

Coalition News

Quarterly Newsletter of the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support
P.O. Box 50651 ♦ Minneapolis, MN 5540 ♦ 763-391-3051 ♦ www.mcdes.org ♦ info@mcdes.org

Vol. 42 No. 1

Since 1977...Education and Support for Those Providing Care to Grieving Persons

March 2020

Mark Your Calendars

Feb 27-Apr 2 ♦ *Spring Grief Series*. Six sessions—each session complete in itself. Page 8 and 763-354-7828 for more information.

March 16 ♦ *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Their Intersection with Health and Resilience*. Info: <https://pathwaysminneapolis.org/>. Call 612-822-9061 to register.

April 5-7 ♦ MNPHC Annual Conference: *Honoring Our Past, Building Our Future*. Info at www.mnhpc.org.

April 6 ♦ MNPHC presents a conversation on end-of-life care with BJ Miller and Sunita Puri, hosted by Cathy Wurzer. Info on page 8 and at www.mnhpc.org.

April 24 ♦ MCDES Spring Conference. *Meaning-Centered Grief Therapy*. Info and registration at www.mcdes.org.

April 27 - May 2 ♦ ADEC 2020 Annual Conference in Columbus, OH. Information at www.adec.org/page/2020_Conference.

June 1-3 ♦ International Death, Grief & Bereavement Conference, *Ambiguous Loss and Grief*. Information/register at www.uwlax.edu/ex/dgb/register/.

June 19-21 or Sept 25-27 ♦ *Camp Erin*, a bereavement camp for children ages 6-17. www.fairview.org. Search for "Camp Erin."

October 2 ♦ *MCDES Fall Conference*. Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy, speaker. Topic to be announced.

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MCDES Spring Conference ♦ April 24, 2020 *Meaning-Centered Grief Therapy (MCGT): Using the Concept of "Choice" in Coping with Loss* Speaker: Wendy G. Lichtenthal, PhD, FT

The loss of a loved one commonly challenges a griever's sense of purpose, meaning, and identity as well as adaptive meaning-making processes. These challenges sometimes contribute to and are even indicative of prolonged grief reactions. Grief experts have therefore long-argued the value of focusing on "meaning" in therapeutic pursuits.

This workshop will provide an overview of a manualized therapeutic approach, Meaning-Centered Grief Therapy (MCGT), and its core principles. Drawing on research of MCGT with bereaved parents, examples of exercises that may facilitate meaning-making processes and may enhance a sense of meaning will be described, with opportunities for experiential exercises and discussion of applications of MCGT.

Wendy G. Lichtenthal, PhD, FT, is Director of the Bereavement Clinic and an Assistant Attending Psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) and Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine (WCM). She completed her clinical psychology internship at WCM and a post-doctoral research fellowship in psycho-oncology at MSK, where she was Chief Research Fellow. As a licensed clinical psychologist, her clinical work focuses on bereaved individuals and breast cancer patients utilizing a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches, with an emphasis on cognitive-behavioral and existential therapies. She was a recipient of the 2012 International Psycho-Oncology Society Kawano New Investigator Award and the 2019 Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) Research Recognition Award. Her published research on bereavement has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Cancer Institute.



Wendy Lichtenthal, PhD, FT

Conference brochures and online registration are at www.mcdes.org.

From The Editor: On Books, Bees, and Better Days Ahead

So work the honey-bees, creatures that by a rule in nature teach the art of order to a peopled kingdom.

– William Shakespeare, *Henry V*



Sharon Dardis

It's been another rough "maybe-I-should-have-just-stayed-in-bed" few weeks. I am so tempted to avoid the news at all costs, but of course, denial and avoidance solve nothing. So instead, I continue to devour the daily paper, listen to the evening news and worry about pandemics and politics, suffering refugees, melting glaciers and generally, the sorry state of our planet. At times, it all feels hopeless.

But wait! Might deep winter somehow offer respite? It may sound crazy, but after the frenzy of the holidays, and national chaos, I've convinced myself I might honestly just like January. It's quieter. There's less to do, other than take down the tree, haul the decorations to the attic, straighten the hall closet, sweep out the garage or organize my socks. Twinkly lights and carols aside, I like the starkness. This year, there's been the bonus of fresh snow in the garden, brilliant moon light at midnight, and all those long, darkly delicious days and nights. There's lively birds at the feeder, squirrels rushing the evergreens,

and yes, books stacked like familiar old friends around me. It's comforting.

Even after a January bout of "is-this-just-a-cold" or is it the coronavirus, I feel grateful. I'm alive and well in a warm house with soft blankets. I have hot tea and a helpful spouse (true) and yes, I have books. There's even a faithful owl who hoots regularly every evening down our chimney. I have a comfy chair near the fireplace. Of course, I've ventured out for family events, dinner with friends, exercise, volunteer commitments, movies, and an occasional trip to the grocery store. But finally, there comes that blessed time to read.

