This year marks the 20th anniversary of Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort Program. Founded in 1997 by Beth Cole, PhD and Sherry Poulson, Caring Connections has provided grief support to thousands of grieving persons through our grief support groups, bereavement calls to families of patients who died in University Hospital, community education programs, clinician and student education and our program of research.

In this issue of our newsletter, we look back to the 9/11 World Trade Towers attack and the initiative of Carrie Pike and Caring Connections volunteers to provide each family of a 9/11 fallen police officer, Port Authority office and firefighter with a remembrance Carrie Bear.

We invite you to enjoy the summer and support Caring Connections by joining the Larkin Charity Golf Classic on Wednesday August 23, 2017! Sponsor a hole or assemble a foursome for a fun day of golf at the spectacular Eaglewood Golf Course. See the back of this newsletter for details.

As many of you know, my research emphasis in the past seven years has been developing and evaluating complicated grief group therapy for persons whose grief significantly limits their ability to go on in life. Most people are able to process their grief with time, coping skills, and the support of loving others—often with the additional care of a grief support group. For some people, however, the experience of loss is very debilitating and does not improve, even with time and natural supports. This situation is known as complicated grief and includes enduring and highly painful emotions and thoughts that are long lasting, severe, and lead to social isolation and diminished ability to function in life.

Beginning later this summer, we will be offering complicated grief group psychotherapy in addition to our grief support groups. We are committed to offering each grieving person the support that best meets their needs and situation. For further information on this program, please call us at 801.585.9522.

“Tears have a wisdom all their own. They come when a person has relaxed enough to let go and to work through his sorrow. They are the natural bleeding of an emotional wound, carrying the poison out of the system. Here lies the road to recovery.”

—F. Alexander Magoun
SALT LAKE CITY
Wednesday, September 6th through Wednesday, October 25th
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 7th through Thursday, October 26th
from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Weekly meetings on Thursday evenings for 8 weeks
University of Utah Health Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

OREM
Wednesday, September 6th through Wednesday, October 25th
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

WEBER COUNTY
Adult grief group for those adjusting to the suicide death of someone close beginning Monday, February 6th and ends on Monday, October 16th, through Monday, December 4th
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
Five MSW students from the University of Utah College of Social Work presented their study “Grief + Loss + Stigma” at the Association of Death Education and Counseling annual meeting in Portland. The students, Haley Burton, Shea Chandler, Katrina Riley, Elisabeth Saucedo and Jordan Zurcher are members of the Utah chapter of Actively Moving Forward, an organization that connects and supports grieving college students.

To discern how stigma influences bereavement, their study assessed the stigmatization of grief and loss within the University of Utah campus by distributing surveys to both students and faculty. Our data revealed that 97% of faculty (N = 470) on the University of Utah campus were willing to make some form of accommodation for students if they experience the death of a loved one. Unfortunately, nearly 65% of students (N = 58) did not ask faculty for accommodations after the loss. We hypothesize several reasons as to why students are not seeking flexibility from their faculty. These include the following: perceived stigma (worry for creating rift or tension with their faculty; fear of no accommodations being made; the belief that they are better off without, etc.). Several limitations hindered the study, such as few number of respondents and majority of participants residing within one college in the university. In the end, these findings are only scratching the surface as to perceived stigma when relating to bereavement and why students are not asking for accommodations. Further research is necessary to understand how stigma is impacting students as they experience the grieving process.

BOOK REVIEW


This powerful and moving book reflects a true collaboration between artist and wife, Wendy Miller and her beloved husband-scientist, Dr. Gene Cohen. Each shining lights in their own respective disciplines, Sky Above Clouds chronicles their shared life in the presence of heart crushing illness, dying, and death. Because of their deep love and clear-eyed honesty, this is an uplifting and poetic account fusing Gene Cohen’s dogged spirit and Wendy Miller’s radiant creativity. In their narrative of chronic illness, all aspects of life—working with the medical community, the impact on relationships, the revisiting of goals and dreams, and the transformation of their marriage—are forthrightly shared. This is the rare memoir that will prove valuable to those grieving a death, awaiting a death and for those who care for suffering persons.
Having the chance to co-facilitate the adolescent grief group with Caring Connections as part of my Doctor of Nursing Practice Psychiatric/Mental Health program at the University of Utah will forever impact my future practice as a professional, as well as relationships in my personal life. Working with these young men has shown me the resilience of the human spirit in tragedy and great loss. The group process is transformative. Their stories are heart-breaking; yet they are willing to share those stories and give a part of themselves to the group in order to assist individuals who are also suffering. This is a superior act of courage and selflessness that will inspire me long into the future. My only hope is to have the humility and a fraction of the courage they have in helping others within my role as a nurse practitioner. This endeavor has been difficult, with sadness and tears, with laughter and frivolity, though, most importantly, with hope and comfort. May we all be so lucky to have people of this caliber throughout our lives, particularly, and especially, in the darker moments.

