

# Coalition News

Quarterly Newsletter of the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support  
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Since 1977...Education and Support for Those Providing Care to Grieving Persons

December 2022

## Mark Your Calendars

**Dec 9-11** ♦ *A Different Kind of Grief*, with facilitators Gloria Englund and Margaret Swift Thompson. Info/registration at [https://www.hazelden.org/web/public/event.view?eventId=7347329&utm\\_source=social&utm\\_medium=facebook-paid&utm\\_campaign=474750&fbclid=IwAR0cqDip-awXm9rMrWlj7H5H1ghCwncnsiMvBdjpYcOkqwC0jNMPyldocG8](https://www.hazelden.org/web/public/event.view?eventId=7347329&utm_source=social&utm_medium=facebook-paid&utm_campaign=474750&fbclid=IwAR0cqDip-awXm9rMrWlj7H5H1ghCwncnsiMvBdjpYcOkqwC0jNMPyldocG8).

**Jan 24-25, 2023** ♦ *Grief Support Services Facilitator Training (virtual)*. Information at <https://www.essentiahealth.org/classes-events/search-results-detail/?eventId=33c26e4c-b68a-cc11-a84f-000d3a611c21>.

**April 25-29** ♦ *ADEC 2022 Annual Conference, includes pre-conference date*. Info at <https://www.adec.org/page/2023-Conference>.

**May 5** ♦ MCDES Spring Conference, *Attachment Informed Grief Therapy: Interventions to Create Safety, Strengthen Self Capacities and Promote Re-engagement*. More info on page 3 and at [www.mcdes.org](http://www.mcdes.org).

**June 5-7** ♦ *Loss, Death, Grief, Cultural and Ethical Contexts*. Preliminary info at [https://www.uwlax.edu/ex/dgb/call-for-concurrent-or-poster-proposals/?utm\\_source=MRKT-1888&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=conted\\_2023\\_dgb&utm\\_content=header\\_image](https://www.uwlax.edu/ex/dgb/call-for-concurrent-or-poster-proposals/?utm_source=MRKT-1888&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=conted_2023_dgb&utm_content=header_image).

## In this issue

- ♦ MCDES Fall Conference Reviews
- ♦ From The Chair
- ♦ Caregiving
- ♦ Gratitude
- ♦ Coping With Grief
- ♦ Book Review
- ♦ Poetry
- ♦ Sundries
- ♦ MCDES News

## Two Fall Scholar Conference Reviews *From Cultural Considerations to Socially Just Practice: Disrupting Patterns of Suffocated Grief*

Speaker: Tashel Bordere, PhD, CT

### Review From Lucy Mungai

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity accorded me to participate in this year's MCDES Fall conference. As an immigrant and a person of African descent who has been in this country for over 25 years, I found resonance with many of the experiences of suffocated grief that Dr. Bordere lifted. Some of these are personally lived experiences, others from witnessing and from listening to stories of people that I have accompanied or been around—both in formal (study and work) as well as in informal settings. Her presentation helped give/add language to my limited vocabulary; experiences that I have sometimes struggled to articulate in conversations with people, in my work of accompaniment, as well as in other spheres of influence that have called me to bring an advocacy voice.

My choice of career to become a chaplain was heavily influenced by my grief process in 2000, when my father suddenly died. I received the report from thousands of miles away, only three years since I had left home to attend seminary in Atlanta, GA. My body had already been aware that a

Review: Lucy Mungai continued on page 8

### Review From Faith Xiong

I am just marking up my third year in college. I am a non-traditional student, transferring from Saint Paul College this past fall to Hamline University. I am working towards a Psychology degree with an emphasis on Forensic Psychology. The Psychology faculty had sent invitations to students in the same realm that might be interested in attending. I was delighted to not only attend the conference, but also be chosen to have the opportunity to attend. I wanted to take part in understanding how grief may occur, and transition that into a working field of criminal justice.

The conference started off with Dr. Tashel Bordere welcoming those attending with objectives such as describing social justice concepts related to loss and grief, especially when depicted with systemic inequalities, working with families who have experience of loss and change that may need adjustment, and the complexity of different types of loss, such the fatality of the pandemic. The most captivating instance was how Dr. Bordere was able to create a safe space, especially virtually. She had wanted to first recognize how

Review: Faith Xiong continued on page 10

## From The Editor: On Graceful Exits

*There's a trick to the 'graceful exit.' It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, or a relationship is over—and let it go. It means leaving what's over without denying its validity or its past importance to our lives. It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving up, rather than out.*

~ Ellen Goodman

“Every exit line is an entry!” Hard as it is to believe, this is the 83rd and final newsletter edition for Verla and me! We are exiting MCDES, entering a new phase in both our lives. What a collaboration of compassion, commas, and new-found friendship this has been! I recently dug through bulging files and boxes, stuffed with past *Coalition News* issues, both paper and digital, stored in cartons, cabinets, and computers. I have notes and quotes, ideas and queries, hoarded in hopes of pursuing yet one more article or resource. It feels like MCDES has become an integral part of who I am. How can I let it go?

20 years of editing has been both a blessing and a curse. I am a procrastinator and MCDES became my willing muse; quarterly editorials forced me to write; contributed articles, book and movie reviews, poetry, sundries, and resources encouraged me to read.

*Coalition News* is published quarterly by the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support. Your submissions are encouraged. During this time of board transition, we are evaluating the newsletter format and frequency. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we come to a resolution. Feel free to reach out with questions, [info@mcdes.org](mailto:info@mcdes.org), or if you have a newsletter article or item.

The Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support (MCDES) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) interdisciplinary organization dedicated to providing education, networking opportunities and support to professionals and volunteers who are involved in the care of dying and grieving persons.

What a history lesson, digging through all those back issues. Events, stories, memories from 2000–2022 literally slipped through my fingertips; time and events marching ever onward.

One of my first editorials in 2002 was about the impending war in Iraq. I mentioned all the “Peace” signs in front yards. President Clinton visited Minnesota and suggested peace might be achieved through “a climate of dependency, rather than globalization.” He suggested we might best all thrive in the world if we “helped one another.” Brilliant. I wish that idea would have worked out better! We also, as Americans, commemorated the first anniversary of 9-11. We honored, named, and mourned the victims.

I had several friends throughout those years who dealt with serious illness, some of whom eventually died; a brutal reminder we are all aging. Both my mother and mother-in-law began losing ground in the early 2000’s requiring long-distance caregiving. Our grandchildren were being born, blessings, one after the other, until there were eight...and we were happily able to watch them grow. Many of you remember my columns referencing, “the world according to our grandson, Charlie.” He turned 21 this fall and is a junior in college!

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina arrived in New Orleans. That same week, my mother died in Kansas. Almost two years later, in



Sharon Dardis

early August of 2007, the 35W bridge collapsed over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. Several more friends died untimely deaths; and in 2008, the economy tanked. In 2009, we watched as America inaugurated the first Black President, Barack Obama. In the spring of 2010, my husband, Stan, nearly died of sepsis, just one month before his retirement. His mom died in early spring that next year; generations passing. All these events fueled my ever-lasting editorial musings. They were all there, in black and white, as you read each *Coalition News*, responding, empathizing, giving feedback, and encouragement. Thank you.

There were continued terrorist attacks and school shootings, but thankfully, in the years to come, there were also good times; travel, family and class reunions. I told you all about it in my editorials which, looking back now, grew longer and longer with each edition. Wow! Maybe I should apologize for oversharing or maybe just say, “thanks for listening!” Sharing vulnerable stories made me, and hopefully all of us, feel less alone and perhaps more connected; we supported, we educated, we networked with one another.

In the years to follow, the solar eclipse of 2017 came and went, along with “un-civil” politics and unrest. There were natural disasters, fires, and floods. Lives were lost; the nation mourned. 2020 brought COVID-19

Editorial continued on page 7

## Notes From the Chair

By Florence Wright, MCDES Chair

Dear readers,

Season's greetings! The passage of time is something that is difficult for me to understand—it seems like just yesterday I was reflecting on the end of 2021, and in what feels like the blink of an eye, here we are approaching the conclusion of 2022! This year marks the end of MCDES service for some very important people: our Administrative Coordinator, Verla Johansson, our Newsletter Editor, Sharon Dardis, and our Treasurer, Peter Thoreen. My words will surely fail to adequately capture my gratitude for Verla, Sharon, and Peter, but I'd like to take this opportunity to express deeply felt appreciation for their years of dedication, service, and for sharing their time, talents, passion, and expertise with MCDES. I'd also like to thank everyone who attended our Fall Conference with the incredible Dr. Tashel Bordere! It was truly a wonderful day packed with informative content, moving music and art, and delicious lobster and wine, of course.

The fall of 2022 also marks the two-year anniversary of my beloved uncle Bill's death. I've written about Bill before; he was such an important

person in my life and I am still very much grieving his death. As he died in October of 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to wait until the fall of 2021 to gather for his celebration of life—and what a celebration it was! It was amazing to see all the family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors who turned out in droves with fond memories and kind words to share.