What better escape than losing your worries in a good book. I am not exaggerating when I say that, lately, the worse the news, the faster I dive-deep into books. Literature may save my sanity and just may, likewise, save the world. In the last two months, between my e-reader and hard-bound books, here's a list of what I've enjoyed.

Travel Light, Move Fast,
The Day the World Came to Town,
The Open Heart Club,
The Beekeeper of Aleppo,
Finding Chika,
999: The Extraordinary Young Women
of the First Official Jewish Transport to
Auschwitz,
Dear Edward,
American Dirt, and
A Rip in Heaven.

Granted, I admit I briefly went to the "dark side" and picked up a copy of *How Democracies Die* but I couldn't bear to finish it. *The Good Neighbor: The*

Life and Work of Fred Rogers offered

goodness and balance. Most recently, my most favorite read that offered me inspiration and comfort was *The Honey Bus: A Memoir of Loss, Courage and A Girl Saved by Bees*, by Meridith May.

My reading choices here are mine alone. They may not appeal to you. But that's the beauty of books. *The Honey Bus* offered me new perspectives and reassurance! The ideas Meredith calls the "principle of the hive" is indeed just what I needed to hear, that "if each of us does our small part, it will add up to a bigger whole..."

And oh, for the healing wisdom of nature and how we all fit into it. I learned that bees are smart, strong, and possess ancient wisdom that helps them survive. The author teaches that bees even mourn when their beekeeper dies. In order to thrive, they need to be told about the death, then have their hive covered for a time, to help them adjust to a new handler. Bees grieve?

May suggests each bee has a specific task and every job is for the preservation of the whole. Brilliant; such metaphors! The author combines these lovely lessons that she learned from a loving grandfather, along with her own story of a difficult childhood, making for a book I am going to need in hard copy. I'll put it on my crowded bookshelves...right next to other favorites that I will read, again and again, for comfort, for hope, for illumination, for embracing the belief that if we read,

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(covers June, July & August events).

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MCDES is a nonprofit 501(c)3 volunteer

organization whose purpose is to promote and provide education, opportunities for networking and support to individuals and groups involved with the care of persons confronting death and their families and friends, and those who are bereaved, regardless of the cause of death.

From the Chair

by Kay Johnson, MCDES Chair

In January, I embarked on another family hiking adventure in Utah. This time, we explored Arches National Park. Excitement was in the air as we reunited and enjoyed another national park together. My daughter, Alyssa, husband, Stuart, and I selected the iconic Delicate Arch trail for our first hike of the trip. It was a chilly day but we felt prepared, with the right clothing and hiking equipment, to successfully complete the three mile hike.

Other than becoming slightly winded, because we are flatlanders, we managed the hike well. As we got closer to the Delicate Arch destination, the hikers on their descent told us that we were nearing an extremely icy area and offered suggestions to traverse the ice. We politely thanked them for the warnings and continued on with assurance as we had hiking boots and traction devices for our shoes. What challenge could possibly lie ahead? As we neared the top and turned the corner, we saw a rock stairway covered in thick, uneven layers of ice. At the top of the icy stairs, there was a narrow trail that led around a large rock wall (the outside ledge of the narrow path went straight down). A crowd of other hikers were assessing, observing, and determining their next step. Delicate Arch was just

out of sight, right around the corner for those brave enough to navigate the icy, narrow ledge. We were so close to the beautiful sight ahead.

The three of us huddled to discuss the challenging trail in front of us. We realized that we only had two pairs of traction devices in our backpack; the third pair had been accidentally left in the car. Alyssa and I secured them on our boots, as Stuart felt he could manage the stairs with just his boots. We basically crawled up the icy rock stairway. Stuart was slipping and sliding enough to cause me alarm. I was focused on what was ahead: the icy trail with a rock wall on one side and nothing on the other side, other than a long way down. I watched other hikers slipping and sliding and heard distressed noises from some. In order to be safe, I knew none of us should be hiking without traction on our feet. We collectively decided that Stuart and Alyssa should press forward around the bend, with the appropriate equipment for a safe completion. I would wait on the ledge at the top of the stairway.

As I sat and peacefully observed what was happening around me, I could not believe what I was seeing and hearing. A middle-aged couple was sitting at the top of the rocky stairs debating their next move. One was wearing cowboy boots and the other wore tennis shoes. They wisely decid-

ed to head back down the stairs and not pursue the end of the hike. One man walked by and said to his young daughter, "I don't want you to hold my hand, I will hold yours because if I fall, I will let go of you so you don't fall with me." A mom and her young daughter walked by, not wearing proper hiking gear for the conditions. The mom was pulling her daughter by the arm while the daughter cried and screamed, "This is too scary, I don't want to." A young dad walked by with a baby in a carrier on his back, walking poles in both hands. He proceeded to walk to a lower ledge and climb up a snow-covered hill to the narrow ledge above. Meanwhile, I held my breath, wondering if he was going to lose his balance and fall backward. Two sweet young men managed to crawl up the stairs. Both were wearing tennis shoes. They sat with me at the top, on a ledge, observing others and assessing the end of the trail ahead, clearly determined to see that iconic and desirable view of Delicate Arch. It was apparent that one was fearful and did not want to proceed, while the other was determined to press forward so they could both complete the hike. They discussed the following tactics: take their tennis shoes off and walk with socks on the ice; climb over the rock wall on the right rather than take the narrow ice covered ledge ahead; and, finally, walk slowly while hugging/holding onto the rock wall on the right. They proceeded with tactic number three while I fearfully sat and watched as they inched along, hugging the rock wall. When they finally made it safely to the last bend where I would not see them any longer, one of them turned slightly to look at me and waved.