Meet our Student
Ryan Cochrane

I just wanted to say a few things about Caring Connections. What brought me to CC happened in 2009, when my wife decided to take her life. Of course I was devastated beyond belief. A few weeks or a month after that happened, I called around for a grief support group and found Caring Connections. I called them to arrange my attendance at a support group, but they told me that it was too soon, and that I would need to wait and call back at a later date. I didn’t really understand why at the time, so I waited and went through the stages of grief. Or should I say, I got stuck in the stages of grief. A year later I decided to try and call them again. This time they invited me to attend their 8-week grief support group for survivors of suicide (those of us left behind). I attended the full eight week course and what a difference it made in my life. I made life long friends who had experienced the same things as I.

The last group meeting on the eighth week, I went up and spoke with the lady who was leading the group that night. Her name was Katherine Supiano. I told her about how this grief support group helped me better understand what happened, and how impressed I was with the group leader and how she was able to help us express our feelings throughout the eight weeks. By the way, It took me five weeks to speak out for the first time, and the thing that made it comfortable enough for me to do so, was that they never pushed me. Every week they asked me if I was ready to talk, and I just said no. I just listened to everyone else’s story until I was ready to talk.

Getting back to my conversation I had with Katherine Supiano. After I told Katherine about how well this support group helped me, I told her that I wanted to be able to help people the way this group helped me. She gave me her card from the University of Utah, and I took it home with me. A few months later, I closed and sold off my construction company, and registered for the University of Utah Social Work program. I am happy to say that I graduated with a Bachelors of Social Work in 2014. I worked in that career for a few years with DCFS, and then as a drug counselor. What a rewarding few years that was. Though I left my social work career a year ago to reopen my construction company, I’ll carry with me forever the positive things Caring Connections did for me.
It was my fascination and love for people that instinctively propelled me into my profession as a social worker. With an undergraduate degree in psychology, I pursued a masters and doctorate in social work. I worked as a therapist for over 25 years and a university professor of social work for almost as long, and most recently am a published author on grief. I certainly had the experience and knowledge relating to helping people through grief, until... I experienced the trauma of losing my husband of 51 years to the ravages of ALS. I learned that nothing can prepare you for that internal, personal pain that comes from the loss of a loved one. I had three incredible children and several grandchildren at the time who reminded me that losing a father and grandfather was certainly a family tragedy, challenging those at very young ages, to find unbelievable courage to deal with the pain of grief.

With that background, I had the opportunity to affiliate with the incredible University of Utah College of Nursing Caring Connections program. I was drawn to this organization because of all they have unselfishly contributed, and continue to do so, to the community. Their caring and compassion is genuine and runs deep. I have been a grief work facilitator for several years and consider it a sacred privilege and honor to help, in some small way, those who have suffered the loss of a loved one. I have grown personally through the experience as I have watched these brave people painfully confront their grief. I have learned that grief is like a runaway train on an unplanned journey, facing a tunnel. There is no way to get around the tunnel; one can only go through it in order to move forward toward healing.

Over the years of my social work practice, I have grown to admire the men, women, children, and families I have worked with. They have become my life’s heroes as I watched them work so hard to confront their pain and struggle to move forward. The people in the grief groups are excellent examples of this. They certainly did not ask for this trauma in their lives. Most were blindsided by the loss of their loved one. They feel confused, traumatized, afraid, empty, angry, and sad beyond words—all a package of messy emotions—yet they find the strength and courage to reach out for help and to help others in the process. In the first session of the group setting, some of these heroes remain unsure if they should stay in the group. They may wonder why others’ pain can actually help them. Typically, by the second or third meeting, they come to know why. As one group member said, “Being with those who actually understand what I am going through because they are going through the same thing,” is a rare but powerful experience. There is a normalizing effect. I have witnessed an environment of trust, safety, and support as these incredible group members help each other. At times, it seems to me, that the process of walking with each other, through the pain, is somewhat magical.

Yes, it has been a privilege to be a part of all of this. I have learned so much from observing these dedicated people as they struggle to not allow their pain to destroy them. In fact, in their own time, they find a way to access their personal strength... more than they ever thought possible.

