometimes, those attempting to bring religious comfort feel compelled to defend God, or explain the actions of a higher power in the context of their own experiences or needs. As comforters, we are more effective if we listen. As Keith Meador observes, "hope is not mere optimism," and bringing hope means attending to suffering and overcoming our own impatience with "the soulful depths and contextual complexities of the lived journeys of those who suffer." To be present and to be with is the calling of spiritual care. The profound experience of grief assists some people to tap into their spirituality in new and enriching ways; that said, that should never be the comforter's "goal."

## Book Review

*At our recent Hospice Foundation of America conference on Spirituality at end-of-Life, we invited attendees to contribute a book review of a spiritual book for comfort for grieving people. The following review was submitted by Marilyn Call, Director of the Robert G. Sanderson Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Taylorsville.*

### ***Streams in the Desert* by L. B. Cowman**

My husband and I wanted a large family. We were blessed with just 3 children but of course they are so amazing that quantity didn't matter much until 2 of our 3 children died within a few years of each other. Ashley died at age 29 in 2006. Camille died from the same unidentified genetic neurological disorder in 2010 at age 32. She left 2 young sons without a Mommy. Our youngest son, Jason, is adopted so at least we don't have to watch him deteriorate and then die from this same condition. Our family feels so small now.

A very challenging aspect of my grief after watching both of my girls die was the difficulty I found connecting to spiritual comfort. All of my life I have been blessed to feel comfort and at times some very clear direction from my spiritual source, my Savior Jesus Christ. Books have been my friends and I have a substantial library of spiritual books. However, since my girls died, I can't concentrate long or deep enough to be fed spiritually from most of my books.

I blame this challenge on the effects of trauma. My Daughters' deaths have so stunned me and changed my life and identity...that my brain and my soul feel like they have shorted out. Establishing new pathways... conduits and vessels for receiving comfort are taking time.

A good friend gave me a book called *Streams in the Desert*, by L. B. Cowman that has helped me immensely. Apparently this book is a well-known book of comfort. It was originally published in 1925, but it was new to me. It has daily devotionals that include a scripture, a short essay and usually a poem. The key for me is that the readings are short but powerful. Each day's reading material is meant to inspire hope, faith and comfort specifically for those of us seeking relief from deep despair. Many times when I have been able to read briefly, I have read a devotional that seemed to be written just for me.

On hard days just feeling universally connected to others who have experienced and survived deep grief has been helpful. On better days I have been able to connect spiritually to my source because of focusing on the spiritual truths others have shared in this book.

Some excerpts from this book that have sustained me: "dear God, when darkness overshadows me, teach me that I am merely traveling through a tunnel. It will then be enough for me to know that someday it will be all right." pp. 185.

"When nothing on earth to lean remains...When strong holds crumple to dust...When nothing is sure but that God still reigns....That is the time to trust." pp.19.

There are several references in the book to how God uses broken things. This gives me hope that though I feel quite broken now, I will be healed and be able to provide great comfort and service to others in the future.

Helping others has long been Melissa Parr’s passion—and her profession. She majored in Home and Family Living at Brigham Young University and spent two years working at Primary Children’s Medical Center before deciding to pursue a master’s of social work from the University of Utah. An independent study trip to Panama in 2010 connected Melissa with older adults as she visited nursing homes as part of a volunteer program. The relationships she built and the lives she touched had such a profound impact on her own life that Melissa decided to shift her professional focus from children to the aging population.

Internships as a client advocate with the University of Utah’s Neighbors Helping Neighbors program, providing resources for elderly adults to enable them to stay in their own homes, and with Rocky Mountain Hospice, delivering support to clients and families throughout the dying process, were integral experiences of Melissa’s graduate work, which she completed in May. Assisting with the eight-week *Caring Connections* spouse loss group that ran from January through March of this year was the first opportunity she had to co-facilitate a grief group. The new grad says working with *Caring Connections* gave her new perspective on the resources families need following the death of a loved one.

“I quickly learned that the most powerful support took place between group members because they were able to express personal experiences in a safe place,” she says. As she pursues a position as a social worker for a hospice organization, Melissa says she believes her experience with *Caring Connections* has equipped her with valuable insight that will guide her in supporting her own clients and their families through the grieving process.