Stuart, Kay & Alyssa



Icy ledge



Delicate Arch

Chair continued on page 9

From “Facilitator” to “Supporter” Role For Those We Know Facing Loss, Death and Grief

by Peter Thoreen, MCDES Board Member

Greetings fellow Coalition members. As one of the MCDES founders, and a lifetime supporter of this organization, I am humbled to be writing an article for this excellent newsletter. I have been moved by so many contributors who have shared their thoughts over the past 40 years. I am not a clinician, therapist or professional caregiver, but for most of my adult life, I have been committed to improving the assistance and care people receive while facing loss, death and grief.

Following a 34-year career in health-care administration, I moved back to the Twin Cities and now find myself, once again, back on the board for MCDES. My first job in healthcare was in 1976 and that started me on a journey to become a healthcare administrator—what I describe as a “facilitator” role. I tried to make a difference in facilitating safer, more cost-effective and more appropriate healthcare in the organizations and the communities I served. I suspect many of my clinical friends and employees often viewed my administrative leadership role as maybe not always agreeing with all the ideas or programs they proposed. Perhaps this is the origin of the often “heartless and penny-pinching hospital administrator” sometimes portrayed in the media. Hopefully, I convinced most I worked with that I was neither heartless nor a penny pincher but rather a caring and responsible facilitator.

I was fortunate to start my career at the same time as the advent and growth of hospice in Minnesota. I watched palliative care emerge and

develop with more compassionate, specific care models for those facing a terminal, serious or chronic illness. In my role, I am proud to say I was able to help foster and facilitate the growth of hospice in all the communities I worked in across the Midwest.

I have always been passionate about improving care for those facing the various losses associated with aging and the end-stage of life. As a young man, my greatest teachers were not only dedicated clinicians, educators and religious leaders, but also my own family members. I was blessed to be able to be involved in the care of my grandparents and their siblings. Visits to their long-term care settings were a regular part of my growing up and “training.” In 1980, my spouse Janet joined me in visits to, not only my own family members but her aging loved ones, as well. She chose a career in healthcare as a Speech and Language Clinician and later became a Hospice volunteer. Her first healthcare job was as a Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant (COTA) at University Hospitals on the Pediatric unit. She was one of the few staff who would talk to kids about their fear of dying. She has been my best teacher in this life journey and has always supported me in my facilitator roles.

Growing up here in Minnesota, I lost an older brother (my parent’s first child) to leukemia. He died when he was 17; I was 5. Most of my memories are of him going in and out of hospitals. I did not understand until my 20’s, and was learning about the hospice

movement myself, why my parents could never could talk about this.

During my early adult years, I began to learn how to listen to my elders and how to try to facilitate the care and involvement of family as they faced their own mortality. In retirement now, this facilitator role for me again takes center stage. Fast forward 40 years; our task is, and will remain, the same for the generations ahead.

Janet and I are now actively engaged in her family’s challenges of providing choices and offering support to five of her relatives in their 90’s. We see other family members struggling with how to serve in these supportive roles. Because I’m a bit assertive on this topic, I spoke with four good friends here in the Twin Cities whose elderly parents had recently died. Two described a positive experience for both their parent and their family in dealing with end-of-life cares. We may have accomplished a great deal in 40 years but there is still have much work to be done. There is still a need to tip the odds towards the “more positive experience side” of death and dying.

Of course, it is not just being that supporter for those seeing “death around the corner” or for those dealing with the indignities of aging. This last year, my friend’s 52-year-old wife died. Another friend experienced the sudden death of his 22-year-old eldest son. A slightly older mentor of mine called me with a diagnosis of lung cancer that had spread. Another 64-year-old good friend just experienced a year

Facilitator continued on page 5

Facilitator continued from page 4

in a skilled care facility after suffering a closed head injury. Each of us, if we have lived life in a way that has engendered friendships and love, may find ourselves in a supporter role. And yes, with the inevitable AARP eligibility comes the inevitability of loss, death, and grief, but also the opportunities to provide support. Speaking for myself, as I age, I see grandchildren as a way to ease the burden of aging. I share a picture of our grandchildren here.