This is why I love people. This is why I am a social worker.

“Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving. When the child leaves home, when the husband or wife leaves for a long period of time or for good, when the beloved friend departs to another country or dies ... the pain of the leaving can tear us apart.

Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking.”

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
We have always had choices in our lives:

- Should I smile or cry now?
- Which thumb to suck?
- Which shoe to lose?
- Who will be my best friend?
- Who will be my second best friend?
- Which to eat first...dessert or the vegetable?
- Which one to fall in love with?
- Who to marry?
- How many children to have?
- What will we name them?

And then, one day, we ran out of choices or so we thought. Our world came to pieces and the sky grew dark and the sun went out. But even then, in the darkest moments that we have ever known, there were choices to be made...even if we did not recognize them. From the moment we learned of the death, there were choices to be made.

- Should I continue breathing?
- Who needs to be notified?
- Which funeral home to use?
- Burial or cremation?
- Which clothes, music, readings?
- Who will do what?
- Should I continue breathing?

In a world where there are no choices to be made, we are faced with countless ones that are required. Yet there is simply no energy, no brainpower and no motivation to make any of them. We would prefer to lie down and die. Some of us even tried, but it didn't work, so we got up, dusted ourselves off, got busy, made coffee, tossed in a load of laundry and began to move forward into grief... a world filled with choice we did not want to make!

In the early hours, days, weeks and even months of grief, our choices are pretty basic and limited. We plod through the fog, frozen as icicles or Popsicles, functioning but not feeling. It is early grief and fortunately the choices are pretty basic.

- Should we eat?
- Should I go to work?
- Should I pay the bills?
- Should I keep breathing?

But as grief progresses, our choices begin to become more complex.

- What should we do with the stuff?
- What do we do with the room?
- Should I keep breathing?
- Should we move, stay married, hide?
- What do we tell everyone when they ask how we are?
- Why are we still breathing?
Eventually grief settles down into a routine, of sorts—a new normal for us—but still there are choices to be made.

- Should we go to a support group?
- Should I make him/her go with me?
- How long should we memorize our child, grandchild?
- How long should we be grieving?
- Can we move on, get over it or stay in sadness forever?

And, finally, what should we bring with us into our new lives?

- Bitterness
- Joy
- Pain first
- Sadness
- Hate
- Pain always
- Guilt
- Sorrow

As you wrestle long and hard, you finally discover the awful truth of grief: your loved one has died, but you have not. You are left among the living, to carve out an existence that has to endure not only the pains of the life, but the joys as well. And suddenly, survival isn’t enough. If you are to be stuck in life, then you can choose to live again.

We can choose how we will allow grief to influence us; we can carry bitterness and anger or we can choose to remember light and love. We rearrange the furniture, change rooms, sometimes we even move. The room becomes a den, a sewing room, a guest room or perhaps someone else’s room. Slowly, we begin to understand that putting things away does not mean putting our love for them out of our lives.

Then, there is fork in the road... a choice point between grieving forever, or learning to live with what you got instead of what you wanted. You don’t have to remember only the awfulness of the death; you can choose to recall the joys, the light your loved one brought, the music of his presence in your life.

These are the “Choice Points” in grief:

- What you will remember
- What you will carry with you
- What you will let go
- Whether to always carry the hurt, the guilt, the bitterness, the anger
- Whether to decide to embrace joy, love, laughter, life
- Whether to let the death overshadow the life

If you didn’t get to say, “Goodbye,” you can say, “I love you” right now, tonight, and forever. You don’t stop loving someone just because they died. What will you decide to remember first: the death or the life?

You can decide to look for joy and carry “rose-colored glasses,” or you can choose to carry pain and sorrow forever. You can risk it all, without waiting for anything anymore; you can just start dancing. Even if there seems to be no light, our memories can light the way. No one can take away our memories. We can toss them away or give them away, but no one else can destroy those precious moments of light. They will last forever.

Love is the size of a sigh
Light as a kiss
Gentle as a whisper
Small as a moment in time

I am glad I bought the ticket. I’m glad I paid the price. I am glad I shared the journey and I still have a memento or two from the ride, but I choose to let go of the hurt so there is room for love to grow. I choose to remember the life, not just the death.

I think the truly bereaved are those who have never known love at all. You and I are rich beyond measure because someone loved us and we loved them...we still do. And for this I am thankful.

Grief isn’t a seasonal song; it’s a lifetime song, but it doesn’t have to be a sad song forever.

