

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Elizabeth Gilbert has written, “Grief is a force of energy that cannot be controlled or predicted. It comes and goes on its own schedule. Grief does not obey your plans, or your wishes. Grief will do whatever it wants to you, whenever it wants to.” Certainly, most grieving people will endorse the reality of this sentiment—at

least early in grief, and at least in part. Grief “will have its way” with us—because it does need to be fully experienced for the one who died to be integrated into our memory and into our future experience. But this is not the final way station of grief. With acceptance of one’s distressing thoughts, feelings and memories, with reasonably effective coping strategies, and the support of kind people, one can navigate the difficult ship of grief to safe harbor. Grief “bursts” may come for an unbelievably long season—but with these supports, grief will soften. Caring Connections is here to contribute to your grief journey with acceptance, understanding, the support of skilled group facilitators and others whose loss may mirror your own.

It is essential that you give yourself the grace of patience in this journey—Gilbert is correct that grief cannot be hurried, but there is much we can do to see that it is not prolonged. Being patient with yourself includes this recognition, stated by Paul Irion, “A death has occurred and everything is changed by this event. We are painfully aware that life can never be the same again.

But there is another way to look upon this truth. If life went on the same without the presence of the one who has died, we could only conclude that the life we here remember filled no space—meant nothing.

Life can be the same after a trinket has been lost, but never after the loss of a treasure.”

Please know we are here to support you.

*“The world is indeed full of peril,
and in it there are many dark
places; but still there is much that
is fair, and though in all lands love
is now mingled with grief, it grows
perhaps the greater.”*

—J.R.R. Tolkien

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DESIGN/LAYOUT

University Print & Mail Services

Registration required, 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.



Serving Utah Families for Over 130 Years
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Grief Support Groups

FOR ADJUSTING TO THE DEATH OF SOMEONE CLOSE

UPCOMING SUMMER 2021 GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

Online Grief Support Groups

(Held via Zoom)

- **Loss of Spouse or Partner**
Wednesdays, June 30 to August 18 from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm
- **Loss to Suicide**
Thursdays, July 1 to August 19 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm
- **Loss of a Family Member or Friend**
Wednesdays, July 7 to August 25 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm
- **Loss to Overdose**
Wednesdays, June 16 to August 4 from 6:30 to 8:00 pm

Online COVID Support Groups

COVID Grief Support Group

Tuesdays, July 6 to August 24 from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

This group will be focused on COVID-19 related grief—this includes those who have lost a family member or friend to coronavirus as well as all who are grieving deaths that were disrupted.

COVID Recovery Support Group

Tuesdays, August 17 to November 2 from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

This group will be focused on support for individuals who have had COVID-19 and are dealing with emotional struggles related to their illness and lasting symptoms.

NEWS IN BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH

Mayland CR, Harding AJE, Preston N, Payne S. Supporting Adults Bereaved Through COVID-19: A Rapid Review of the Impact of Previous Pandemics on Grief and Bereavement. *J Pain Symptom Manage*. 2020 Aug;60(2):e33-e39. doi: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2020.05.012. Epub 2020 May 15. PMID: 32416233; PMCID: PMC7228694.

In this recently published article examining grief sequelae to previous pandemics, the authors note that epidemics and pandemics appear to cause multiple losses not only in death itself but also with respect to disruption of social norms, rituals, and mourning practices. "This affects the ability for an individual to connect with the deceased both before and after the death, potentially increasing the risk of complicated grief."

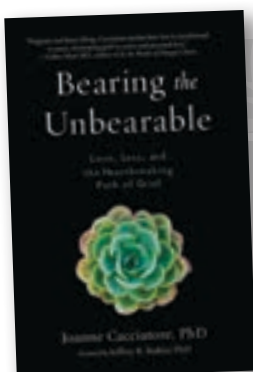
As indicated in this figure, we are individually and collectively in the slow slog of recovery from the countless, traumatic deaths from COVID-19, and deaths that occurred during the time of COVID-19. At Caring Connections, this strengthens our

PHASES OF DISASTER



Adapted from Zunin & Myers as cited in DeWolfe, D.J., 2000. *Training manual for mental health and human service workers in major disasters* (2nd ed., HHS Publication No. ADM 90-538). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

resolve to stay ahead of this trauma as an early resource to those grieving this year. Our commitment is evident in our COVID grief and COVID recovery support groups (please see previous page).