This year, to celebrate Bill's life, my cousins (Bill's children), their partners, my husband, and I planned a trip up north to a family cabin in Ely, Minnesota to scatter his ashes. We had fun musing about which of his favorite foods to cook, which of his favorite activities to engage in—walking, hiking, biking, canoeing, and which nostalgic music would accompany us during our time together. You can imagine the disappointment I felt when the trip was canceled as a result of our family's COVID and subsequent RSV illness. On the date of Bill's deathiversary, I felt at a loss for how to acknowledge the momentous day. Although it wasn't the fulfilling and meaningful trip up north I had hoped for, I settled on taking a walk around a local lake. As I walked, my mind somehow stumbled upon *Gone From My Sight*, a poem presumably written by the Rev. Luther F. Beecher that I first discovered in

Deborah Karnes "little blue book" by the same name. The poem has a message that is simple, yet powerful. In

the piece, the dying process is likened to a ship setting sail at sea. As the persona watches the ship's departure, it becomes smaller and smaller in the distance until the ship is no longer visible. Although the ship is "gone," it is only gone from sight, not existence. This idea has brought me such comfort as I have grieved those I love. Although the deceased are no longer physically present, I carry them with me as time moves forward. I say their name in honor, I see them in my dreams, I hold tight to my memories, and I know that they have helped to shape me into the person that I am. As I reflected, I realized that there are things I do each day to honor and remember Bill, and others I love deeply. During my walk, I felt Bill in the warm breeze, I saw him in the blue sky, I heard him in the rustling of the leaves. No doubt the cabin would have been really special and memorable, but with Bill's presence all around me and within me, I think I can wait until next year.



Florence Wright

### Mark Your Calendars for the MCDES Spring Conference (Virtual)—May 5, 2023

**Attachment Informed Grief Therapy: Interventions to Create Safety, Strengthen Self Capacities and Promote Re-engagement—Speaker: Phyllis Kosminsky, PhD, LCSW, FT**



Phyllis Kosminsky is a clinical social worker in private practice in Westchester, New York, and at the Center for Hope in Darien, Connecticut, where her work focuses on grief, loss and trauma. She received her Master's Degree in Social Work from Columbia University and her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from Brandeis University. She is a certified provider of EMDR and has extensive training in hypnotherapy as an adjunctive psychotherapy technique. Dr. Kosminsky has conducted many training sessions in the treatment of normal and complicated grief and is a regular presenter at conferences. Her publications include journal articles, book chapters, and the book *Attachment Informed Grief Therapy: The Clinician's Guide to Foundations and Applications* (2016). More information is at [www.mcdes.org](http://www.mcdes.org).



# Caregiving < — > Caregiving: Family and Professional Care Comparisons

by Ted Bowman

*Adaptations and extensions of a session for the 2022 MN Hospice and Palliative Care conference.*

In July 2022, I stepped back from fourteen consecutive years of leadership and facilitation of a neighborhood caregiver support group. In 2009, my mother, age 94, died, after eight or more years of living with dementia and, in her last year, a left-side stroke. My two brothers and I were her family caregivers. For the past four decades, I have been a grief and family educator whose work has been primarily with volunteers and professionals who provide supportive care for citizens, patients, clients, and their peers.

The intersections and overlaps of my various caregiver roles prompted me to consider similarities and differences between various forms of caregiving. Upon reflection, I concluded that a symmetry of caregiver roles was more common than expected. As you read further, consider caregiving in your family, neighborhood, and professional/volunteer settings.

## Caregiving—Framing the Discussion

“I like to say that there are only four kinds of people in the world—those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers.” ~ Rosalynn Carter

“There are only two kinds of grief and bereavement ‘counselors’: You ARE a caregiver...currently and in the future. You deserve and will continue to need a caregiver(s).” ~ Ted Bowman

## The Multiple Layers of Caregiving: It Takes a Team

*It takes a team; do you know who is on your team* was the question asked by an elder care lawyer when speaking to the caregiver support group. *If you don't know who is on your team, you are facing trouble* was her continuing focus. Financial or legal stresses; home maintenance requirements; scheduling appointments for the care received; asking or receiving supportive



Ted Bowman

help—all those and more, the lawyer asserted, were aspects of caregiving.

Psychiatrist and grief scholar Arthur Kleinman described it this way, as he cared for his wife: “Caregiving is about skilled nursing, competent social work, rehabilitation efforts of physical and occupational therapists, and the hard physical work of home healthcare aides.

Yet, for all the efforts of the helping professions, caregiving is for the most part the preserve of families and intimate friends, and of the afflicted person herself or himself. They struggle to undertake the material acts that sustain, find practical assistance with activities of daily living, financial aid, legal and religious advice, emotional support, meaning making and remaking, and moral solidarity.” (*Harvard Magazine*)

Kleinman reminds his readers of palliative care, whole-person care. Caregivers of all kinds and in whatever the setting will directly or indirectly face: 1) mundane, practical, simple and complex tasks and situations; 2) decisions about tender transitions (from health to less health, from stability to ambiguity, from living to dying to death, grief to mourning; and care of self and others); stress and distress about family, household, and care norms and procedures; and repeated evaluative reflections about one's, the family's or the team's competence and choices. Multi-layered caregiving requires, at a minimum, a team awareness; better if in an active milieu that supports self and other caring.

While working at a children's hospice in England, I was exposed to and experienced this assertion: *one and all attend staff support sessions because today may be the day one of our colleagues will need/want support.* The staff support sessions were voluntary, not required meetings. Yet for almost fifteen of their first years, there was virtual perfect attendance by all staff. A culture of—it takes a team—was not only said; it was practiced.

Just as family carers need a team, we who are grief and bereavement carers also need a team. Who is on your team? Are they colleagues in your setting (organization) or do they work in another setting?

Caregiving continued on page 5

Caregiving continued from page 4

## Multiple Layers of Care: Self and Other Care

Compare care reflections from staff of an adult hospice in England with reflections from family caregivers in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Which list contains care practices you do or can utilize?

### Reflections About Doing Adult Hospice Work—Gathered at the Rowans Hospice, England

Take care of yourself. —→ Their grief is not your grief.

Stay curious. —→ Listen, be mindful.

Take yourself seriously, but also lightly.

Humor, value laughter. —→ You can't get it right everytime.

Be prepared to say no, as well as yes.

Build in reflexion time. —→ You can't FIX anyone, that's okay.

Don't tell people at a party where you work.

Be compassionate to yourself and your colleagues.

### Wisdom From Caregivers—March 2022: What do you know now, you wish you had known?

Get information about caregiving from various sources.

Few things will stay the same, be prepared for changes. Don't be too hard on yourself.

Support for caregivers is crucial. —→ Form a team.

When attending a group or reading, make note of “take-aways.”

Ask for help. —→ Accept help. —→ Know the difference.

Create a list of “help” you can pass on to friends, family, neighbors.

Group members often share what seems mundane, but which may be amazingly helpful to another caregiver.

While working in England, I discovered that they use the word carer not helper. Helper implies a hierarchy; carer is more lateral...was their explanation. From their perspective, there are family carers and there are volunteer and professional carers. Neither group routinely used the word—caregiver.

## The Differences Between Caregivers

Some family caregivers are reluctant; others are drafted because they are women, the oldest, or the one nearby; others don't understand the word caregiver—they are simply honoring their marital vows or giving back to their parent care that mimics in some small way what their parents did for them in childhood and beyond. On the other hand, most grief and bereavement carers chose their vocation. Here is an example from a professional: Bereaved parents have asked me why I continued to stay in the painful environment of the group. They did not choose to be there, but I did. (Dennis Klass in *When Professional Weep*)

Caregiver groups are a mixture of people who need to simply off-load (where else can they scream and wail?), some who seek understanding for their ambivalent feelings, and others hoping for resources, insights, or fixes for situations. Many caregivers become what one writer has called “the invisible second patients.” Could the same be said about you?

### Summary

So, yes, there are differences, but there are many similarities. Perhaps these musings were already obvious to you. For me, I am now more appreciative for the work of palliative care educator, Betty Davies. She wrote about creating a milieu of mattering, a place where patients, family carers, and the team of professionals/volunteers acknowledge and support one another in their mutual work of caring. I support that perspective and want to be part of such milieus.

We are all caregivers.

**Editor's Note:** Ted Bowman is an educator, and consultant. He specializes in change and transition. For over 40 years, he has been a frequent trainer, consultant, and speaker with many groups throughout Minnesota, the United States, and other countries. Ted was an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota (Family Education) 1981-2012; at the University of Saint Thomas (Social Work) 2006 until 2019; and 1989 to 1996 at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. He can be reached at [tedbowman71@gmail.com](mailto:tedbowman71@gmail.com).