***Caring Connections Mission:*** 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.

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

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# Getting Over “It”

## by Marie Levine

This summer we’ll commemorate the seventeenth anniversary of Peter’s death. It doesn’t seem possible that seventeen years have passed; that I have seventeen years of experiences that don’t include Peter; that I am even alive. The truth is that seventeen years doesn’t feel any different than ten years or fifteen years or, probably, twenty years. It does feel very different than one or two years or, even three, four or five years.

Mostly, people think I’m “over it.” Well, in the words of a recent ex-president, it depends on how you define “it.” Am I over the gut-wrenching, physical pain? Yes. Am I over the disbelief, the why’s, the inability to breathe? Yes. Am I now able to organize my thoughts, put a sentence together, remember where I put my glasses? Yes, mostly (I still have trouble remembering where I put things). Am I over the incessant crying, screaming and mind-numbing despair? Yes, I am. The early intensity of pain, disbelief and breathlessness has been replaced with a deep unrelenting sadness, sadness for what Peter has missed and what his father and I are missing.

No one even suspects how difficult it is for us to celebrate the joys of our friends, but that’s what life has become for us. As their children marry and have children of their own, we laugh with them and share their joy. But after each celebration, we retreat to our unwelcome solitude and share only with each other how painful the celebrations really are. We have no joy to share. The “neverness” of that often seems unbearable.

But if “it” is defined as the wonder that was Peter, I’ll never be over it. Peter will always be our magical child. He will always be bigger than life to us and we will never get over that we had him or that we lost

him. In the beginning my greatest fear was that I would forget-forget what it felt like to look forward to his coming home from school, to the sound of his voice, to how much he brought to my life. I was afraid life would make him a distant memory, but I was wrong.

Peter is a constant presence in our lives. His absence grows bigger with each passing day. As we’ve gotten older, we’ve watched our friends’ lives seem to get bigger even as their years diminish. With weddings and grandchildren, their futures are extended. No need to even think about the end of days for those whose families continue to grow. For us, our future is immediate, short term. Now, it’s all about us. While a day doesn’t go by that we don’t wonder about what

Peter would be doing now, those thoughts are always accompanied by wondering what we should be doing now, now that we clearly see an old age devoid of children and grandchildren. We wonder how we should prepare for that.

So, people look at me and think I’m “over it.” They see me laugh, but they never see me cry. They see me totally engaged in life and living, but they don’t hear the

conversations I have with Peter or his dad. They are comforted by apparent survival, and no one is forced to confront my sadness. The fact that sooner, rather than later, Peter and I will be together again might cause those who think I’m over it some discomfort and a need to assure me (and themselves) that I have a long time to live, and I should put such thoughts out of my mind. Talk like that will no doubt encourage those who survive me to one day say, “her son died very young, and she never got over it.” In fact, they’d be right.

“While a day doesn’t go by that we don’t wonder what Peter would be doing now, those thoughts are always accompanied by wondering what we should be doing now.”

*Grief Digest Magazine. 2011, Vol 8, Issue 3. Used with permission.*



## Lemons don't have to be sour--at least not in Kaysville. But to explain:

By Ann Rees

Ten years ago a few recently widowed women responded to an advertised class about grieving, but left it feeling that it was too generic, that the specific concerns after losing a spouse had not been addressed. They made phone calls to other widows in Kaysville--including some they had only heard of but not met--and invited them to meet together. Initially these women shared their individual stories and established a bond based on the feelings (and fears) that they had in common. They decided though to support one another and to have good times together instead of dwelling constantly on their misery. That decision to make lemonade from the lemons handed them in life is what gave birth to the "Lemonade Ladies," now thirty members strong.

