Grief is a universal experience and nearly everyone will lose someone that they love at some point in their life. We also know that grief is unique to each person. Part of what makes each grief experience unique is the relationship between the grieving person and the one who died. Two siblings for example, will grieve the death of a father differently—because each had a different relationship with the same father. As we reflect on these various relationships, now “fixed” in time by death, we recognize the challenge of grieving the death of one that we longed to have a good relationship with, but did not. To grieve a sibling who was selfish or demanding, to grieve a child who was “not himself” due to addiction or mental illness, to grieve a spouse that abandoned you and later died—these are the kinds of losses that bereavement researcher Pauline Boss describes as ambiguous losses. One may grieve a relationship where the now deceased person was psychologically present in one’s heart and mind, but physically absent, as in a kidnapping, or during protracted military service; but most commonly ambiguous loss develops when the deceased person was psychologically absent or estranged and subsequently died. This is where “unfinished business” in grief emerges as a particular heartache for many. Death may close the door to actual reconciliation or restoration of a relationship, but in both the best and worst of relationships, much of grieving involves reflecting on what was good or not so good in our relationship with the one who died. No relationship was perfect, and this reflective process helps the grieving person come to terms with the reality of the relationship, the meaning of their loss and the transition toward the new life ahead.

In every one of our support groups, we welcome a mixture of those who are grieving what they loved and lost, and those who may be grieving what they desired and never had. Each type of grief is worthy and honored in our program. We invite you to consider our fall grief support groups, or to recommend them to someone in need.

Warm regards,
Kathie Supiano, PhD, LCSW
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 through the generous support of Larkin Mortuary.

Should there not be enough people registered for a particular group, the group may be postponed.
In this issue, we will update you on the ongoing research we are conducting, and describe the contributions of our graduate research assistants.

**ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION**

**Group Therapy for Dementia Caregivers at Risk for Complicated Grief**

We are now in the final year of this three year project to develop and evaluate a pre-loss group psychotherapy intervention for dementia family caregivers whose person with dementia resides in a nursing home and is nearing the end of life. Our research team includes Drs. Kathie Supiano, Troy Andersen and Marilyn Luptak, and partner facilities the William Christofferson Veterans Home, Silverado Aspen Park and St. Joseph’s Villa. Our graduate research assistant, Cynthia Beynon coordinates all recruitment, assessment and data management. She is earning her PhD in Nursing.

**CAMBIA HEALTH FOUNDATION**

**Grief Support Groups for Frontier and Rural Utah: A Pilot Study to Develop and Evaluate Tele-Health Distance Technology to Provide Grief Support and Develop the Bereavement Care Professional Workforce in Utah**

We have completed this project to deliver and evaluate our grief support groups by tele-health technology to bereaved persons served by three rural Utah hospice agencies. We found the model both feasible and effective. We will use this model to conduct our support groups beyond the I-15 corridor. Our graduate research assistant, Alzina Koric managed the technology and coordinated recruitment, assessment and data management. Alzina is a PhD student in Public Health.

**RITA & ALEX HILLMAN FOUNDATION—EMERGENT INNOVATION GRANT**

**Complicated Grief Group Therapy for Community-Residing Persons with Serious Mental Illness**

In this one year project, we will evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of our Complicated Grief Group Therapy program for clients of Polizzi Clinic, Utah’s only mental health clinic for uninsured persons with serious mental illness. Our research team includes Drs. Kathie Supiano and Ann Hutton, CGGT facilitator Paula Larsen, LCSW, graduate co-facilitators Drew Stelter and Sarah Jane Morrison and graduate research assistant Colin Riley. Colin conducts all recruiting, assessment and data management. Colin, Drew and Sarah Jane are earning their Doctorate of Nursing Practice-Psychiatric/Mental Health.

**STATE OF UTAH—DIVISION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

**Grief from Overdose Death: Project to Prepare Clinicians to Provide Grief Support to Those Bereaved by Overdose Death**

In this project, we will develop, implement and evaluate a training program in caring for persons who have lost someone to overdose death for professionals and clinicians. Our team includes Kathie Supiano, Mary Martineau, LCSW and graduate research assistant Sage Williams. Sage is earning her Doctorate of Nursing Practice-Psychiatric/Mental Health, and coordinates all training sessions and participant evaluation procedures.
My name is Torle Nenbee. I was born in Nigeria and I come from a refugee background. I graduated in May 2019, with a Masters of Social Work at the University of Utah maintaining a 3.7 GPA and earning the Emerging Diversity Scholars Fellowship. I received my Bachelor of Science in Sociology at University of Anchorage Alaska and served three years in the Peace Corps in Lesotho, Africa as a Healthy Youth Volunteer.