## November—National Caregivers Month

Celebrated every November, National Family Caregivers Month (NFCM) is a time to recognize and honor family caregivers across the country. It offers an opportunity to raise awareness of caregiving issues, educate communities, and increase support for caregivers.

The national observance is led by Caregiver Action Network (CAN), a nonprofit that provides free education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers. CAN selected the 2022 theme, *#CaregivingHappens*, to acknowledge the reality that family caregiving is not always convenient or expected.

## Grat-i-tude

by Ben Wolfe

*noun* 1. the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

What is the true meaning of gratitude?

Gratitude, which rhymes with “attitude,” comes from the Latin word *gratus*, which means “thankful, pleasing.” When you feel gratitude, you’re pleased by what someone did for you and also pleased by the results.

When I was five-years-old, I went in the mornings to kindergarten. I walked on my own the five blocks to school, fall, winter and spring, and at lunchtime headed to my neighbors’ houses. Those houses were made up of parents, who had kids like me, in morning kindergarten. The big difference was my parents were both working full-time, and I guess if you think of it today, I was a “latchkey” kid, some days at my own house with a babysitter for lunch, and other days, yep, it was off to the neighbors for lunch and after, playing in the street or someone’s backyard. But there was always some type of supervision.

When I was in first grade, my brother was already in sixth grade, both of us attending the same elementary school. Of all the kids in the school,

only two children stayed at school during lunchtime, my brother Bob and myself. We had to eat our lunches on our own, and then after 15 to 20 minutes my big brother would come and get me and we would play in the gym or go outside (depending on the weather). In second grade and almost throughout elementary school, I had peanut butter and jam sandwiches, eating at my desk in school for lunch. In junior high I went to a new school, brand new, and bought my lunch from the lunch line each day...no more peanut butter sandwiches.

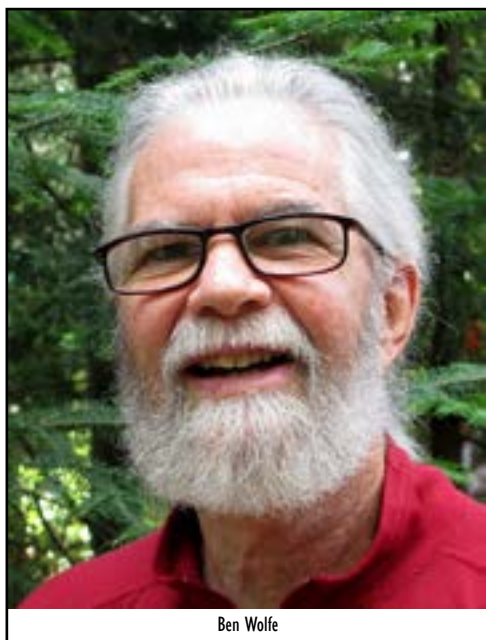
My parents were **HARD WORKERS**. They worked long hours to support their three kids (my brother Bob, and my sister Neena who is nine-years older than me), and at the same time, made time to be involved in civic and religious activities. I learned a lot by just watching them, and watching them when no one else was looking!!!

It wasn’t just attending my hockey or baseball games, but times like when my mother showed up dressed as a cheerleader on the stage at my high school during my senior year to cheer on the students and encourage them to go to the big hockey game that night.... and yes, when I saw my mom on the stage, dressed in a cheerleader’s outfit with pom poms, I could not hide under my seat more than I did that day. She embarrassed me **TONS OF TIMES... BUT SHE DID IT WITH LOVE AND PASSION....**and my dad was

right there alongside her. Two parents who raised three children the best they could, and a mother who died from cancer at 59. Thanks for so much, mom and dad!

In your life, who were, or still are, your mentors, your sounding boards? Siblings, relatives, the neighbors next door or down the block? Who were the people that guided you along over the years...your teachers, religious leaders, coaches, mentors who took time to help you as needed, colleagues at work, or people you grew to admire and had/have great respect for? So often we are reminded by watching a movie, or reading a book, or just watching people interact...we say to ourselves...“I should call so and so,” or “I should drop a card to so and so.” But, we only think it, we don’t act on it. COVID taught us a great deal in ways we most certainly were not expecting. We were, over and over again, reminded life is short, and at some point in time, the sand in the hourglass will no longer be on the upper portion of the glass, but now completely on the bottom...life will have, as we know it, come to an end.

Today I’m “retired,” and loving it... however, I’m still involved in lots of areas by choice. I am what many folks call...someone who has “failed retirement.” I love being isolated (secluded) here in the woods on a small lake in Northern Minnesota with my partner



Ben Wolfe

Gratitude continued on page 7



**Gratitude** continued from page 6

in crime, Barry. I cannot even think of all the people who helped me prior to graduating from college, or my three years in the Peace Corps, or being a traveler, working overseas for over nine years, and my professional life in the United States. Or how my life changed when I met Barry as we were both a couple of hitchhikers in Tasmania 50 years ago this December. How do I ever show the type of gratitude and love I want to show to the most important person in my life, Barry? In Barry and my relationship, how do I, as a former older client of mine taught me, remember and appreciate the “sacred moments”.... the moments of just being together.... of doing small and not really important things, but just spending time together.

Who are those people in your life that have helped you on your journey, who you respect, and who in some way made an impact on your life? Like the AT&T commercial years ago shared, “reach out and call someone!” Take some time to reflect on those who have been part of your life. Who have taught you lessons you live by today? Who supported you as you took chances, allowed you to live out your dreams, and when things didn’t always go “as planned,” were supportive and reassuring? How do you express your appreciation for both the big and small things those people brought to your life?

There is the story of a train going down the tracks, periodically stopping to let people on the train, and also to let them off. Our lives are no different, we too are “going down the tracks,” with people entering and exiting our lives. Some making more of an impact on us than others, but each person, in some way, adding to our life.

There are a zillion people who have been part of my life. Maybe two or three zillion! Past and present members of the MCDES board are examples of individuals who’ve given their time, talents, and expertise, and who’ve given of themselves to help others. I know the MCDES board has recently had some board transitions as all boards do, but I have to thank three people in particular for their efforts over MANY years to grow MCDES, and to keep it the professional organization it is today. Sharon Dardis, Verla Johansson, and Peter Thoreen are leaving the board at the end of this year. Each has made a contribution only they could.... they have been “gifts” to not only MCDES, but also to me....friendships that have endured for years, and hopefully, for years to come. Thank you, Sharon, Verla, and Peter! You’ve made a huge difference in my life, and the lives of others!

**Editor’s Note:** Ben Wolfe is a Fellow in Thanatology, Founder and Director/Grief Therapist for almost 30 years at St. Mary’s Medical Center’s Grief Support Center in Duluth, and former chair of MCDES for 25 years.

“I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought;  
and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

~ G. K. Chesterton

**Editorial** continued from page 2

and tragedies of the pandemic, George Floyd’s murder, more upheaval, political and social divide. What followed next seemed almost unbelievable. A Capitol insurrection, and yes, almost bookending these 20 years of dusty editorials, with the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, there is still no peace. It has been two decades for the history books. And through it all, MCDES has been there.

Imbedded in all the many hundreds of pages of two decades of newsletters, I see resilience, connection, and hope. What magnificent member wisdom poured out of each issue, offered by all of you who so generously offered your precious knowledge, expertise, and support to readers. Thank you; thank you for helping make *Coalition News* and MCDES ever better! We will continue moving onward!

I am not good at letting go. Ellen Goodman’s quote about graceful exits is on my desk, as a constant reminder to “exit up.” I recognize, at my age, that time is of the essence and that every moment counts. I love the quote from the movie, *Tuck Everlasting*: “Don’t fear death. Fear the un-lived life.” God willing, Verla and I, and all of us have some good living left to do!

Please take time to enjoy this latest issue, chock-full of interesting, helpful content. As always, thank you for your future contributions of articles, reviews, Sundries and resources to *Coalition News*.

Heartfelt thanks to those who helped make this edition happen. Thanks to scholars, Lucy Mungai and Faith Xiong for reviews that richly and accurately describe our Fall Conference. Watch for upcoming details on

**Editorial** continued on page 11

Review: Lucy Mungai continued from page 8

terrible thing had happened several hours before the confirmation of the same. The unencumbered way in which I grieved the sudden departure of my beloved father would require a huge book volume, suffice to note that I was among loving people who did not mind my “indecent” wailing, and in a safe environment. I also felt a strong sense of the presence of a nonjudgmental God, even if I did not grieve the way my faith tradition had wired me into believing, regarding how as a Christian one was expected to grieve, “not like those who have no hope.” I had just completed three years of seminary education and had been in ministry for about 10 years. Furthermore, when I traveled back to Kenya to be with my family for my father’s funeral, I could not believe the accommodations that were made by the church leaders. To especially have been allowed to speak to my father, and say a proper farewell in that way, brought me so much peace and strength, that I still dwell on. I had neither imagined that such a spontaneous request would be granted nor rehearsed about how I would have done that.