So, how do we empower that supporter role we are all capable of? This is not always an easy task. Of course, we need to listen more and talk less. We need to value time with elders who are approaching end-of-life. One of my favorite hospice medical directors used to tell me that we should all institute a “family conference” at our annual Thanksgiving gatherings. Before prayers of gratitude and turkey carving, we might discuss and share our desires

around end-of-life care and what we want for ourselves. This is not a bad idea and what a loving lesson for the teenagers around the table!

On that note, I’d like to make everyone aware of a special opportunity to foster this discussion idea, not just for professionals but for their families and friends, as well. On the evening of April 6th, in downtown St. Paul, the Minnesota Network of Hospice and Palliative Care is sponsoring a conversation with Dr’s Sunita Puri and BJ Miller. Both are young hospice and palliative care specialists. Dr. Puri’s recent book, *That Good Night; Life and Medicine in the Eleventh Hour* is a set of poignant stories about her journey and work to become a specialist in this area. Her stories have insights into how to be a supporter to all our families dealing with death, loss and dying.

Dr. Miller has written more of a “how to” resource book for supporters entitled, *Practical Advice for Living*

Life and Facing Death. This would be a good recommendation for anyone who finds themselves in a supporter role. This evening of conversation is for all “supporters” not just healthcare professionals but families and loved ones alike. Please encourage your own family, clients, associates and friends to attend and pass a copy of this newsletter along to any “supporters-in-training” you may know. There will be conversation, and music. I hope to see you there!

To conclude, we all need to continue this effort to improve care for those facing death, serious illness, and loss. This means training and educating more clinicians and facilitators but also encouraging ourselves and others to be compassionate supporters to those facing death. Thank you for your support in these efforts in the past, today, and in the future.

Editor’s Note: Peter can be reached at peterthoreen@gmail.com. For more information on how to register for April 6th MNHPC event, please see page 8.



Last Summer, Claire (6) and Emily (8)—“facilitating” Emily’s first Northern Pike is Grandpa

“Each of us, if we have lived life in a way that has engendered friendships and love, may find ourselves in a supporter role.”

– Peter Thoreen

The GREAT Grief: Responding to Existential Losses

by Ted Bowman

The old adage—if something is unmentionable, it can also be unmanageable—is common folk wisdom. Giving grief words, even metaphorical words, is often seen as integral to effective grieving processes.

During the past year, differing persons receiving support for individual or family losses, have voiced that if they wake in the middle of the night or persevere during the day about loss, it is not the personal, but the state of the world that is distressing. Some have asked if there are words or phrases for their experiences. To be clear, there was often a sub-theme for the grief they voiced: the planet itself could be in danger; divisive world leaders; disparities between the haves and have-nots; despair about the treatment of refugees; and growing racism. Still, the over-arching sadness was the state of the world.

For much of the past year, I have been attempting to address this request for words. As I have done so, a related request emerged – how does one respond when grieving the state of the world? I first wrote about this subject in the September 2019 issue of *Coalition News*. See the article at <https://www.mcdes.org/TBowmanGreatGriefarticle.html>. This is a follow-up to that article.

Here are some phrases or words I have found that may be useful when talking about losses related to the current state of the world.

- ◆ **The GREAT Grief**—Stoknes, P. (2015) “The Great Grief: How to Cope with Losing our World.” *The Guardian*. Thursday, May 14, 2015.
- ◆ **Grieving the Ineffable**—dictionary – incapable of being expressed or described in words, see also *Effing the Ineffable: Existential Mumbblings at the Limits of Language* (2018) by Wesley Wildman, SUNY Press.
- ◆ **Solastalgia**—definition: derived from nostalgia. Solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at home, but the environment has been altered and feels unfamiliar.
- ◆ **Collective Near-Death Experience**—referred to me by an English colleague and based on writing by Richard Tarnas who suggests that like with a personal near-death experience, you now know anything can happen.

Other phrases were heard including: ongoing grief, psychic instability, existential grief, and polarization anxiety.

This sort of list can and will grow. You can also now find commentary such as an article in the January 2, 2020 *New York Times* entitled “Why is America So Depressed?” In a different, but related vein, Beret Guidera in the August 11, 2019 *Star Tribune* wrote:

“If Your Words are Public, Improve Them,” advocating for fewer hurtful, hateful, demeaning and condemning words as we grieve the state of the world.

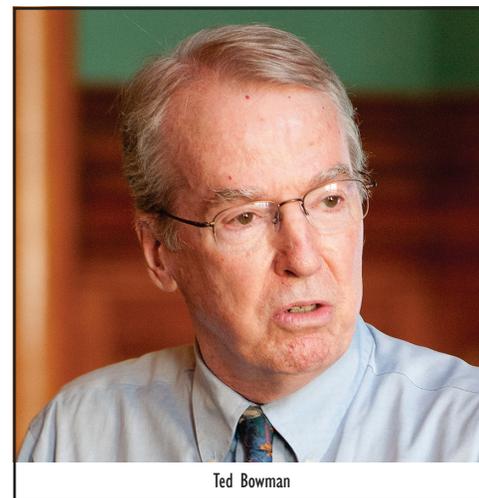
Whatever these losses are called, how do we as grief practitioners respond, what can we say or do? Here are some words I find provocative as I consider my options, found in poetry, research, and the Talmud. Joanna Klink advocates for presence, not abandonment, for grieving persons.