BOOK REVIEW

*Bearing the Unbearable:
Love, Loss and the
Heartbreaking Path of Grief*

Joanne Cacciatore

This exquisitely compelling book was written by Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, an accomplished research scientist and founder of the MISS Foundation, a not-for-profit program that helps families whose children have died or are dying. Dr. Jo strikes the

perfect balance between her deeply felt loss of her daughter and her scientific and therapeutic understanding of grief. This book is structured in 52 small chapters—just enough for a newly bereaved person to take a “bite” at a time. Two things set this book apart from the many on bookshelves. First, it is not prescriptive, but rather conveys respect for the varieties of grief. Secondly, and truthfully, it does not offer simple fixes or answers. Reading it will help you find your own way, and offer the strength and perspective to walk it.

MEET OUR PARTICIPANT

CHRISTINE MAUGHAN

On March 24th, 2020 I experienced my first COVID-19 symptoms when I suddenly couldn't taste Sriracha and my face broke out in a rash. It would be a few more weeks before I started having breathing problems and would eventually test positive in April. I thought that if I caught COVID and did not have a serious case I would be better in two weeks, because that is what we were being told at the time. What I didn't expect was to still be dealing with a long list of post-viral symptoms a year later, everything from cognitive issues to shortness of breath, dizziness, tremors, erratic heart rates and blood pressure, and a daily reminder that simple tasks are much more difficult than they used to be and certainly more exhausting. I never imagined COVID-19 could lead to a chronic illness, and I'll never forget the day my doctor used that term to describe my condition.

There are some symptoms that have improved over time. My chest pain and cough are not nearly as intense as they once were, and they no longer frighten me. The joint pain and stiffness have improved significantly from the days when I was unable to hold a pencil to make a shopping list. But other symptoms have gotten worse, such as the tremors in my hands and legs, while others stay the same or come and go, such as the fevers. The fatigue is my daily companion, though it has certainly improved since the acute phase, and most importantly I have learned better how to manage it and live with it.

Before catching COVID I was an active 37-year-old. I loved to hike, ski, and road bike and spent as much time as possible playing in the mountains with my family. I loved nothing more than watching my young daughter learn how to ski. Most of those hobbies are not currently accessible to me, or if they are they must be shortened significantly and may wipe me out for days. In many ways it feels as though my identity has been stolen by this virus, and while I remind myself every day just how lucky I am to be alive, I am also having to reshape who I am, while grieving for the person I once was.

Being diagnosed with a chronic illness can be an isolating experience, and it adds an extra dimension when the illness is new and poorly understood, and when there is a worldwide pandemic causing many

of our usual social circles to be drastically reduced. When I first learned about Caring Connections from a Facebook post in the Utah Long Haulers group I was curious, but hesitant to join. I had never done anything like this. I also kept thinking one day I would just wake up and be better, and I wasn't sure I was sick enough to be accepted in the group as I didn't want to minimize anyone else's suffering. I almost backed out multiple times, but I am so glad I didn't.

Caring Connections provided much needed support during a journey that for me ended up being much longer and much more challenging than I expected. Through this group I was able to connect with others who were experiencing similar symptoms and similar challenges coping. We shared tips for how to get through the hard days, and celebrated with each other during the good days. We related to one another in a way that no one else truly could. The facilitators did a wonderful job helping us navigate our challenges and teaching us coping mechanisms for when things get rough. My favorite parts, however, would have to be the guided meditations and the way that we lifted each other up. Knowing that you are not alone, that your struggles are being shared by others, and that you have a team behind you cheering you on, has been an invaluable experience and immensely beneficial.

To my fellow Long Haulers, I would say:

- Never give up hope. There are researchers and doctors working hard to understand what has happened to us and how best to help us recover.
- You are not alone. Chronic illness can be an isolating experience, but there are so many Long Haulers who are living through a similar experience to yours. If it could help to connect with some seek them out.
- You are going to have good days and bad, really good moments and bad. This is to be expected. During the bad days remind yourself that they won't last forever, and don't forget to appreciate and celebrate the good ones when they come.
- Give yourself the same grace you would give your best friend. What you are dealing with is real and difficult. Allow yourself the time to rest and

the courage to admit that you don't have to be perfect when things are hard.

- Ask for help when you need it. Whether it be crying with a good friend on a bad day, or allowing someone to do your grocery shopping so you can save your energy for something else, the people who care about you want to help, and it's okay to let them know how.

- Try to find joy in every day, even if it's something small. One of our facilitators mentioned how she began making an effort to step outside and watch the sunset in the evening and it really stuck with me. Try to incorporate a moment of mindfulness or joy into each day for yourself.