Fast forward, in 2011, I completed a study for my thesis about the importance of storytelling and having an attentive audience to listen. I listened to African immigrant women who shared stories about their immigration journeys. Many of them talked about their stories of losses, some of them too difficult to describe, as Dr. Bordere mentioned with reference to ambiguous losses from Pauline Boss’s writings. The opportunity for the women to tell their stories on their behalf and from their perspective was very healing and liberating for them. Unfortunately, many people suffer from multiple losses, as Dr. Bordere mentioned, and few people from marginalized groups are accorded such an opportunity to tell their stories. Consequently, they suffer from cumulative impact of such losses in ways that limit their lives.

Dr. Bordere highlighted the impact of death and non-death losses. With powerful illustrations and concrete examples from research study findings, as well as national media stories, she made the case about inequity in the grief process. Recognizing the role of social justice in some causes of, and the differences in, what is socially

allowed in people’s expression of grief, she challenged participants to examine ways in which they facilitate or suffocate healthy grieving processes for marginalized communities, especially Black and African American populations who suffer disproportionately from suffocated grief.

Dr. Bordere proposes a deliberate move from cultural considerations to intentional social justice-oriented efforts to dismantle structures and systems that have historically served to suffocate people in their grief. This, she suggests, starts with a willingness to become vulnerable and honestly admit what one does not know, and to seek ways to understand and engage better with people from a culture different from one’s own. I really appreciated her proposed Five Ways of Culturally Conscientious Care, namely: acknowledge, ask, accept, align and apologize. As challenging as these can be, she encouraged regular practice, and to not allow the fear of failure to stifle the effort, and to recognize that it is not perfection that matters as much as an openness to genuinely seek to know how to better engage with the “other.” She also strongly conveyed the impor-

Review: Lucy Mungai continued on page 9



Lucy Mungai, PhD, BCC

I grew up in Kenya and immigrated to the U.S. in my late 20s. My work and calling in life involve education, counseling, and mentoring. I am passionate about facilitating a safe space for people to tell/retell their stories, create or give birth to new stories in life-giving ways. From teaching high school and counseling youth in Kenya, I have worked in the U.S. in higher education, and with my other passion, of facilitating the building of a beloved community, I have worked and volunteered (ongoing) with churches and some nonprofit organizations. I currently work as a hospital chaplain.

Married and blessed to be a mother of two wonderful young adult daughters, I enjoy walking and hiking with family, and friends, and will take traveling opportunities to explore and visit new places whenever possible. I also like to cook and invite people to share food and stories. Whenever possible, I cherish moments of writing, community-building events and presentations.



Review: Lucy Mungai continued from page 8

tance of building relationships of trust that have historically been broken to break barriers that inhibit healthy grief and healing from generational traumas that come powerfully in expressions of grief from losses.

As can be expected, in my practice as a hospital chaplain, grief from a loss and particularly at end-of-life is the most common issue for which we are called to attend. Oftentimes, in this Minnesotan context, there is a heightened level of stress from hospital staff involved when the bereaved family happens to be non-white. Most of such are communal-oriented groups. This elevated to a crisis level during the COVID-19 pandemic, when family visits to patients were curtailed except

for a few limited end-of life accommodations. The pandemic itself forced suffocation of grief expressions in general, while cultural crushes especially between white staff and visitors from non-white communities reached their climax. Dr. Bodere addressed the impact of the pandemic and social unrest, both of which brought a heightened awareness of the hidden inequities and polarizations along racial and political lines. With the practices in education, healthcare, political and other social systems, including religious ones, suffocated grief impacted disproportionately more people from the marginalized groups.

I found the conference presentation and the accompanying handouts very informative. The knowledge is a

treasure in my practice as a chaplain and other engagements with people going through challenging situations involving losses or people in need of companionship or encouragement to stand for themselves and use their own voices in lifegiving ways. Dr. Bodere's use of personal stories with grace and humor, examples from her family situations, from common everyday life situations, videos, quotes, and invitation of participants to engage in reflective exercises during her presentation, all helped keep this online presentation engaging and interesting throughout. The only thing I wondered about is whether participants would have better engaged and the conference probably been further enhanced with online breakup sessions for discussions instead of just text comments on chat.

## How to Stay Mentally and Physically Healthy While Coping with Grief

by Justin Black

**Editor's Note:** There are many blogs, websites, and podcasts online these days, all offering information and support regarding grief and loss. It goes without saying that the younger generation of grieverers are reaching out more now than ever, using technology for connection, for comfort, for information, and sharing one another's stories. Justin Black is one such young griever. Justin experienced multiple losses in 2018, including his much loved grandfather's sudden death, and soon after, his beloved dog of 14 years. After that, his mother was diagnosed with cancer, and, in an effort to better understand all that he was feeling, he reached out to others, began to educate himself more about grief, and created <https://www.bereaving.net/>. He describes his website and blog as "a place where people can go to share their stories of loss, read about other losses, and not feel alone in their grief." He states, although he's not a licensed counselor, he is "here to listen and learn from others and their grief experiences." He references author Mitch Albom's book title, *For One More Day*, saying to other grieverers, "It's okay to ask for one more day with someone you love." Justin recently shared this (edited) article with *Coalition News* about some of the helpful things he has learned and shares with others during his own grief journey. For more information or to contact Justin directly, visit <https://www.bereaving.net/>.

Losing a loved one is (one) of the most challenging situations an individual can face. While grief is a natural response to a loss, it affects people in various ways. For some, grief can lead to mental health (issues) and result in the onset of anxiety or depression. For others, the effect can be physical, such as loss of appetite and low energy levels. Predicting the effects of grief is not (always) possible. However, here are a few steps individuals (might) take to manage (their) health while grieving.

### Managing Your Mental Health

First, let us look at the best strategies to maintain good mental health while grieving.

**Take Time to Grieve.** The days after the passing of your loved one may be hectic. From arranging funeral proceedings and contacting relatives, to managing paperwork for health and legal-related needs, you'll have your hands full. But, even amidst these tasks, it's important to make time for yourself and come to terms with your emotions.

Don't pressure yourself to feel a certain way. Rather, accept your feelings as they are and try to manage them in a way that you feel best, such as writing a journal, talking to loved ones, or looking at photographs.

**Avoid Being Isolated.** While grieving, it's common for individuals to seek solitude. (Sometimes) being alone for prolonged periods can do more harm than good. It can lead to individuals being stuck in a loop of thinking about

Coping with Grief continued on page 13

Review: Faith Xiong continued from page 1

there might have been individuals in the conference who have experienced suffering. She also spreads a variety of examples of “finding ourselves in the room” in order to take up space. This was an opportunity to showcase an excerpt from her book in order to allow the audience to think of an experience that made them feel safe—psychologically and physically.

Dr. Bordere applies this stance of safe space to social justice in loss and grief, and questions, “how can we make people feel safe, when people are content with oppression and undergo so much grief?” Therefore, she makes an effort to break down barriers that not only correlate to this ponder, but also what possible causes there may be such as external and internal differences. The external aspect would be the systemic differences that play a significant role in America, such as race and ethnicity, as well as the internal aspect of fears; what to say, what not to say, and most importantly, understanding privilege and marginalized communities.

A quote by Robert Frost goes, “We dance around in a ring and suppose, but the secret sits in the middle and knows,” Dr. Bordere applies this to Western culture that is not built around marginalized regions, particularly those that identify themselves as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Therefore, there was this distinguishing factor of what it means to have accessibility versus availability, and this was brought about by those who were privileged and those who were not. Dr. Bordere makes a note to question what defines privilege. The root of this was not due to the fact that individuals may “not have the best

in life.” What it really meant was a variation of things, such as the identities individuals have in marginalized populations. However, specifically, the term privilege was personal versus social and political power. This categorizes laws, policies, basic rights to healthcare, food, shelter, safety, trust in complex communities like school, and the right to walk to the store without fear of being harassed. There is this “red-lining” emphasized in design for people to not obtain these same resources which line up to things individuals did not ask for, such as being born into a certain community, whether that means race or a socioeconomic environment, as well as the color of our skin. Furthermore, the concepts of macro and micro aggressions are labeled out. Macro aggressions were those that were far more obvious, because there was intent behind it, such as verbal or behavioral actions where identities were attacked. Micro aggressions consist of insults which both contained verbal and behavioral actions, but were subtle and more likely passive.

Building onto these frameworks allows more subdivisions to be recognized, such as marginalized identity status. Dr. Bordere raises the question, “what does it mean to exist in the margins or multiple spots in the margins?” which reverts to the subject of accessibility and availability, as it is the umbrella of privilege and marginalization, where individuals are the center or mainstream of a social group and have the utmost privilege. It is to question one’s identity in the aspect of how individuals may acknowledge their stance in society and utilize it for those who are at a disadvantage. In addition, this allowed theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and marginality, where a person exists with multiple identities,

that continue to intersect with one another. There are multiple layers to justify who individuals may be, such as being a woman, and being tied to being a woman of color, who identifies with a specific race and ethnicity, as well as being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and more. Because individuals are not always tied to one identity, they have multiple layers that allow them to be who they are.