My future practice goals are to become a licensed Social Worker and to work with underrepresented populations in the areas of policies and programs. I have a passion for community outreach.

I am currently interning at Huntsman Cancer Institute. My supervisor arranged for me to co-facilitate the Caring Connections grief and loss support group. My professional facilitator taught me that a co-facilitator plays an important role in the group dynamic. As a co-facilitator, you are responsible for leading by example and need to be an observer of the group. You have to be able to communicate what the lead facilitator may not be able to observe, and also you have to be on the same wavelength as the lead facilitator so the group dynamic is healthy.

Grief and loss has taught me that while it is healthy to grieve it is also healthy to use coping mechanisms to handle this grief. Setting aside a time of the day to grieve is natural while the rest of the day using coping mechanisms in a healthy way to get through the rest of the day is natural while you are processing this loss. Grieving people have helped to reinforce this concept and allowed me to see that there is not a set time for the healing process.

This experience will affect my professional work because it gave me skills and hands on experience that I can carry on with my work.

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/
Whenever I’m asked what I like to do in my free time, I always say, “The activity never matters to me as long as I enjoy the people who are with me!” Relationships are everything to me. I’ve especially always had a special connection with older adults. When I was a little girl, my great-grandmother would take me out to the big tree in the yard and we’d have a little packed lunch. We’d sing songs and I remember her letting a ladybug crawl on her hands. I was scared at first to touch it, but she made it less scary. I was still a little girl when her husband died, my great-grandfather. I remember her grief as she and I stood next to his casket. I remember being scared to touch him, but again, she made it less scary. I touched his hands and was profoundly changed by witnessing her love for him and her sadness at his death. Her grief was sacred to me. I believe grief is sacred. It is a deep expression of our love.

Being a part of Caring Connections has been one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. I have watched as people have been scared to come together, scared to share their deep feelings, scared by the loss they are experiencing and their new unfamiliar life, and somehow, together we make it a little less scary. I have witnessed healing and true connection between people from all walks of life, with nothing else in common, except their loved-one’s-sized hole in their hearts and the care they feel for each other. We stand next to each other in our grief and we know we are not alone.

I feel so privileged to be a part of anyone’s grief journey.

As a social worker at the University of Utah Inpatient Rehab Center, I frequently witness people in the midst of grieving. I have been amazed at the resiliency of the human spirit. I don’t know that any of us gets exactly what we hope for in life, and in those devastating moments when we’re confronted with the loss of love or of life or of dreams it feels like even the sun betrays us by still shining. But shine on it does. And eventually we find ourselves open to its warmth again. Relationships are everything. To all of us. And Caring Connections provides a beautiful, safe place to venture out into the sun together.
BY DIANA M. MARTIN

Diana M. Martin has been an adjunct professor in The Writing and Reading Center in Montgomery College in Rockville, MD, for over 15 years. She has a MFA in Creative Nonfiction and has published articles in the areas of parenting, health and cultural arts. When her husband lost his battle with cancer of unknown primary, later identified as bile duct cancer, she became the sole caregiver for their adult son, Alex who is autistic.

After my husband died in 2015, the first thing I wanted to do was to move. The townhome we shared with our son felt large, cold and sad. Dan spent his last days in the living room looking out onto the garden where he could see cardinals gather on the ledge of our deck to feed each other a worm. He sat in a brown, leather recliner that lifted him to standing position when he was too weak to do this on his own. His spirit filled the house, and although he was a joyous person, all I could see and feel was a heaviness of someone who suffered. For a while I couldn’t look at photos of us, let alone sit in his chair. It physically and mentally hurt me to see a man, once so rich with a love for life, never be able to enjoy retirement, see his son become independent or spent his last years doing whatever pleased him. I wanted to flee. I spent months looking at condos, scouring the “FOR SALE” signs and calling realtors. Finally, I made a decision.

I decided to stay on one condition: this house would be redecorated with a focus on the new relationship I have with him versus the relationship I had with him when he was alive. Our relationship still exists, but in a different realm. Although it may seem one-sided (I do all the talking), if I listen quietly and with intent, I can hear his spirit guiding me in the background. I think to myself that he would have liked certain things, such as the new furniture, cozy lighting and inspirational saying that I have scattered throughout our basement.

People have said to me, “Make this into your own space.” So, I tried to. It entailed hanging a big, bright mural of sunflowers across newly painted gray panels. I’m not sure Dan would have gone for that. I can imagine us discussing the matter and almost predict what he would say. Then I would remind him that we planted sunflowers in our backyard the year our son was born and that I had photos in Alex’s baby memory book to prove it. I try to visualize him smiling and tentatively giving in. In this new relationship, I see him joyful—the Dan before the cancer took over.