MEET OUR FACILITATOR

TROY ANDERSEN

I am from Utah, born and raised. As an undergrad I studied psychology. I've always been fascinated by the human mind and experience. I have two master's degrees, first in Social Work and next in Gerontology, and a PhD in Social Work. I am an alum from the University of Utah. Outside of work, I live to be outdoors. I have a second home near Capitol Reef and enjoy being there as much as possible. I am the proud father of 5 and have 9 grandchildren with one more on the way!

I am on faculty in the College of Social Work at the University of Utah. I teach master's level courses in health social work and aging. I have practiced social work for over 30 years! I have worked for over a decade in a neurology clinic with individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. In addition, I have worked in emergency departments as a clinical social worker. Dr. Supiano and I have worked together for 15 years in both clinical and research capacities. I have participated in numerous Caring Connection

support groups including spousal and child loss and with caregivers of individuals with dementia.

Shared lived experiences allows for a safe place to address the complexities of loss and to utilize proven methods to enact change. Even the most caring support individuals often develop compassion fatigue when a grieving individual doesn't start to adjust over a societally sanctioned period of time. Group interventions are often the best mode of treatment in situations of grief and loss.

As a frontline healthcare provider, I have had an ongoing opportunity to see the ravages of this illness exact a toll on both the individuals with COVID-19 and the healthcare providers engaged in providing direct care. An aspect of COVID-19 that is just beginning to get more publicity is the "long-hauler's" lived experience that continues long-term. Frankly, it has been humbling to witness these ill-effects in the lives of those in the group I have led. It has been a pleasure to attempt to address these complicated issues with these brave individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought overwhelming grief to many families.

We want you to be aware that FEMA, under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, is providing financial assistance for COVID-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020.

For information, please refer to this website:

<https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>

MEET OUR STUDENT

GAIL ROBERTS

My name is Gail Roberts. I am a social work Master's student—graduating in May! I am planning on continuing work with older adults in the hospice setting. I had heard mild mentioning of Caring Connections throughout the MSW program, but I did not know I could become involved. I had never experienced a grief support group before and felt like I needed that under my belt to decide if I wanted to continue bereavement-related social work practice.

My co-facilitator was Emogene Hennick. I think she embodies the quality of active listening. Sometimes people just need to talk through their feelings, especially if they have never said these feelings aloud. Emogene is masterful at allowing the time and space required for articulating those thoughts and emotions. I hope to emulate that kind of patience with the bereavement clients I come into contact with in the future.

I learned that our society forces an uncomfortable, rigid mold on the grieving process. Many people still think their grief journey has a definite end and beginning, starting at Denial and ending at

Acceptance. Grief is infinitely more complicated and certainly not linear. I learned that the most crucial resource for grieving people is normalization. They may believe their way of grieving is inappropriate, just because it is not linear or perfectly logical. While some coping methods may be more productive than others, I still vehemently believe that, as long as no one is being harmed, all ways of grieving are normal and okay. It really shows how much macro-level advocacy is needed to change the way we think about how grief "should" happen.

I co-facilitated the group for people who lost a loved one to COVID-19. This was incredibly interesting, as such a polarizing pandemic led to complicated, disenfranchised grief. It is something these people were (are!) forced to think about daily. I am thankful for their stories and resilience, as they will inform my future social work practice. There will be infinite consequences of the pandemic for decades, and I feel much more prepared to assist clients experiencing loss due to COVID-19 competently.