How does it work? Informally. There is a potluck dinner each January, followed by a casual meeting in which each "lemon" pairs up with a friend or two to choose the one month of the year for which they will plan an activity. And what are the activities? Whatever they wish. There have been interesting speakers, backyard picnics, evenings playing board games or watching movies in a home, and humanitarian projects to donate. Overnight trips have been made to Cedar City for the Shakespearian Festival, St. George for Tuacahn productions, Yellowstone, and to one member's cabin near Oakley. Because cooking for one person is no fun, eating out is always popular, whether locally or in an adjoining county. Another favorite has been attending the musical productions of a nearby high school or plays in community theaters. A memorable adventure

occurred when the FrontRunner was new to Davis County. The Lemonade Ladies negotiated the ticketing machine in Layton, rode to Salt Lake, figured out how to get a bus to the Gateway Center, and enjoyed dinner in a restaurant. No one, however, had checked the Front Runner schedule for the return trip and the result was total confusion--fodder for much laughter after the fact--and gratitude for cell phone communication after several became separated from the group and missed the train.

There is absolutely no pressure to attend every LL function. Roll is never taken, and everyone understands that the group exists to offer friendship and support, as well as a social outlet, to women who are no longer part of an established couple--not to make demands upon them. Some "lemons" are long time widows and others are new to the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional adjustments facing them. What comfort there is in a grassroots support group in one's own neighborhood and community. As Joyce, a new member, put it, "I feel accepted--at home. Everyone has been so cordial, and we all have something in common."

Long Live the Lemonade Ladies!

# *Walking the Labyrinth*

*By David Pascoe*

**M**y first experience with the spiritual practice of walking a labyrinth happened at Mercy Center in California. In the lush and verdant grounds of this convent and retreat center, skillful hands have constructed a large, circular walking path out of stone and sand, tucked away behind towering oak trees and blue and purple hydrangeas.

The labyrinth is a beautiful, geometrically designed circle with a large standing stone at its center. To get to the stone, walkers follow a narrow path that winds back and forth, arcing through the quadrants of the circle, now leading closer, now turning away from the center. It is not a maze, because there are no blind alleys or deceptive turnings. By staying on the path and trusting the builder of the labyrinth, a walker eventually arrives at the center. To get back out, the process is reversed, following the winding pathway back to the circle's edge. A single break in the perimeter allows for both entry and exit.

Walking the labyrinth is a slow and deliberate process. I was not alone the first time I entered. On a month long training program in spiritual direction, I was with a group of 40 or more fellow pilgrims, who entered the labyrinth at staggered intervals that golden summer evening. From the trees all around, achingly beautiful plainsong echoed, swelled, and subsided from hidden speakers, as if our walking were accompanied by chants sung by the souls of holy men of long ago.

Though I am a tenderfoot, I felt compelled to walk barefoot over the hard packed sandy path. The outline of the path was marked by thin bricks that had been sunk into the sand. The path's hard, grainy surface was occasionally scattered with dry pine needles and small, sharp stones. I felt enough discomfort in the soles of my feet to keep me focused on the ground ahead, though not enough to distract me from the experience. In fact, the

occasional sharp pain kept me grounded in an unexpected way – just the opposite of how I had felt at other times walking barefoot on open ground.

My pace was naturally slow and deliberate. As I walked, I found my mind moving in rhythm with my steps. Almost before I was aware, I began praying under my breath: “For being untrue, forgive me Lord. For lying, forgive me Lord. For ridiculing, forgive me Lord. For disappointing, forgive me Lord.” All the way in, I prayed a litany of forgiveness for sins I had committed, named people I had offended, confessed things done, things not done. I prayed for people by name – family, friends, those close to me now and in the past, whom I had hurt or disappointed. When I reached the center, I paused to touch the standing stone. Then on the slow path back, I prayed prayers of gratitude, thanking God for every person, event, circumstance, and experience of my life.

Had I been alone, I might have spoken those prayers out loud as I have done at other times and in other places. This kind of organic prayer seems to rise out of me unbidden, unrehearsed at times when I am alone and focused on speaking to God. Solvitur ambulando says a plaque I bought at the Mercy Center gift shop. “Things are worked out by walking.”