There have been times when I sit in this newly rejuvenated space and marvel at life. Other times I cry because Dan is not her here enjoy it with me. Old pangs of guilt return. I start to visualize the sick Dan. I remind myself to dim those memories that are painful because I want to have a new relationship with my husband. I want the chapter of his sickness and death
to close so we can move onto the next chapter. Cancer owes this to us.

Deciding not to move and redecorating turned out to be an integral part of my healing process. It allowed me to use my creative energy to engage both body and mind. Some days my body ached from going up and down the stairs and moving furniture. Other days I was exhilarated from re-purposing a window from a thrift shop into a cool piece of artwork. I incorporated Christian, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual practices to make the room a serene, safe place to meditate and relax.

I moved the electric armchair that was bought for Dan to use when he was in the last stages of cancer into this new space. I placed a warm blanket and pillows on it. When I sit in it, I think of Dan as free. He is free from pain. I allow myself to sit quietly with the Dan that is free, and it is hard. But the room is beautiful. It has a fountain, gorgeous multicolored tapestries and a salt lamp. The sun sets above the sunflowers, creating a sky of cobalt blue and orange. I, too, want to be free.

Published February 15, 2019, reprinted by permission CURE Magazine

BOOK REVIEW

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM R. KLINER, PHD

Drew & The Grief Thief: A Story For Children And Adults Experiencing Death & Grief
Lisa Zoll, Jason Schwartzman, Lynn Shiner, Eric Cleckner—Illustrator

Drew & The Grief Thief is a tender tale of a young boy named Drew and Sprinkles his pet hamster. Through delightful illustrations and an insightful text the reader accompanies Drew through both the difficult journey of grieving the loss of his furry friend. While this book may on the surface appear to be for children only, it actually provides adult readers with insights and practical tools/tips to help children who have lost a significant person or pet.

Grief is a challenging topic to address with any population and Drew & The Grief Thief provides adults a platform for tackling this topic to help children and themselves. It is an all too common occurrence for well-meaning persons to say and/or do the wrong thing while hoping to comfort someone who is grieving. Words and actions of family and friends unfortunately can range from helpful to harmful when a child or adult is grieving. The authors wisely use repetition to tie ideas together and make concepts easier to understand. One can understand how Drew’s “happy” world was prior to the loss of Sprinkles; how the wrong responses of each family member to the loss of Sprinkles altered his “safe” world and how a “hopeful” world is possible when they recognized how to respond in a helpful and healing manner.

While the sweet illustrations and text are easy enough for a child to understand the true message is really for adults. In our longing to comfort others from their loss we often add to their grieving. When one loses a loved one (from a furry friend to a huggable human) that loss results in grief. Due to the complex nature of the topic of grief it is recommended that children 3–10 read this book accompanied by an adult. It is the reviewer’s recommendation that ALL adults read this book so that they are better prepared to understand grief and ways in which they can be a healer when others are in need of care, comfort, and community when faced with the loss of a loved one.

The loss of a loved takes time. Time has a far better chance of healing all wounds if we all learn to Listen, Empathize, Validate, Educate, Legitimize, and Support the griever. Drew has a great deal to offer helping you become a Healer rather than a Grief Thief.
As I headed south on I-215 my heart raced with the anticipation of meeting Carrie Pike. I had clothes that belonged to my wife, Nellie, in the back of my car. Gathering up her clothes earlier that day had been so hard. I lost my sweet Nellie nine months ago with Early Onset Alzheimer’s at 55. My heart was crushed, I had no idea how I was going to carry on.

A good friend of mine told me about the Caring Connections meeting, which I attended two days earlier, with Carrie Pike as the main speaker. I really did not want to attend because it was on a Monday night, and that was the night I had friends over for Monday night football. But I had the strongest impression that I needed to be there. At the Grief and the Holidays meeting, Carrie talked about her new book and her Sept 11th experience of helping families who lost loved ones, and the miracle that came from providing over 400 families with Carrie Bears.

As she answered the door, Carrie could immediately sense the heavy load on my shoulders. She invited me in and asked, “did you bring your wife’s clothes?” I really didn’t know the process, so I brought some of her favorite outfits in from the car and we talked more about her. Carrie really loved the clothes and said that they were things she would wear.

Carrie was so happy and made me feel at ease as we talked. She said, “Tell me about your wife?” I opened up and told her that Nellie was president of a sorority at the U of U, graduated in elementary education, and taught 4th grade for 17 years. My wife was very outgoing and loved people. She also was a counselor at Brighton Camp in 1982. Carrie looked at me and said, “REALLY!! What was her camp name?” I said, “It was SAGE!!” Carrie put her hand over her mouth and said, “Was your wife NELLIE?” My heart sank as I said yes and asked Carrie if she knew her. She said, “Hold on.” Carrie ran to her room and brought back her first scrapbook and there it was, a picture of her and Nellie at camp. Nellie was Carrie’s counselor! We both looked at each other and cried. I couldn’t believe it! I felt like Nellie was standing right by us as we talked and cried.