Essentially, the evolving frameworks permit critical consciousness. This is the awareness of systemic inequalities, which can be used when working with populations, and how individuals may deal with personal experiences when working with communities that may differ. This awareness results in the significance of self-awareness, an understanding of where individuals may lie when it directs personal privilege and disenfranchisement. Marginalized populations, however, may spend time breaking down barriers to how their children may view themselves positively, and the pain that comes with the realization, as well as the attempt to unravel Western history into the story of ancestors. This is a means to survival and is not always optional. It is oppression that occurs in one place and may not often be oppressed in another place, especially when tied to race. Dr. Bordere focuses on cultural competence, which is learning about other people in the matter of race, and the measures that make up the “good” and the “bad” of a specific race. Yet she questions, “who is it really benefiting?” when examining advantaged and disadvantaged groups, because it is easier to blame individuals of similar background, than to hold accountable those who created marginalization in the first place.

Review: Faith Xiong continued on page 10

Review: Faith Xiong continued from page 9

Dr. Boredere examines the trauma, loss and grief of marginalized populations through commonalities of historical losses. These losses were categorized through the criminal justice system, such as the incarceration rates of people of color (POC) versus white individuals. The intergenerational trauma that continues to live in the body, abortion in black communities, as well as the overall medical and healthcare system. Essentially, these losses created a buildup of grief as there was a loss of protection for the safety of children, as well as families, and the patriarchal and white supremacy that lacks support in Black and Latino experiences. Therefore, these continuous experiences of loss result in grief and are turned over into suffocated grief, where there is a cost to resisting oppression and grief that are showcased during social movements and raids.

To conclude, my last statement is a quote gathered from the conference, "I am invisible simply because you refuse to see me." This goes hand-in-hand with colorblindness and the effects of being oppressed. Although Dr. Boredere particularly specifies the research for black communities, there is still an underlying aspect of people of color overall. I identify as a woman of color. I am an Asian woman specifically, and my ethnicity is Hmong. I attended this conference to obtain an overview of some of my interests that pertain towards POC and its culture, as well as how this affects research that is predominantly based upon white individuals. I wanted to dive deeper in

order to gain an understanding of what research may look like when examining marginalized communities and the ways in which it functions when taking into account the frameworks that structure it. The ability to broaden my knowledge when it comes to POC, rather than in my own community, permits an understanding, especially when examining the criminal justice system, and how it continues to affect those in marginalized communities. It also helps me understand that, to a certain extent, I do have the privilege to potentially do something about it, such as basing my career on working with individuals that derive from a variety of backgrounds and layers of intersecting identity. I'd chosen this quote because Dr. Boredere detailed the lens of "color blindness" that is often used by individuals, if not specifically white individuals, where it is demeaning and invalidating to shut down an experience that is different from your own. It is to understand that often times, each and every individual does not derive from the same ribbon as you.

**Editor's Note:** Faith Xiong is currently a student at Hamline University where she is majoring in Psychology with a concentration in Forensic Psychology. Her future goals include studies in criminology and criminal justice, with a goal of a doctorate in the field of psychology, in hopes of "attempting to help guide others by attending to aspects of healing which navigates growth and can allow individuals to be capable of thriving." She attended the Fall conference with a particular focus to learn more about traumatic grief experiences and its affect on victims and families.

Editorial continued from page 7

our Spring Conference, to be held May 5th, 2023, with Dr. Phyllis Kosminsky. See page three, and [www.mcdes.org](http://www.mcdes.org) for more information.

November is National Caregiver's Month. Thanks to Ted Bowman for the article discussing caregivers similarities and differences. Indeed, we are all caregivers!

During this season of thanksgiving, don't miss former Chair Ben Wolfe's musings on gratitude. Thank you, Ben, for reminding us to count our reasons to be grateful! And yes, we are forever grateful to Eunie Alasaker, who has become our own MCDES resident book reviewer. Thank you for another good one, Eunie!

Be sure to check out the helpful links on our Sundries page, as well as all the resources listings. If you have content to contribute for future issues, please know they are always welcome! We continue to honor the healing arts; poetry being one of our favorites to share. Thanks again to poet-friend, Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer for her generous permission to reprint. (Don't miss the number she suggests to call for a "pep talk.") Thanks also to "The Good Listening Project" and Poet Listener, Yvette Perry, for sharing her listening session with one of her "poemees." Again, we welcome all poetry that speaks to grief, loss, and healing. Your essays, stories, and professional practitioner's corner musings are also encouraged.

Thanks to Kay Johnson and Florence Wright for your steady leadership and fond farewells! You have firmly implanted your generous hearts and good memories in Verla's, Peter's and mine. We are all the better for having served MCDES! Thank you!

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

~ Maya Angelou

Editorial continued on page 12



Editorial continued from page 11

And speaking of gratitude, it is with much gratefulness that we welcome new administrative coordinator, Stephanie Becken, who is, even as I write this, meeting with Verla to assure a smooth transition. Welcome, Stephanie, to the wonderful world of MCDES!

This is not goodbye. I intend to remain a member of MCDES and hope to see you at future conferences and events. I turn now toward another worthwhile endeavor, The Good Listening Project (TGLP), <https://www.goodlistening.org/>. Having just completed 32 online hours of instruction, I will hopefully, early December, after a month of practicums, become a Certified Listening Poet. The intent of TGLP is to help create resiliency in healthcare workers by listening and making them feel heard. They leave the experience with their story as a custom poem; a simple act of empathy and grace! If you wish for more information, email me at [sdardis@aol.com](mailto:sdardis@aol.com).

I intend to keep reading, writing, listening, and hopefully, make a graceful exit as your Board member and Editor for MCDES. What a wild, wonderful opportunity this has been. Thank you!

Stay well and safe and please, keep doing the good work you do, so well, for so many!

## Book Review: *The Bright Hour: A Memoir of Living and Dying*

by Nina Riggs, Simon and Schuster (2017)  
Reviewed by Eunie Alsaker

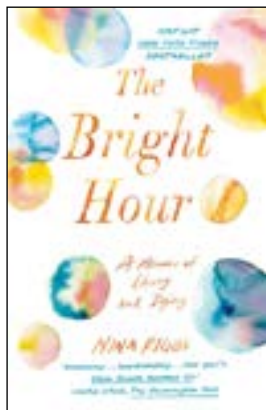
*“I am cheered with the moist, warm, glittering, budding and melodious hour that takes down the narrow walls of my soul and extends its pulsation and life to the very horizon. That is morning; to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body and to become as large as the World.”*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1838

A stunning book came out five years ago that I only recently discovered. *The Bright Hour* by Nina Riggs (2017) is a memoir which evolved from a blog she started when her mom was living with multiple myeloma. Riggs had already settled into reflecting on themes of life and death before her own diagnosis of a treatable “one small spot” on her breast. Within a short span of time, Riggs, 37, wife, and mother of two, learned her cancer was terminal. Her book was finished only days before her death and published months later.

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s focus on nature, beauty, and transcendence are evident in the works of Riggs, his great-great-great granddaughter. She easily navigates between the philosophical and the nitty gritty details of everyday life. With easy humor and insight, she walks us through tender moments with her sons, the task of finding the perfect couch for her family to grieve on, memories of her romance with her husband, chemotherapy, and trips to the beach. Somehow, Riggs manages to write a comforting book while she is dying.

This book is about how to love our limited days with our dear ones. It looks squarely into the face of life and death and concludes that beauty and love remain.



**Editor’s Note:** In case you have been considering submitting a book review for a future newsletter issue, here are a couple of suggestions. Your submissions of these and other books or films on the topic of death, dying, and bereavement are always welcome. [Submit to info@mcdes.org](mailto:info@mcdes.org).



*Minerva’s Owl: The Bereavement Phase of My Marriage* by Carol Matthews. This book explores bereavement as another stage of married love. It is touted as offering a sense of peace in the face of grief and loss.

*Bless the Birds: Living with Love in a Time of Dying* by Susan J. Twist. Winner of the May Sarton Award for Memoir. Rosemary Wahtola Trommer said of this book, “It’s such a ripe time for this book about how to meet fear, loss and sorrow with courage and grace and most importantly, love.”

## Sundries

### Supporting A Child Who Has Lost a Child to Suicide

“In July 2022, my father sat inside his vehicle in my grandparents’ driveway and took his life. While he had a history of mental illness, his death was unexpected and took our family through one of the darkest moments we’ve ever experienced. I’ve slowly recovered from his untimely passing by prioritizing my mental health and doing what I love, like writing and spending time with my pets.” Read the article at <https://www.healthline.com/health/supporting-a-child-whose-lost-a-parent-to-suicide-2>.