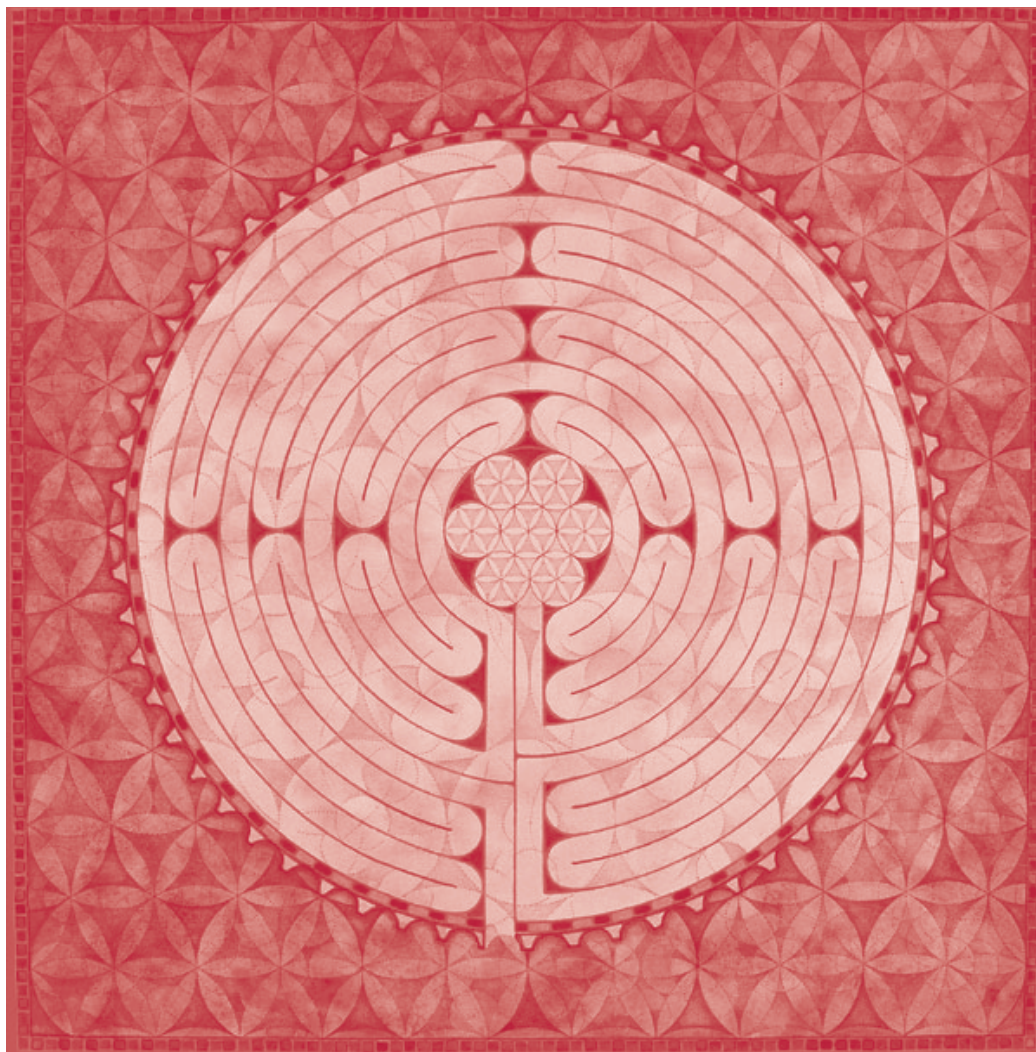
The labyrinth calls me to simply be. As its slow, repetitive rhythms take over my conscious mind, I feel the pull to enter into the silence at my own center. Yet it is so hard to abandon myself to being. When I walk the labyrinth, I am most comfortable moving, reciting just under my breath prayers, petitions, praise, whatever thought process I am working out as I am walking in. But when I reach the center, I cannot stay. Simply holding still in the silent expectancy of the core is more than I can bear. I pay lip service, but am anxious to move



again, relaxing into the unwinding of the path back to the safety of the margins.

And yet, dear God, our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. Why am I restless at the place where I should find rest? What will it take to abandon myself so completely to you that I am more “me” in the being than in the doing?