Carrie said Nellie was her favorite counselor and she had so much love for her. Carrie was supposed to roommate with her good friend that week but it didn’t work out so she ended up with another roommate which brought her a lot of anxiety. She was nervous to be away from home but when she met Sage that fear went away. After camp, Carrie really wanted to keep in touch with her. They exchanged letters and even a year later Sage (Nellie) went to Carrie’s house to tell her she was engaged to be married to me!

Who knew that Carrie could now give Sage’s grieving husband some comfort and peace 40 years later as she made Carrie Bears for Nellie’s grandkids? The connection between me and Carrie was such a tender mercy especially during the holidays. Nellie had saved Carries letters from camp and I gave them to Carrie as a Christmas gift. This connection still brings tears to my eyes because I know Nellie wanted me to meet Carrie and now I know why I needed to attend the meeting. It was not a coincidence.
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Many Caring Connections grief group participants interact closely with our undergraduate work study interns, from an initial phone call to our office to being greeted at group nights and events. Time marches on, and our interns go on to do great work in their careers.

Joseph Anderson, MSW was our intern from 2008-09. He is now a regional mental health trainer for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Daniela McCroby was our intern from 2015-2018. She graduated with her Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing this past December. She married Michael Nelson in February and is a nurse in Twin Falls, ID.

WRITING THROUGH GRIEF

Writing can help guide us toward deeper understanding of the pain and suffering of loss. Whatever the reason for grieving—divorce, death of a loved one, illness, aging, job loss, empty-nesting, moving—this workshop is designed to provide a supportive environment for participants to explore and honor all feelings of grief. Writing prompts, exercises and readings will offer new ways to express thoughts. Putting pen to paper gives us the opportunity to change perspective and transform suffering into healing. No prior writing experience is necessary. All writing levels welcome.

"Writing through Grief with Debbie Leaman provided a safe space in which we could explore the many facets of grief and loss. Through writing prompts, we were gently guided through and allowed to express difficult emotions integral to the grieving process. As we voluntarily shared our experiences, we connected with one another and realized that though our grief may be solitary, we were not alone."

—Participant, Writing Through Grief

Contact info: debbieleaman@gmail.com
Website: debbieleaman.com
WOULD YOU LIKE TO CARE FOR CARING CONNECTIONS? HERE ARE WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT US:

If you wish to donate to Caring Connections directly, please contact us at 801-585-9522.

Order a Memory tile for the Caring Connections Memory Wall. Tiles are $35 and inscribed with the name of the person being memorialized. The Memory Wall is displayed in the Caring Connections office area at the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building.

Remember someone you love this fall with a memory tile.

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 __________________________ Middle Initial _______ Last Name ________________________________
Birth Year _________ Death Year ____________

Ordered by __________________________________________ Phone __________________________
Address ____________________________________________

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
COPING WITH LOSS, DYING, AND DEATH IN LATER LIFE

Caring Connections provided the teleconference from the Hospice Foundation of America, Aging America: Coping with Loss, Dying, and Death in Later Life on March 29. Many clinicians in the area of Grief and Bereavement attended. Dr. Carole Baraldi-Geriatrician & Palliative Care MD presented.

GRIEVING THE UNTINKABLE

Seeds of Remembrance “Grieving the Unthinkable” with speaker, Michelle Schmidt was held at the College of Nursing on May 1. Michelle is the author of the book, Carried: How One Mother’s Trust in God Helped Her Through the Unthinkable. Many guests enjoyed her insight and her resilient spirit. To view this event, go to www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections.

I LONG FOR CHUBBY FINGERS WRAPPED ROUND MY EMPTY HAND

By Janelle Vigil

In memory of her daughter Leyla

I long for chubby fingers wrapped round my empty hand
And ten little toes buried in the sand
I carry you in my heart my tiny one
Where reality doesn’t stand a chance in the morning sun
On days like this
I long my darling for what could have been
And smile for that which was
Your first laughs echo sweetly in my ears
As tenderly as your heartbroken tears
I long to wipe them away again
And hold your little head against my heart
You grew up too fast and then you went away
To places far flung and to this very day
I cannot find you or follow
Those wiser than me tell me wait till tomorrow
Time eases all sorrow.
but You toddled behind me too long and so I fear they are wrong
Love lasts forever I believe
And thus some days I continue to grieve...

with love,
Mama
Thank You
to our community partners, facilitators, volunteers and donors; and especially to our group participants who, in sharing their grief, lift the hearts of others.