### Medical Examiner Reports Give Glimpse Into Hurricane Dead

With 49 deaths confirmed by the state’s Medical Examiners Commission in Lee and Collier counties, Florida, the tragic conditions behind them paint a picture of terror and sorrow. The statewide 68-death list is certain to grow, officials predict. More at <https://www.news-press.com/story/weather/hurricane/2022/10/05/hurricane-ian-official-report-shows-how-people-died-storm/8179907001/>.

### Anniversary Grief Reactions are Deeply Personal

Anniversaries conjure to many people’s minds the scent of roses or the pop

of a cork from a bottle of champagne. Not so for people in grief. Psychologists first wrote about anniversary reactions in 1972, in a study in which bereaved widows were asked to describe their level of distress as the first anniversary of their spouse’s death neared. Go to <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/grief-in-the-margins/202209/anniversary-grief-reactions-are-deeply-personal>, for more.

### Seven Books That Understand Your Grief

Edna Bonhomme says “When it comes to funerals, I’m a coward. I haven’t attended one for a family member in 25 years, even though in that time, at least one relative has died annually—from cancer, from gun wounds, from a global contagion. I have had to find other ways of mourning. Today, I frequently navigate bereavement in a quieter, private state—and I use literature to help me get there.” Her recommendations are at <https://www.theatlantic.com/books/archive/2022/11/grief-books-covid-reading/671915/>.

### Why the Death of Celebrities Like Queen Elizabeth II Can Affect Us Deeply

On Thursday September 8th, Britain’s longest reigning monarch Queen Elizabeth II died. For many people around the world, her passing prompted feelings of deep sadness and grief.

If the queen meant something to you, you might find you are surprised at the depth of grief you feel. When someone close to you dies, it’s natural and expected to experience heartbreak, sadness, and loss, but when a celebrity passes—be it an actor, a singer, or a head of state—feelings of grief can take us by surprise. Find out more at <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/why-the-death-of-celebrities-and-world-leaders-like-queen-elizabeth-ii-can-affect-us-deeply>.

### Tackling Structural Racism in Therapeutic Settings

Culturally responsive therapy and historical trauma have been highlighted in MCDES conferences. Both are reviewed in this article: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/11/25/1137754258/heres-how-some-therapists-are-tackling-structural-racism-in-their-practice>.

### All There Is With Anderson Cooper

Anderson Cooper’s podcast takes us on a deeply personal exploration of loss and grief. He starts recording while packing up the apartment of his late mother, Gloria Vanderbilt. Listen at <https://www.cnn.com/audio/podcasts/all-there-is-with-anderson-cooper>, or at <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/all-there-is-with-anderson-cooper/id1643163707>.

**Coping with Grief** continued from page 9

the what-ifs and being regretful. An effective way to manage the overburdening thoughts arising from grief is to seek the support of those around you.

Confiding in others can help lift a heavy weight off your shoulders and (help you) seek guidance on what to

do next. Your parents and elders may have more experience than you, when it comes to managing grief. Their wisdom (might) help you gain perspective.

**Steer Clear of Substances.** Losing someone close to you creates a void that is hard to fill. It is in these moments that individuals (sometimes)

turn to substances such as alcohol, in search of a way to numb the pain of facing the void. Depending on substances to manage grief is a harmful decision for both the short and long term. If you find yourself struggling to come to terms with the situation, reach

**Coping with Grief** continued on page 15

## Poetry Corner

### Dear Students of West Side School

by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Thank you for the pep talk.  
 When your teacher asked you  
 to record messages in the phone,  
 you could not have known  
 one day your innocent words  
 would reach this woman in Colorado  
 and I would sit in my car  
 and stare at a mountain and press 4  
 to listen to children laughing  
 and press 3 to hear a room full of kindergarteners  
 shouting YOU CAN DO IT,  
 and it would make me weep.  
 I imagine you do not yet understand  
 how something so beautiful  
 could make a person sob—  
 a complex, but very real emotion  
 we don't have a word for in English.

But perhaps you are already learning  
 of the ripple effect: How kindness  
 brings hope. How hope opens us.  
 How being open can make people cry.  
 My friend Paula explained it to me this way.  
 That's what friends do—  
 they share the truth with you.  
 Oh, young friends I have never met,  
 I thank you for the ripple,  
 for the way it has recharged in me a tide  
 so deep that currents leak out.  
 Thank you for restoring the great inner ocean  
 that sometimes turns desert, goes dry.  
 Thank you for reminding me,  
 please, do something you like,  
 something that inspires you.  
 I remember now. Oh bless these salty tears.  
 I remember.

**Note:** If you, too, could use a pep talk, or even if you don't need one, call anyway: 707-873-7862.

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer is an American poet, teacher, and storyteller, with a MA in English Language and Linguistics. Her poetry has appeared in *O Magazine*, *Prairie Home Companion*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, on stage at Carnegie Hall, in back alleys and on river rocks. She lives in southwestern Colorado with her husband and daughter. Rosemerry became a bereaved mother, when son, Finn, died suddenly on August 14, 2021. She says it was "all the outpouring of love, kindness and goodness" that has "buoyed and changed" her throughout the past year. She gratefully acknowledges and honors all the losses that made those who reached out to her, "so tender and generous toward others."



Rosemerry has maintained a "poem a day" practice since 2005, served as the third Colorado Western Slope Poet Laureate and was a finalist for Colorado Poet Laureate in 2019. She has published several poetry collections;  *Holding Three Things at Once*  was a Colorado Book Award Finalist. Rosemerry travels widely, performing and teaching. She also performs with Telluride's eight-woman acappella group, "Heartbeat." Watch her Ted talk, "The Art of Changing Metaphors" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXC3-ZFkhDo>. She and her poetry can be reached at <https://www.wordwoman.com/>. Her blog is at <https://ahundredfallingveils.com/>. Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's poem is reprinted here with her permission.



## The Good Listening Project

Editor's Note: "Good listening is healing." The Good Listening Project (TGLP) cultivates resilience and wellbeing in healthcare communities around the country. Listening poets "hold space for people to share" and then, those thoughts are reflected back through a custom poem especially for them. To learn more, see how you can become a Certified Listening Poet or to listen to TGLP podcasts, go to [www.goodlistening.org](http://www.goodlistening.org). Below is an example of one such listening session; a poemee's story and the resulting custom poem.

### Poem Origin Story

Our conversation began with this poemee's reflections about Father's Day, and the ways in which he felt fathers are not celebrated as much as mothers often are. An active father himself, he recognized some of the reasons this was so, but lamented that our culture has not found a way to adequately celebrate the experiences of men. This then morphed into a conversation about men's health and his own cancer scare. "I already had a mistrust of the healthcare system," he said. At first, he wanted to attempt to treat himself using home remedies. But he was led to innovative medical treatments by a caring Black female physician. "I'm about 85% now. I'll take that. It will be another year before I'm considered cancer-free."

He stated that he was an optimistic person generally, and appreciated the wisdom that came with age. "When I see an old dude who's optimistic, living his life, I always stop to talk to him to try to find out what he has done. I may not always agree with what he says," he said, laughing, "but I do want to know what his secret is."

### American Sonnet for Father Day and the Wisdom Tree

-----  
He lives in the cool shade of the old oak.  
Under its canopy we sit. We dap.  
*I tell you time I got Big C? Stage 3?*  
*Thought I was gonna cure myself—apple*  
*Cider vinegar and vegan.* (He laughs.)

*I'm 70. Wouldn't be, though, if I'd*  
*Just done all that homeopathic stuff.*  
I ask why he's always optimistic.  
Pain flickers brief behind shut eyes seeing  
Drugs drain wisdom from whole communities...  
*This tree here? It survived many storms, still*  
*Stands. That's me, just celebrating living.*

I nod. I know that one day I'm old dude  
Living under this tree. Hope it guides me.

Yvette Perry, Listener Poet

Coping with Grief continued from page 13

out and seek support from family/friends, rather than substances.

### Managing Your Physical Health

The effects of grief can spill over to your physical health, as well.

**Don't Sacrifice Sleep.** Sleeplessness is a common symptom of grief, as represented in research shared by the Sleep Foundation. Sleep is much more than a time to rest. It is the process through which our body heals, both mentally and physically.

Maintaining a good sleep schedule should be a top priority, as it will keep stress levels in check and help maintain clarity of thought. If you have trouble sleeping alone, consider staying over at your relative's or friend's home or call them over. Having company can lessen isolation and maintain some normalcy in your household.

**Practice Meditation.** Practicing meditation is one of the oldest and most effective ways to calm a stressed mind. Including meditation in your daily routine will decrease stress and promote healthy sleep and eating habits. The easiest way to meditate is to sit in a quiet room and focus on controlling your breathing. Various mobile apps and websites provide guided meditation exercises that you can follow to enter a state of peace and calm.

### In Conclusion

When it comes to coping with grief, every individual will grieve in their own unique way. The key is to not consider yourself alone in the process. There will be people around who care for your well-being, who can step in to help, when requested. (Reach out.)