If you are fierce, if you are cynical, halfhearted, pained – I would sit with you awhile, or walk next to you...

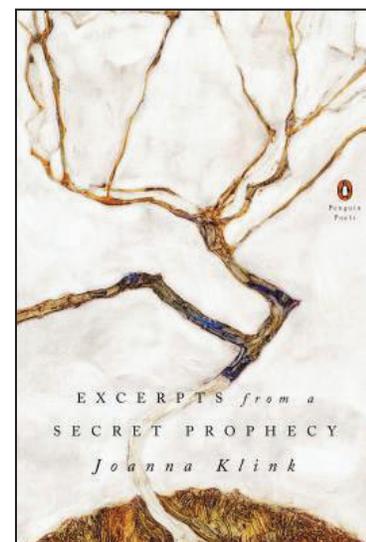
From *Excerpts From a Secret Prophecy* (2015) by Joanna Klink. New York: Penguin Books.

Mary Baures collated resiliency factors for individuals facing tragic circumstances. Her interviews reveal these two and more attributes of what she called portraits of recovery.

1. They accepted what they could not change and they attempted to change what they could.



Ted Bowman



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2. All of them went through such an awful ordeal that had they immediately faced the whole catastrophe head on, they probably would have burned out in no time...Recovery is a slow, step-by-step process in which one must move from one stepping stone to the next in order to cross the river and gain the other shore.

From *Undaunted Spirits: Portraits of Recovery From Trauma* (1994) by Mary Baures. Philadelphia: The Charles Press.

Poet Wendell Berry provocatively wrote a questionnaire about being immobilized when dealing with collective losses and their resulting grief. He seems to be crying out: do something, however small or large to live your values. Do not be silent; talk with others.

What sacrifices are you prepared to make for culture and civilization? Please list the monuments, shrines, and works of art you would most willingly destroy in the name of patriotism and the flag.

“Questionnaire” from *Leavings* (2010) by Wendell Berry. Counterpoint

From the Talmud, this wisdom:

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

This quote is from Pirkei Avot (literally “Chapters of the Fathers,” but often called “Ethics of the Fathers”). It is included in the Mishnah, oral traditions, that are part of the Talmud. The quote is attributed to Rabbi Tarfon.

This inspiration from Mary Oliver:

What I want to say is
the past is the past,
and the present is what your life is,
and you are capable
of choosing what that will be,
darling citizen.

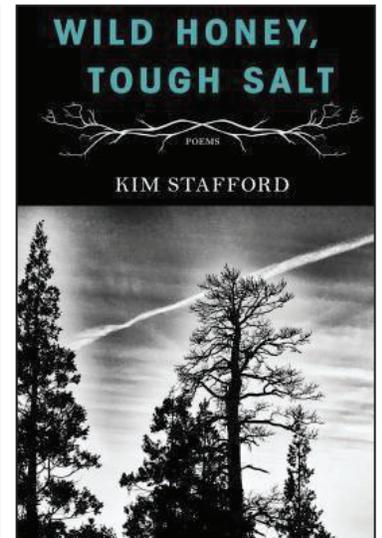
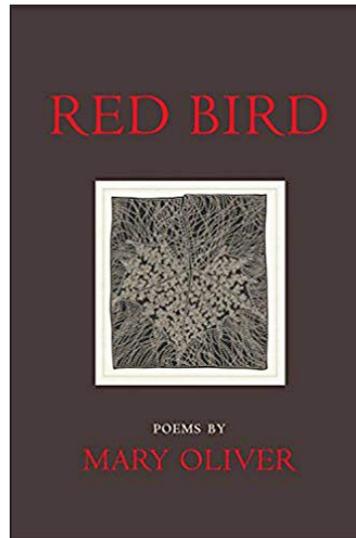
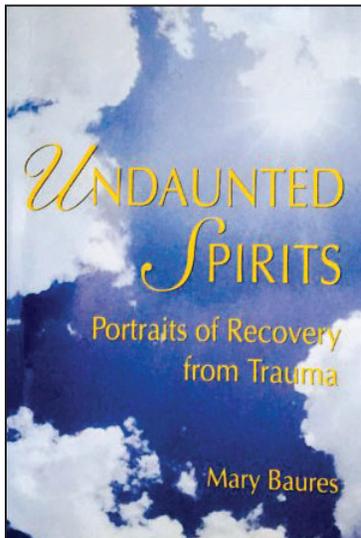
So come to the pond
or the river of your imagination
or the harbor of your longing,
and put your lips to the world.
And live
your life.

From “Mornings at Blackwater,” *Red Bird: Poems* (2008) by Mary Oliver. Boston: Beacon Press

And, finally, this from Kim Stafford:
Ask about your enemy’s wounds and scars.
Seek his hidden cause of trouble.
Feed your enemy’s children.
Learn their word for home.