Our loved ones lived; we loved them; we still do.

I choose joy and thanks for the little while.

I stared at the blank page. I’m a freelance writer, but trying to write about the sudden death of my oldest brother, words wouldn’t come.

After my brother Rob sustained a traumatic brain injury while riding his bicycle,—yes, he was wearing a helmet—I was asked to teach a course called “Writing Through Grief.” I politely declined. It had only been a few months since he’d died, and I couldn’t deal with my own feelings of ambivalence and loss, let alone feelings of grief in others. A few months passed, and the program director approached me again. “I’m putting together the fall schedule,” she said, “and we need to talk about Writing Through Grief.” I hesitated, but agreed to teach the workshop.

An objective of the course was to write a personal essay and it was my job to come up with a curriculum. If the participants were going to write an essay, I felt I needed to write one, too. But how much should I reveal?

While I’d written about Rob’s death in my journal, I hadn’t come to terms with it. His death was complicated. We weren’t close. I’m used to writing funny and poignant essays, and to me, there was nothing funny about his accidental death filled with unfinished business.

I faced the computer screen, but decided to do a load of laundry instead. And then another. Finally, when I couldn’t find any more laundry to wash or fold, I made myself sit down and at least type a title: “Sudden Death.” Then I began.

The sudden death of my beloved father years ago, and now my brother, came crashing down on me. I wrote about my guilt and anger, my remorse and regret, and my memories, good and bad. I wrote about the time Rob and I were kids when he taught me about constellations. Night after night we’d look up at the sky as he pointed out Orion, the Pleiades, and Cassiopeia. But, as we grew older, we grew apart, not only because of physical distance, but because of our vastly different mindsets and lifestyles. It was a complex mix—a lifetime of guarded affection, conflict and misunderstanding. And now there was no chance for repair or reconciliation.

After filling up many pages over a few days, I felt... lighter. Much of what I wrote didn’t make it into the final essay, but writing allowed me to transfer the raw emotions swirling inside of me, out onto the page, helping me gain a different perspective on our relationship. Intangible feelings became more concrete, and through the writing, I finally understood that unfinished business is just that: unfinished.

Because I went through the exercise of writing through my grief, I was better able to guide the workshop participants as they delved into their difficult feelings, confusion and pain.

We were all there for different reasons, grieving losses from deaths due to accidents, overdoses, murder, illness, suicide, and more. Through writing prompts and readings, we explored a range of emotions. And, just like me, they wondered: How much should I tell? How can I be honest without compromising those we love? We listened to each other as we shared our writings, bearing witness to each others’ stories. In between passing around Kleenex boxes, and sometimes even laughing, we felt safe within the supportive space we’d created. While we each had our own unique experiences, we began to understand that grief, a jumble of opposing emotions, is ever-present and universal. Recognizing our shared humanity helped all of us along the path of healing.

Writing through my grief served as a bridge from the person I was when I first faced that blank page, to the one I am now. Writing provided me with clarity and some inner peace. I know I will continue to be sideswiped with conflicting feelings, but the pain isn’t as sharp. Now, when I look up into the sky, I’m relieved to see Orion, the Pleiades, or Cassiopeia, comforted by all of my memories of Rob. The whole complex mix.

For more information on Debbie Leaman and upcoming Writing Through Grief workshops, please visit debbieleaman.com.
It was magnetic! Everywhere you went it drew you in. The TV, newspaper, internet—all had images and stories of 9/11 victims and their families. Day after day, we all saw the images of airplanes and buildings, dust and ruins. Tragedy in all forms. Everyone during that time, if you asked them where they were, will instantly remember. We all need to remember and never forget how so many lives were affected and how the country came together to strengthen each other.

Two weeks after this awful time, I was asked to go to a Caring connections Board Meeting. Beth Cole wanted to do something special for those who had lost their lives in trying to save others. She suggested we make Carrie Bears for all of the Firefighters and Police Officer families. I instantly became overwhelmed. How many of them were there? And how could we get their shirts to make teddy bears? In a moment of weakness, I suggested we do something else. But as we talked through it all, it became evident that this would be a personal gift that would make a difference.

We began making plans. To obtain a shirt from the families just wasn’t feasible so we purchased bolts of fabric that were used to make the shirts. Sherry Poulson made contact with a firefighter in New York—Engine 54, Dave Turner. Dave was able to get us all the names of the fallen and lists of fire stations and supply us with official patches. Each Carrie Bear would have an American Flag embroidered on one arm with either NYPD or FDNY on the other arm. The back of the bear would be embroidered to include “In loving memory” and the individual name along with the location of their firehouse (i.e. Ladder 4) as well as the date, September 11, 2001.