<https://www.bereaving.net/>.

## MCDES News

### Retirements

by Kay Johnson, Vice-Chair



Sharon Dardis

#### Sharon Dardis

Writing a farewell to a writer is a BIG task! Sharon Dardis has been on the MCDES Board of Directors since 2000 and she will retire at the end of this year. Sharon has served as the MCDES newsletter editor extraordinaire. She and Verla teamed

up on their first newsletter together in June, 2002. This issue is their 83rd. WOW! The Board has marveled at and appreciated the quality; we consistently hear praises from our members. Job well done! Sharon will be retiring at the end of this year after 20 years of service to MCDES. Her beautiful, soft, calm and supportive spirit will be missed. She has been an outstanding supporter of new writers for the newsletter, leaders, and board members. Thank you for your dedication and support of the MCDES mission. We are grateful that you will be able to enjoy more time with family, friends, reading, writing, flying, and travel in general. You have left a mark on many pages, and on all of our hearts. With our deepest gratitude.

#### What did you appreciate about your MCDES involvement?

Oh! This is a hard question because there hasn't been anything about my MCDES involvement that I haven't enjoyed. I look at the MCDES objectives of networking, education, and support....and begin there.

(A.) Networking...This must be mentioned first because it certainly was the case for me....all the wonderful friends and professional contacts I made along the way, both as a member, and also a board member with MCDES, offered me individually, professional support. The rich diversity of members and their varied expertise certainly contributed to this. Even though the past few conferences haven't been in-person, somehow, I still feel connected. I credit this to the strong and wise leadership of the Board, the fact that MCDES was able to pivot with the pandemic challenges to "go virtual," as well as the engaged members who loyally stayed

with us. What a privilege it has been for me to be a part of this esteemed group!

(B.) Education...There is no way to adequately measure the educational opportunities MCDES extended to me over the past years. The list of national experts and their knowledge at our conferences is second to none! As a registered nurse, the CEU opportunities with MCDES conferences helped me maintain my licensure over the years. Even though I'm retired, I still appreciate the knowledge and professional expertise and connections MCDES conferences offer. Going virtual has enhanced the organization's ability to extend its reach and mission. I have to admit though, I still miss the lobster and chocolates at our conference lunches over the years!

(C.) Support: How do you measure support? Again, I think it comes down to the members, as well as the organizational structure. Is this an organization you are proud to be part of; one you will mention on your resume? Are there colleagues you can reach out to for advice and expertise? In my case, the answer has always been a resounding, "Yes!." MCDES will always strive to support its members!

#### Do you have a favorite MCDES memory?

After 23 years, it's hard to choose just one favorite memory. I will forever recall how my role as editor of the newsletter went from a nervous "what did I just agree to do?" to a "thank goodness I said yes...what a growing experience this has been!!" A take-away-gem for me, of course, will always be Verla and my friendship. I doubt she and I would have ever met had it not been for MCDES. Someone once said we "grow into roles" and I believe that has been the case for both Verla and me.

And of course, the other memory is all the wonderful friends I made on the Board over the years. Imagine another opportunity where you can be thrown together with so many other helping professionals: clergy, social workers, therapists, psychologists, nurses, doctors, administrators, funeral home and hospice staff, teachers, volunteers and students. It is pure magic and such a blessing!

I have to thank Paul Johnson for recommending me to the Board position, so many years ago. He was involved as a facilitator with me in the Kids In Grief group I was coordinating at Lakeview Hospital in Stillwater. I had no idea my saying "yes" to Paul would lead to such a personal and professional gift! Thank you, Paul!

Retirements continued from page 16

I always admired Ben Wolfe's work "from afar" when I worked in Fargo, where I was coordinating the Hospice of the Red River Valley's "Kids Grieve, Too" program. I would often write to him, requesting "permission to reprint" his handouts from Duluth, little knowing one day, he would become a friend and colleague. He was always a sort of a "death/dying/bereavement rock star" in my eyes. He still is!! Thank you, Ben!

Ted and Marge Bowman, over the years, also became mentors and friends. Their generous hospitality, as they hosted December board dinners and generously shared their gifts of writing and therapy, is a memory I will always treasure.

Of course, I will never forget all the members who contributed content so tirelessly to the newsletter, each and every time Verla and I asked.

Thanks to Eunie Alsaker and Chris Lewis for all the book and movie reviews. I hope their examples will encourage other members to continue this valuable service. And to the Chair and Co-chairs, Ben, Florence, and Kay, who met the deadlines with their "Notes From the Chair." And to all the board members who offered leads, articles and article ideas, practitioner corner columns and resources, we couldn't have done it without your help. Thank you!

Lastly, thanks to the many members who also contributed their expertise, articles, and outreach over the years. This collaboration is what makes MCDES successful, and what will continue to help it grow and thrive.

### **What will you be focusing on after your Board retirement?**

I am so glad you asked!! I admit I was asking the very same question once I announced my retirement: what next?

Of course, my first answer is that I hope to continue to focus on my family and friends. Life is short and I want to make the most of every moment.

But I was still trying to think of ways I could continue to be of help in this crazy world, and then, this summer, I became aware of a wonderful project that truly spoke to my heart!

The Good Listening Project (TGLP), [www.goodlistening.org](http://www.goodlistening.org), is a non-profit organization which began in 2018 with the intent of promoting resilience in healthcare workers through good listening and poetry...right up my alley!!

So I was interviewed last August and became one of seven students in the Good Listening Project's 4th cohort, which ran for 32 hours on Zoom this fall. Once I complete classes, I will be hosting six listening sessions with poeemes who will receive a custom poem from me. At the completion, hopefully, I will become a Certified Listening Poet!

I'm not sure where all this will lead. TGLP has contracted with many hospitals and medical organizations since 2018 (like Mayo and the AMA) to listen, write, and hopefully, in the words of the founder, Frankie Abrialind, "offer a bit of peace, restoration, and healing" to healthcare and the world. So stayed tuned!! And if you or anyone else wishes to explore this further, I am always happy to share more details.

### **Parting thoughts for the membership and/or remaining Board members**

The fact that MCDES has endured and served for 45 years is remarkable. It is an organization that, from the beginning, based its founding principles on empathy, compassion and education.

This legacy is one I hope new and old members will continue to support and be proud to be a part of. Sometimes it feels like there is so little we can do to help with what's going on in the country and the world right now.

I think getting involved with MCDES offers us agency to do just that. What is that metaphor about throwing just one starfish back into the ocean...that you are at least saving one. That is my parting thought to members...stay connected and engaged with MCDES. Support, educate, network...and keep on throwing those starfish back into the ocean. Everyone together can make an impact and it will also make a positive difference in your own life.

To the Board members...my parting thoughts are ones of gratitude and admiration. I admire your wisdom, energy and dedication, not only to MCDES but to your careers and your clients and patients. Thank you for your kind approach in all matters and your willingness to continue to stand, not just in the death/dying/bereavement communities, but in all walks of life, for compassion, understanding, diversity, and love. What an honor and privilege it's been to walk beside you all these years. Please stay in touch...I might even write you a poem!!



Retirements continued on page 18



Retirements continued from page 17



Peter Thoreen

### Peter Thoreen

In December, MCDES will offer a fond farewell and deep gratitude to Peter Thoreen, who is retiring from the Board for a second time! Peter has been our reliable, humble and insightful Treasurer for the past five years, after a busy 35-year career as a healthcare management executive. Peter's FIRST time serving

MCDES was about 45 years ago, when in his early 20's and fresh out of college he CO-FOUNDED the "Minnesota Coalition for Terminal Care," the precursor of MCDES, with Howard Bell, who went on to become the long-time first Executive Director of Pathways. These two young men who, by chance, both worked as Program Directors at the University YMCA, also happened to share an intense interest in the growing field of hospice and palliative care. Peter had developed an educational program called "8 Weeks to live, 8 Weeks to Die" which caught the attention of a philanthropist named Hugh Harrison who funded Peter's first efforts to grow this care of the dying movement. In 1978 the newly formed Coalition held a Terminal Care conference which drew 250+ people, causing Minnesota to become an early hub of hospice care. Without Peter, you would not be reading this story because there would be no MCDES. Blessings to you, Peter, for all the ways you have made our world better.

### What I have appreciated from this latest five year stint on the MCDES board

As a lifelong member and founder of MCDES I was so pleased to find the organization so vibrant and relevant after retiring and returning to the Twin Cities after 28 years. I most enjoyed just getting to know and interact with Verla and the Board. It is not easy to meet and be able to become friends with such wonderful and genuine people in a "new" place.

### Favorite memory

Having lunch at a conference with Gail Noller and Howard Bell, shortly after re-joining the Board—two dear friends and fellow MCDES founders. Next would be watching Kay and Florence step up and lead MCDES before and during the pandemic.