Repair their wall.
Learn their sorrow’s history.
Trace their lineage of the good.
Ask them for a song.
Make tea. Break bread.

“Champion the Enemy’s Need,” from *Wild Honey, Tough Salt: Poems* (2019) by Kim Stafford. Pasadena, CA: Red Hen Press.



Mark Your Calendars

Feb 27–Apr 2

Spring Grief Series, hosted by North Metro Grief Education and Support. Held at Servant of Christ Lutheran Church in Champlin. Registration at 6:45, sessions from 7 to 9 pm. Each session is complete in itself. Information: 763-354-7828.

April 6, 2020

MNHPC presents an evening with two leading voices in end-of-life care, in a conversation with Cathy Wurzer,



Dr. Bj Miller



Dr. Sunita Puri

host of MPR's *Morning Edition* and TPT's *Almanac* and founder of End in Mind. Visit www.mnhpc.org for more information and tickets.

MN Residential Hospice Houses

“You matter to the last moment of your life, and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but to live until you die.”

– Dame Cicely Saunders

Thanks to Minnesota Hospice and Palliative Care for a comprehensive Minnesota Residential Hospice Facility resource compiled by MN-HPC members Pam Slocum, Ginny Green, and Kevin Rodlund. You can access the information at www.mnhpc.org/hospice-care. Then scroll down to “Residential Hospice Facilities in Minnesota.”

Book Review: What God is Honored Here? Writings on Miscarriage and Infant Loss by and for Native Women and Women of Color

Gibney, S. & Yang, K. K. (Eds.). (2020). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press

Reviewed by Eunie Alsaker

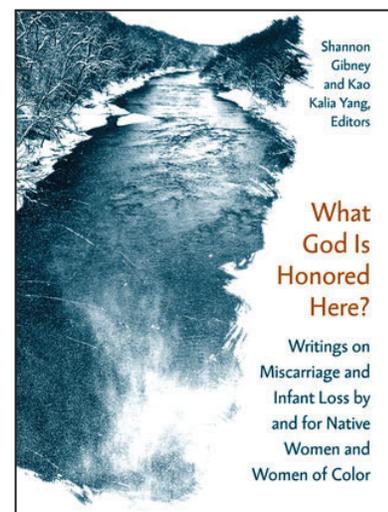
In our culture, miscarriage and infant loss typically reside in the “we-don’t-talk-about-that” category. The literature that does exist is by and large written by white women. These experiences of grief, along with native women and women of color, have historically been silenced. Now a collaboration of grieving mothers tells their stories and invite others to listen and share their grief.

What God is Honored Here? Writings on Miscarriage and Infant Loss by and for Native Women and Women of Color is a unique and important literary anthology. Shannon Gibney and Kao Kalia Yang, two MN writers and previous Minnesota Book Award winners, are both contributors and editors of this book. They write of their fear that “...life would continue as if our babies had never lived if we didn’t do something to commemorate their existence.” (p 2) In response, they gathered the stories of 24 additional women with similar losses, including Yang’s own mother who had seven miscarriages.

The writing is powerful as well as beautiful. The mothers walk us through their heart-breaking losses, infertility, and fear during subsequent pregnancies and births. They tell of both compassion and lack thereof in hospitals. Some are left wondering how much race played a role in the loss of their child given the disparity in infant mortality rates among races in our country. They share the “You’ll get pregnant again,” and “It’s time to move on,” comments. They write of how they remain connected to their lost child. They note how both rituals and the writing process itself contributed to their healing.

The editors affirm that it was a gift for them to work in collaboration with other authors. This book is a gift to the rest of us. Their stories teach us about grief related to infant and pregnancy loss. They guide us to slow down and understand their stories. They remind us to consider how race and ethnicity impact grief and loss. They provide me, a white woman, with a way to expand my knowledge and become more inclusive. They teach us that it is not “just” a miscarriage, but the loss of an expected future—of their child. They remind us to honor these losses.

The stories touched and challenged me. My friend of twenty-two years miscarried before we met. The other day I finally asked, “What was that like for you?” And I sat down to listen.



Editor continued from page 2

work, inspire, stick together and do our individual parts, goodness and peace will eventually prevail.

Which brings me to MCDES, of course. What a busy hive of workers we are and how apropos this subject is to all of us. If we are the bees, then MCDES is the hive! And the queen is our mission statement, that we nourish and protect and enable. There are workers and sentries, nurturers, and cleaners. Our “hive” survives only when we work together for the betterment of our goals and objectives.

This issue is another good example of that. Thanks to everyone who continues to volunteer articles filled with expertise and stories. We can all relate and learn. Like pollen from the bees, these rich pieces contribute to our networking, our support, and our relationships with one another and our clients.