I envisioned long tables in church gyms with layers of fabric and my pattern pieces. I was a little worried about the time this would take. We were able to find a company that took my pattern pieces and could cut down through layers of fabric at one time to make it easier. I would sew an example of an ear or an arm and package it along with 50 plus other arms in one bag with instructions and an approximate time it would take to put this one item together. After all of the separate parts were sewn by many across the valley, I with a few other trusted seamstresses would put the bears all together. Then came the stuffing days! We had several days scheduled at the Caring Connections office and many were held in homes and with youth groups. Each Carrie Bear was sponsored by a family or a company. The tag around the neck of the bear could be personalized to say something like, “This Carrie Bear is from the Smith family in Salt Lake City. We hope it brings comfort.” etc. Those that sponsored the bears helped in covering the costs of fabric, thread, monogramming, packaging materials, ribbons, and stuffing.

Halfway through the project, a few of us decided to go to New York to deliver some of the bears to Engine 54—Dave Turner’s firehouse. He had invited us to be there for their Christmas party on December 15, 2001. After so many hours of helpful hands, we made it! We were on a plane to New York with hope of healing some hearts and filling some empty arms.

We had mailed the other fire stations Carrie Bears ahead of us and had packed suit cases full of the 15 bears we would hand deliver. The day that we walked into Engine 54, the first thing we saw was the banner...
that hung from the ceiling, “All gave some—some gave all.” This phrase went straight to our hearts. Then we saw Dave Turner. He saw us with all of the bears in our arms and he just bowed his head and cried. We decided that the four of us would stay in a little room off the side of the main firehouse area and one by one, each family would come in and receive their Carrie Bear. It was two hours of kissing cheeks and tears running down our faces. The families were so appreciative. They would hug us and say thing like, “What a treasure,” “Thank you for your thoughtfulness,” “This will help with the loneliness,” and “Now I have someone to sleep with at night.” It was so fulfilling to see the bears immediately be snuggled into the arms of those who had lost so much.

It turned out that all of the packages we had sent ahead of time for other fire stations were lost. It took us a day to find them and coordinate getting them to the right places. We were so glad to physically be there to make sure it all worked out.

We visited the popular sites while in New York for a few days but the most meaningful was meeting the families at Engine 54 and seeing ground zero. The outpouring of love, support, connection, and bond between all that were there was unbelievable. It changed me. The quiet stillness of ground zero was palpable. There was understanding without words. Comfort in a glance between strangers.

I had the privilege of going back to New York in August 2016. I hadn’t been since that Christmas of 2001. The memorial dedicated to those that lost their lives was indescribable. The same feeling of connection and stillness was there and it washed over me as I fingered the names I recognized inscribed in the bronze parapets. Tears again rolled down my cheeks as I remembered their families. My heart is forever touched by this experience. The whole project changed how I felt about life and grief. On September 11th of each year, Dave Turner and I exchange emails of remembering and catching up. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity to help in some small way.
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/

SEEDS OF REMEMBRANCE

We were delighted to welcome Sherry Young as our featured speaker for Seeds of Remembrance. Sherry spoke of the death of her sister Joy, who died of cancer, but also struggled with mental illness. Sherry and Joy’s daughters compellingly reminded us of the value of each life and the importance of intentional remembrance of those we love.

The evening began with a dove release provided by Wings of Love.

The 2017 recipient of the Carma Kent Heart of Caring Award was grief group facilitator Vicki Pond, chaplain at Primary Children’s Hospital. Community Nursing Services Honor Salute Program, which honors hospice patients that are veterans was honored with the Kind Remembrance Award. We are especially grateful for the ongoing support of Larkin Mortuary and the Rose Shop for their generous support of Seeds of Remembrance.

RACE FOR GRIEF

We are pleased to participate in the Memorial Day Race for Grief, coordinated by Lora Erickson (aka the Blond Runner). This race and fun run honors the grief of those who have lost a family member or friend. The Race for Grief is held in Bountiful and supports Caring Connections and The Share Program for Pregnancy Loss. We appreciate the support of Dannon Yogurt and Patton Group Properties for their support.
A HOPE AND COMFORT IN GRIEF PROGRAM

2017 Larkin Charity Golf Classic

Wednesday, August 23, 2017 at Eaglewood Golf Course

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