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/



A NEW SEASON, A NEW WAY OF SEEING

BY DARCIE SIMS, PHD, CHT, CT, GMS

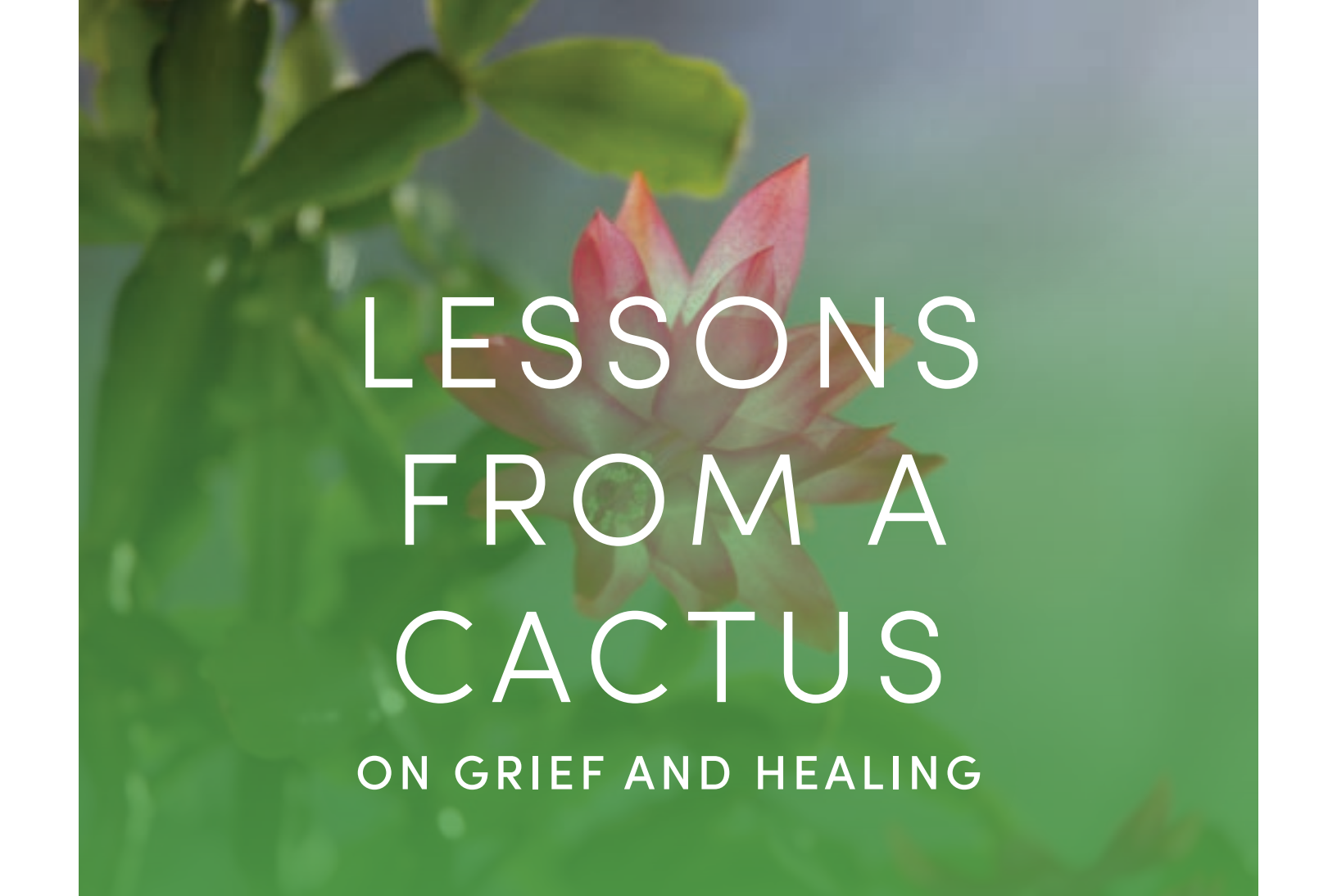
Spring is the season of shifting, sorting and cleaning house. Spring brings with it a sense of renewal, a sense of wanting to lighten the load, clear the air and simplify living. It's a time to clear away the baggage of winter's grief and to shed the overcoat that seemed to shelter us from the pain.

Spring is the time when we get a new sense of the cycles of life. When tulips bloom, trees bud and the garden begins to awaken, there comes a change in perspective. We may be able to see things in a new light, with new vision, with a clarity that can only be born in the fires of loss. We will never go back to being who we were, but we can establish a new sense of self as we work through our grief. We can create a "new normal" as we learn to adapt to the changing demands of grief. We can get through this time of sorrow, but we will not get over it. We simply learn to look at things differently in the early light of spring.

The death of a loved one teaches us to embrace the moments of our life rather than waste them in search of tomorrow. Grief is a thief, stealing away energy and time, and I no longer want to be a victim of anything. When you really think of it, there is so little time in life, and I no longer want to waste any of it. Sometimes I forget and I get caught up in all the "little stuff," like schedules, and chore lists and meetings and appointments.