Thanks and condolences to Peter Thoreen, MCDES board treasurer, whose article about facilitation and care at end-of-life was submitted just shortly before the death of his own mother-in-law. The end-stages of life continue to re-focus our life lessons and priorities. Please consider joining Peter at the upcoming MNHPC event in St. Paul on April 6th. With Cathy Wurzer moderating the discussion, it promises to be an inspiring night. Sharing the spotlight will be leading specialists in end-of-life, serious illness, and palliative care, Dr. BJ Miller and Dr. Sunita Puri. There will also be stories and music. Bring your families; come with a friend. This is an event meant for everyone, not just professionals.

Ted Bowman continues his discussion on the GREAT grief. Thanks to Ted, whose collection here of phrases,

words, poetry, and yes, books, offers us solace from what he calls, our “over-arching sadness with the state of the world.” Again, thank you, Ted. Your words, prose and suggested books offer comfort and food for thought during these unsettling times.

Eunie Alsaker brings another book review, rich in language that encourages us to look beyond our own experiences and delve into the challenges that other cultures and losses offer. Thanks, Eunie, for an insightful look at the diversity of loss. *What God is Honored Here* is another title sure to find a spot on my book shelf!

Ed Holland, a long time MCDES board member, had the opportunity to interview his colleague and friend, Dale Larson regarding the 2nd edition of his book, *The Helper's Journey*. Dale has buzzed in and out of the MCDES hive, having been our conference speaker on two occasions. Thanks to these gentlemen for sharing their informative conversation with us!

And lastly, speaking of conferences, don't miss the upcoming Spring conference with Wendy G. Lichtenthal on Friday, April 24, “Meaning Centered Grief Therapy.” Register early! Our conferences, thanks to all of you, continue to be sellouts.

So books and bees, January stillness, collaborating friends and clinicians are on my mind these days. Such thoughts comfort me, like honey in a cup of tea, reminding that even when things look darkest, there are those who will sit with us, read with us, reminding us that there is always reason to hope. Things will come right again. And yes, may there always be bees. Author Meredith May writes that her grandfather “spoke in metaphors, using the bees as examples of the proper way to behave.” He reminded (her) that “bees live for a

purpose far grander than themselves, each of their small contributions combining to create collective strength.” And that “by giving more than they take, bees ensure their survival and reach what might be considered a state of grace.” That pretty much sums up how I see MCDES these days; graceful, collective strength with each contribution. Perfect! Thanks for all you do so well, for so many! See you at the Spring conference; think flowers, bees, and better days ahead!

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I was disturbed by all that I had witnessed as hikers made decisions about whether or not to complete the hike. I was more than comfortable with the decision that I had made to respect Mother Nature, recognize that my fear may get in the way of being safe, and found courage in my ability to make that decision. Back at the trailhead, a young couple just starting on the trail asked us how it was. They then went on to say that a couple and their young adult son had slipped and fallen two months earlier. The parents died and the son was airlifted to a nearby hospital. I felt even more disturbed by what I had just seen and experienced.

Reflecting on this experience, I found myself drawing parallels between what I had witnessed at the end of the trail and what seriously ill patients and families experience. Some family members and patients are not on the same page with how to proceed (cure or comfort). Some are able to openly communicate while some are not. Some family members and patients seem to be better prepared/informed/able to make decisions than others. Some are determined to

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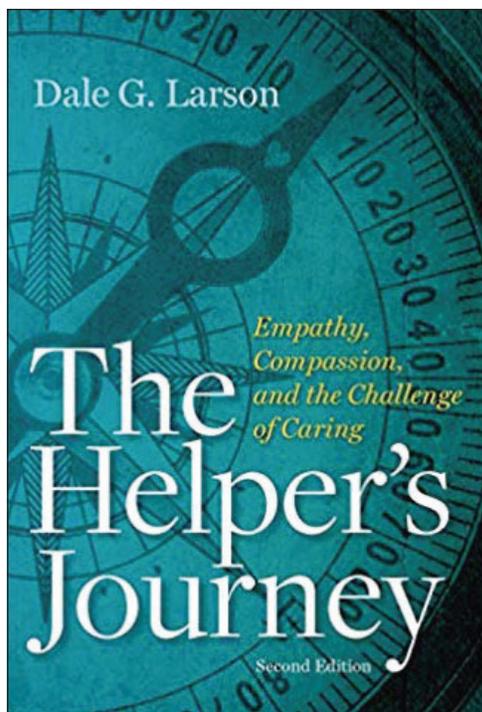
Q & A with Author Dale G Larson—The Helper's Journey

Interviewed by Edward Holland, MCDES Board Member

Editor's Note: Dale G. Larson, PhD, recently published the second edition of his 1993 book, *The Helper's Journey*. Board member, Edward Holland took this opportunity to interview Dale about his book and work. Dr. Larson has twice been a MCDES conference speaker. His topic in May, 1998 was "The Helper's Journey: Finding the Balance." In October, 2004, he spoke on "The Challenge of Caring: On Compassion, Resilience and Healing." Dale Larson can be found at www.dalelarsonphd.com.

What inspired you to write the 1st edition of your award-winning, best-selling book, *The Helper's Journey*?