*David Pascoe is a Certified Clinical Chaplain at Silverado Hospice and has graciously allowed us to distribute his writings to the readers of the Caring Connections Newsletter.*



“All those years I fell for the great palace lie that grief should be gotten over as quickly as possible and as privately. But what I’ve discovered since is that the lifelong fear of grief keeps us in a barren, isolated place and that only grieving can heal grief; the passage of time will lessen the acuteness, but time alone, without the direct experience of grief, will not heal it....we are in a world of grief, and it is at once intolerable and a great opportunity. I’m pretty sure that it is only by experiencing that ocean of sadness in a naked and immediate way that we come to be healed—which is to say, that we come to experience life with a real sense of presence and spaciousness and peace.” Annie Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*

## Caring Connections in the Community: Upcoming Events

*Caring Connections* is pleased to offer the following upcoming events:

### **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention- Annual OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK**

Saturday, August 27 at Sugar House Park. For information, visit [www.afsputahchapter.com](http://www.afsputahchapter.com)

### **2011 Larkin Charity Golf Classic-benefiting *Caring Connections***

Wednesday, August 31 at Eaglewood Golf Course. See detailed announcement in the newsletter, or contact Lehi Rodriguez at (801) 809-1757 or [lrodriguez@larkincares.com](mailto:lrodriguez@larkincares.com)

### **Exploring complicated Mourning: Sudden Death and Traumatic Loss: A Seminar for Professionals**

featuring Alan Wolfelt, and sponsored by Larkin Mortuary. Friday, September 23, 9:00 a.m. -3:30 p.m. at the Grand America Hotel. Early registration \$65. To register, call (801) 809-1757.

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## Facilitator Susan Roberts Receives Carma Kent Heart of Caring Award

Carma Kent was one of the founding members of the *Caring Connections* Advisory Board and was herself well-acquainted with grief and loss. Carma's life was marked with the loss of her grandson Kazen to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), her father to a car accident and her dear husband Robert to suicide. Yet she transformed her own incredible life tragedies into a loving concern for others.

Carma generously supported *Caring Connections* and funded the production and

printing of the 3rd edition of our book, *Dealing with Sudden and Unexpected Death*. She died two years ago after battling cancer for many years.



*Susan Roberts (far right) receives the Heart of Caring award from the family of Carma Kent.*

In honor of Carma's memory, and in recognition of her lasting impact on *Caring Connections*, we have established the Carma Kent Heart of Caring Award. The award is presented each year during *Seeds of Remembrance* to an outstanding group facilitator. Of course, all of our facilitators are outstanding, and many people don't realize that our facilitators are trained clinicians who give their time in service to *Caring Connections* without compensation. This year, we are pleased to honor Susan Roberts, M.Div chaplain for the hospitals and clinics of University of Utah Health Care. Susan has facilitated grief groups for the past five years.

## Announcements

**Prefer to receive immediate updates?** If you are not yet on our electronic mailing list and would like to be included, call (801) 585-9522. Help us help the environment *and* lower costs.

**Do you have stories or experiences concerning grief or the grief groups that you would like to share?** Please mail them to Caring Connections, C/O the University of Utah College of Nursing, 10 South 2000 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. Or send them via email to [shawna.rees@nurs.utah.edu](mailto:shawna.rees@nurs.utah.edu)



*A tile on the Caring Connections memory wall is a lovely way to honor your loved one while supporting the program's services. In photo: Program Administrator Shawna Rees.*

### 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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## *2011 Larkin Charity Golf Classic*

**Benefiting Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program**

**Wednesday, August 31, 2011**

**7:00 am - Registration/Breakfast**

**8:00 am - Shotgun Start - Four Person Scramble**

**Eaglewood Golf Course**

**1110 E. Eaglewood Drive, NSL, UT 84054**

**Entry Fee: \$100 for single player; \$400 for foursome**

**Includes: breakfast, 18 holes with cart, lunch, raffle, tournament prizes**

**Hole sponsorships and corporate sponsorships still available**

**For more information: contact Lehi Rodriguez at 801.809.1757 or [lrodriguez@larkincares.com](mailto:lrodriguez@larkincares.com)**