### Focus after retiring from board

In 2022, we moved and became members of Becketwood, a senior cooperative in Minneapolis. Many important and fun things are going on here with our new 300-plus friends and fellow cooperative owners. We also have a new grandson, 25 minutes away, who will be another fun priority.

### Parting thoughts

There is that old saying that there are only two things certain in life, "death and taxes." In reality it is "death and grief." There is still much work to do for current and new Minnesotans as they face these realities. Thank you, Board and members, for keeping MCDES relevant for over 45 years!



Verla Johansson

### Verla Johansson

After 27 years of service to MCDES as our Administrative Coordinator, Verla will retire at the end of this year. In 1994, the MCDES board asked Verla to "help out for a while" during a transition in the board. Ever since, she has managed our membership, conference

registration, correspondence, and every imaginable detail. She has been the "glue" that holds everything together behind the scenes and the one who keeps us all going in the right direction to meet deadlines. It is her expertise and skill that you have seen in our brochures, newsletter layouts, and website. She has been a friend to all of us and truly supported the mission of MCDES. We wish Verla ALL THE BEST as she pursues her many interests including books, photography, birds, gardening, and dedicated community and family involvement. While thank you doesn't begin to cover it, we do thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

### What have you appreciated about your MCDES involvement?

First and foremost, the day that former Board member, Paula Dicke, came into my office (fall of 1994) at the University of Minnesota Hospitals and Clinics, and asked me for a favor. I said "yes," and it turned out to be one of the best "yes's" of my life. Not long after that, I was hired to maintain the MCDES member database. From there, my role with MCDES expanded. The MCDES Board members and general membership have given me so much. I learned of the great and beneficial work you do. You helped me become a

Retirements continued on page 17

Retirements continued from page 16

more compassionate, empathetic, kind and caring person—all qualities that are so very important. Over the past 27 years with MCDES, I have been the beneficiary of so much.

Newsletter articles: Anything by Ted Bowman, book reviews from Eunie Alsaker, information about conferences, to name a few. One article that specifically comes to mind is the article in the June 2008 issue of *Coalition News*, titled “Erik: If Love Could Have Saved You” by Debi Lilligard. It helped me know, on a deep, personal level, that sometimes love is not enough, and also that love is so very powerful.

The delight that comes from working with someone over many years. The December 2022 issue of *Coalition News* will be the 83rd issue that Sharon Dardis, and I have co-produced: she as the editor, and me as the layout/production person. I have been the beneficiary of a wonderful professional and personal relationship. For instance, we found that we share a love of books and reading. Our editing sessions, conducted via phone, often turn into sharing book recommendations, as well as personal conversations. I have also learned the value of a well-placed comma. Thank you Sharon, for this and so much more.

The MCDES Board Members: I know of no other group that so selflessly volunteers their time for the greater good. They respect one another, are passionate about the work they do so skillfully, and they are a lovely, and fun group of people. I am speaking of not only the current board members, but also of former board members, most specifically Ben Wolfe, Paul Johnson, Ed Holland, Gail Noller, Ted Bowman, Amy Shaleen, and others. It has been my honor to be your administrative coordinator.

The MCDES members: I am humbled by the passion, compassion, knowledge, and empathy you bring to your work. I am grateful to you all.

### Do you have a favorite MCDES memory?

I do not have a “favorite” memory, although memories of steak and lobster at MCDES conferences comes to mind.

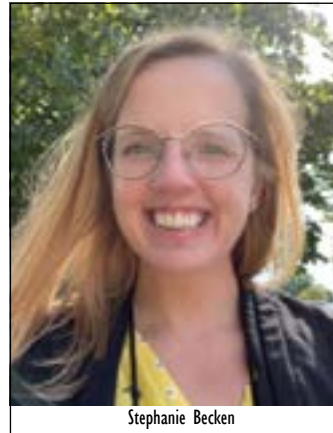
### What will you be focusing on after your board retirement?

I hope to be able to spend more time reading. After all there are so MANY books, and so little time. I am in two book clubs, and I volunteer with the Friends of the Larsen Family Public Library, in Webster, WI. I love spending time with girlfriends, and I hope to do some traveling with my husband.

### Parting thoughts for the membership and/or remaining board members?

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for the opportunity to know you, serve you, and admire you for the work you do. It has been my great honor.

### Welcome New Administrative Coordinator



Stephanie Becken

Please join us in welcoming Stephanie Becken as the new MCDES Administrative Coordinator! Stephanie has a BA in Psychology and a Masters in Nonprofit and Public Administration from Metropolitan State University. She lives in Wisconsin with her busy family: husband, Tanner, and children: Grace (18), Joy (almost 15) and Tanner (11). The family enjoys spending time outside with their many critters (donkeys, goats, chickens, dogs). They also enjoy playing games together—lots of Skip-bo and Trains, and whatever new game the kids find for a cold evening inside. Stephanie likes to knit, crochet, sew, and read. She is taking more interest and joy in gardening and making food from their garden, as well.

Stephanie was excited about joining our MCDES team, specifically because, years ago, she worked providing end-of-life care for residents in long-term care facilities—before the facilities had actual teams and services for hospice, so it was a relatively new thought. Her mom worked as a nurse’s aide when she was growing up and being a nurse’s aide was Stephanie’s first paying job. Her mom was a huge advocate for what end-of-life care could be and she thinks she has had a practical and warm affinity with the process of life. “I appreciate those who do the work of caring at end-of-life—it can be a heavy load.”

Her work experience has centered around the nonprofit and public administration sectors where she has worked with churches, schools (pre-K and district-wide), grant-based nonprofits, church camp, and most recently, the City of Superior.

Stephanie is happy to be here and excited to learn more about MCDES and our members. We are grateful to have her on the team and we know you will enjoy interacting with her. Welcome, Stephanie!

Minnesota Coalition for  
Death Education and Support  
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Minneapolis, MN 55405  
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# Coalition News

## December 2022

### MCDES Board Members

Eunie Alsaker, Secretary  
Diane Bauer  
Allison Chant  
Sharon Dardis  
Bob Furniss  
Kay Johnson, Vice-Chair  
Kelli Kinney  
Christine Lewis  
Andrea Tatley  
Peter Thoreen, Treasurer  
Tim Thorpe  
Florence Wright, Chair

*MCDES membership does  
not imply certification or  
accreditation of its members.*

### Grief Resources

Jewish Grief Education/Support Group:  
[www.jfcsmpls.org](http://www.jfcsmpls.org).

Pathways—A Healing Center: [www.pathwaysminneapolis.org](http://www.pathwaysminneapolis.org).

North Metro Grief Support Coalition:  
763-354-7828.

Allina Support Groups: Search for “grief support” at [www.allinahealth.org](http://www.allinahealth.org).

Capitol City Grief Coalition: Contact coordinator Lois Knutson, 651-227-4430.

Downtown Coalition for Grief Support:  
[www.mplsgriefsupport.com](http://www.mplsgriefsupport.com).

MN Network of Hospice & Palliative Care:  
<https://www.mnhpc.org/grief-support>.

Children’s Grief Connection:  
[www.childrensgriefconnection.com](http://www.childrensgriefconnection.com).

Compassionate Friends:  
<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>.

Hastings Area Grief Coalition: <https://account.allinahealth.org/events/59327>.

Grief Support—Essentia Health—St. Mary’s Medical Center (Duluth):  
[www.Essentiahealth.org/griefsupportduluth](http://www.Essentiahealth.org/griefsupportduluth).

West Suburban Coalition:  
[www.westsuburbangriefmn.org](http://www.westsuburbangriefmn.org).

The Grief Club of Minnesota:  
<https://griefclubmn.org/>.

Edina Coalition for Grief Support:  
[www.edinagriefsupport.org](http://www.edinagriefsupport.org).

Dakota County Grief Resources:  
<https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/HealthFamily/MentalHealth/Training/Documents/GriefLossSupportServices.pdf>.

Youth Grief Services, Fairview:  
[www.fairview.org/youthgrief](http://www.fairview.org/youthgrief).

The Young Widowed Support Group:  
[mrcraem@parknicollet.com](mailto:mrcraem@parknicollet.com).

Center for Grief, Loss & Transition:  
<http://griefloss.org> or 651-641-0177.

South Mpls Coalition for Grief Support:  
[www.trustinc.org/programs/grief-support](http://www.trustinc.org/programs/grief-support)

Bloomington-Richfield Grief Coalition:  
<https://brgriefcoalition.com/>.

Prince of Peace Grief Support, Burnsville:  
<https://popmn.org/mission/support-groups>

Weathering Life’s Losses—Adult Support Group, and Kids in Grief Support Group. Thurs., Stillwater, 651-430-4586.

The Grief Project: [www.griefproject.org](http://www.griefproject.org).

Brighter Days Family Grief Center: [www.brighterdaysgriefcenter.org](http://www.brighterdaysgriefcenter.org).

Crisis Text Line: Text “MN” to 741741.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

The Trevor Project: Suicide prevention line for LGBTQ. Text “START” to 678678.