That's when I need to step back, take a deep breath and slow myself down. Then and only then, can I begin to hear the new rhythms of whoever I am becoming. I am forever changed because someone touched my life. I want to remember that-always! The lessons of our losses cannot be ignored nor negated. They are simply too expensive. I no longer want to count what I have lost. I want to acknowledge the blessings of the

A New Way of Seeing, continued on page 11



LESSONS FROM A CACTUS

ON GRIEF AND HEALING

BY SHARON K. TSCHANNEN

My cat, Grace, slumbered on the buffet with whimsical visions of mice in his dreams. Suddenly there was movement in the yard outside, and Grace awoke. As his radar kicked into gear, he scrambled from window to window, scouting the movement as he went. In a moment of foolhardiness, he hurdled into the wooden plant stand, causing my Christmas cactus to flop and plummet to the floor. Branches burst and potting soil spilled on the white carpet. The racket pulled the plug on Grace's pursuit, and I glared at the sight of the empty plant stand. As I lifted the pot off the floor, soil cascaded into a heap on the carpet.

That plant was treasured because it had been a start from my grandmother's Christmas cactus, and I had cherished her. Some years, it bloomed on Christmas, living up to its name; sometimes it didn't. In its advanced years, it had become confused (much life

Rose had in her later years). After she died in 1963, the cactus had lived on, as if preserving her memory. It had occupied a place of honor in front of a stained glass window—until now, anyway.

Trimming off the broken branches, I put the cactus just inside the garage door so it could catch the sun's warmest summer rays. Its limbs were propped up all the way around the pot until they could grow strong enough again to support their own weight. While I refilled the pot with soil and saturated it with Miracle Grow, I focused on the blue liquid soaking into the soil. I believed this injured memorial needed a miracle to survive, so I monitored it daily. Over time, the cactus did snap back, and a new strength emerged. Branches stretched up and out to receive the sun's rays, and strong, new leaves appeared. After while, it didn't need the props anymore; it would survive. It was a miracle.

At the grief-support group I attended, I shared the story of the cactus. Though some of the members' husbands had died (as had mine), we never would say to one another, "I know just how you feel." We understood that no one who has grieved a death will ever know just how another feels. We are all individuals with unique personalities who have shared similar experiences.

Some couples had enjoyed many anniversaries together, and some had only a few before experiencing their losses. Some spouses had been supportive of each other's needs and desires, while others were less so. Some were blessed with a truly phenomenal marriage, but some had a bewildering one. Some spouses had been ill for years, and some had died suddenly. A death caused by an accident or a suicide may be more emotionally complicated, making it harder to achieve closure. There can be financial challenges, unrealized dreams, uncompleted projects and hurts and angers that were not resolved. Forgiveness may be necessary. Some couples had young children who are still at home, while others have adult children. Some families are geographically close and can be supportive, while the family members of others may be many miles away. Some of the widows may have to master new chores, like paying the bills and mowing the lawn. Even though there are many differences in our circumstances, we all agreed on one thing: we could all relate to the cactus. We had all been torn apart.

Like the cactus, we had all rested securely on our supporting plant stand in front of stained-glass windows, absorbing the rays of the sun, until the moments when we experienced a midair belly flop and found ourselves plummeted to the deepest grief we had ever experienced. Limp and broken, we breathe heavily and feel as if we have been torn apart. Our lives are upside down, and we need others to prop us up—sometimes for days, weeks and months. We need to receive loving kindness; we need to be cared for with loving hand. We appreciate real friends who will companion us, listen to our stories, and dry out tears. We yearn for miracles!

But we know there is hope for tomorrow, and that there is power to create a "new normal" in our lives! Just as

the cactus snapped back, so can we. It will take time, hard work and tender loving care (like Miracle Grow), but there is hope, and the cactus has shown it to us.

For whatever reason, my cactus had not bloomed for several years prior to its fall, but, surprise, it is blooming again! New pink buds are bursting into full, pink flowers. It's Thanksgiving week, but the cactus is so chipper it couldn't wait for Christmas to bloom. What an awesome surprise; three weeks later the cactus is still blooming. I hope it will still be blooming next week when we gather for our grief group. I can't wait for everybody to see it.

Never anymore do I take the flowers for granted. They represent new lives and new hope. Once I was broken, but I bloomed again. I'm sure grandma Rose is tickled pink too that her memory lives on in the cactus. I still leave the window shades up at night for Grace so he can leapfrog from window to window in his dreamy adventures. But, the cactus now lives on the glass coffee table in the middle of the room where it absorbs the sun's rays through two windows, south and east. It is blooming, thriving, giving joy, sharing its beauty and reminding me that there is hope for the future.

***"Once I was broken,
but I bloomed again."***

I placed a stack of antique books on the plant stand, and as I completed this story, I noticed the title of the book on the top of the stack: Helen's Victory by George Sheldon. I haven't read the book yet, but maybe the story will resolve around Helen surviving the loss of her beloved husband. I know Helen's journey won't be exactly like mine, and she will never know just how I felt when my spouse died. She probably didn't even have a cactus plant or a cat, named Grace. But, my cactus and I just want to say, "Hope for a miracle and a "new normal" life. Let it be your victory, too!"

From Grief Digest Magazine, Volume 10, Issue 3, reprinted with permission.



"Grief is a journey, often perilous and without clear direction, that must be taken.

"The experience of grieving cannot be ordered or categorized, hurried or controlled, pushed aside or ignored indefinitely.

"It is inevitable as breathing, as change, as love. It may be postponed, but it will not be denied."

—Molly Fumia

SUPPORT CARING CONNECTIONS

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CARE FOR CARING CONNECTIONS?

Here is how you can support us.

If you want to donate to Caring Connections, you can do so at:
<https://auxiliary.apps.utah.edu/ugive/designation/1924>.

For donations of \$35.00 or more, you can request a memory wall tile for a family member or friend who has died. After making your donation, send their name, birth year, and death year to adrienne.bott@nurs.utah.edu. These tiles are displayed in the Caring Connections office area at the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building.

springs that I did spend with my loved one. I do not want to cloud the joy of our life together with a long list of things that I didn't say, things I didn't do, things I didn't mean.

The line between the living and the dead is so thin that it is not visible, but it separates those who are moving forward and those who are standing still in grief and regret. I will no longer live my life so that I am building up a bank of regrets that will have to be paid at the end of a loved one's life. The time to say, "I love you," is now. The time to settle the argument is now. The time to give a hug, a kiss, a handshake, an encouragement is now. The time is now, and now I want to take the time. Funny how that works. When you have too little time, it seems an impossible task to grab more. When you have too much, it seems an impossible task to spend it. The time to live is now.

I want to live my life with as few regrets as possible. So, from now on, I'm going to:

Tell people I love them, now
Open all presents, now
Eat chocolate once a day
Exercise daily, but give up being guilty if I don't
Give up being guilty about anything
Dance more
Learn to play the banjo
Tell people I love them, now
Keep my To Do list under control
Read more
Listen more, talk less
Eat vegetables once a day (but not spinach or beets)
Wear comfortable clothes
Give up panty hose
Tell people I love them, now
Finger paint
Hug my grandchildren, my spouse, my children
Run through rain puddles
Bake cookies
Tell people I love them, now
Dream more, worry less
Follow my dreams instead of just dreaming them

Relax more

Sit down

Tell people I love them, now

Be sad when I am, happy when I am

Try to just BE, not always DO

Tell people I love them, now

Someone you knew, liked or loved has died. You did not. Whatever the reasons for this turn of events, you have the opportunity to change your life to better reflect your dreams, passions and ambitions. Take a look at who you are, what you are doing, why you are doing it and being to make the changes you want in order to live the life you want to be living instead of the one you are enduring.

"Life is simply too precious to waste in wishing it were something else."

If you still love your work or your home or your daily life, take renewed pleasure in the small moments that make up a single day. If you are not happy with your life, your home, your job, begin to work toward finding something that makes your spirit soar. Life is simply too precious to waste in wishing it were something else.

Live your life in celebration and gratitude for those who have so lovingly shared their lives with you. Cherish those moments you spent together, and live your new life now with a renewed commitment to living as fully as possible.

It is acknowledging and living the pain that brings forth the energy and strength to allow hope and healing to return. No matter where you are, no matter what memories you carry with you, may love be what you remember most.

From *Grief Digest Magazine*, April 2011, Volume 8, Issue 4, reprinted with permission.



Caring Connections

A HOPE AND COMFORT IN GRIEF PROGRAM

UPCOMING EVENTS



ONLINE MINDFULNESS MEDITATIONS FOR GRIEVERS

When healing from grief and learning to find a new normal, it's important for griever to engage their bodies and their minds in the process. In doing so, they can access our own innate resources for resilience and growth.

Join Katarina Friberg Felsted, PhD, for three mindfulness meditation sessions for griever. They will be held online via Zoom on **Wednesdays, September 8th, 15th, and 22nd from 6pm to 7pm**. This practice is open to any previous or current grief group attendees and their families. To RSVP and get the Zoom meeting details, call 801-585-9522 or email adrienne.bott@nurs.utah.edu.