I had worked with terminally-ill patients during my clinical internship, and then had a grant from NIMH to do a national mental health skills training program for hospice workers. I was doing research and lecturing and had a clinical practice with seriously-ill clients. I put all that I had learned to that point in the first edition. It was inspired by the clients and hospice and oncology workers I had the honor to be with during those early days.



What led you to do the second edition and what's new in it?

The second edition, like the first edition, is another "what I've learned" publication. There have been many exciting developments in our field over the past several decades. I needed to spell them out for myself with the hope it would benefit others doing the work. The fields of positive psychology and neuroscience are yielding new understandings of empathy, altruism, the health benefits of a meaningful life, and the dynamics of effective helping relationships and high-functioning interprofessional teams. I got to write about eudaimonia, mirror neurons, exquisite empathy, compassion collapse, moral distress, compassion fatigue, and dozens of other ideas and phenomena not in our conversations two decades ago. I waited until I had collected the work and ideas that energized me most and then integrated those into the general framework of the first edition. You might think of me as the "cicada of second editions," only appearing every 20 years or so. I think it's good to have the book at this particular time, a time when we are seeking to bring person-centered compassionate care into full bloom across the helping professions.

Why use the word "helper" rather than "caregiver" or "carer" or "companioner"?



Dale Larson, PhD

I think the concepts in the book apply to everyone assisting others who are suffering, no matter what you call them. I do distinguish family and friend caregivers from professional helpers or clinicians, and try to maintain that distinction throughout the book to avoid confusion. However, I have always heard from family caregivers that they find *The Helper's Journey* very inspiring and supportive in their caring and self-care.

I see *The Helper's Journey* as a kind of guidebook or manual of sorts for anyone working not just in end-of-life care but helping and caregiving in many other settings as well. How does the book equip helpers for the many challenges they face?

That is a good reading of the book. It begins with the inner world of the helper, with what brings us into the work and motivates and guides us, and then looks at how we can put our empathy and compassion to work without burning out. Then it focuses on how to strengthen your resilience to stress, how to manage the dynamics of concealment and disclosure in helping, and then on goes to the features of

Helper continued on page 11

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an effective helping relationship and a healing communication style. Finally, I describe how to create a healthy interprofessional team and also outline some ways we can extend and build our compassion in the larger world. Overall, I look at the forces that nourish empathy, compassion and helping, and how we can maximize these in ourself, in our caring teams and organizations, and in our global community. The book tracks the helper's journey from the innermost sources of compassion to its fullest expression in helping relationships, teams, and society.

You seem to have a special interest in the topic, “Helper’s Secrets.” Why?

My research on self-concealment has been a major piece of my career. I created the Self-Concealment Scale in 1990 and it has now been used in about 200 significant empirical studies. More on this can be accessed at my website, www.dalelarsonphd.com. In the new book, I describe how the research and theory on secrets and health relates to all the topics we are most concerned with—burnout, the helping relationship, complicated grief, and much more. It has always been a fascinating topic for me, one that really began in my work leading support groups for hospice and oncology workers, which led to my papers on helper secrets, and then to work on self-concealment as I tried to make sense of how keeping troubling information about the self secret can be harmful, and how revealing that information to a trusted confidant can be healing.

Your subtitle is “empathy, compassion, and the challenge of caring.” How do you connect those three parts or components of the helper’s journey?

I write about these connections extensively in the book, and see them connecting in what I call the empathy-compassion-helping connection. In the book, I describe the challenge of caring this way: “Finding a way to be emotionally involved in your work, to maintain your helping motivations, empathy, compassion, and commitment as you courageously—yes, this work is courageous—help people live with hope in a world where loss is inescapable, is perhaps the central challenge in this work. It is the challenge of caring.”

What have you learned and/or relearned about yourself in writing these books?

I have learned and relearned that this work is sacred work, and that our science and clinical experiences can guide us in it. I find joy in sharing ideas that might make a difference in the caring efforts of others. This has always given deep meaning to me and continues to do so. Maybe another edition when I am 95, and a 4th at 125.

For helpers, what are the most important “take-aways” the 2nd edition offers?

Balance caring for others with caring for yourself, keep learning new skills and perspectives, and know that your work will reverberate far into the future, across the generations to come. A final take-away is my deep appreciation for the work that you do.

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fight until the very end. Some let go to make the most of what they know they have, everyone giving it the best they can at the time, with what they have.

I was also inspired to ponder, “What is considered courageous?” Was it more courageous to continue on the hike even though we wouldn't have all had the proper gear for the challenging conditions and may not have safely made it? Or, was it more courageous to stop, surrender, and honor the fear and challenging conditions? Is it more courageous to continue with treatment for a serious illness knowing that a cure is extremely slim or non-existent, or to focus on quality of life and creating meaningful moments in life with the time that is left? Many factors come into play for patients and families during this time. I have learned that we are all unique, we will respond in our own way, and there is no right or wrong. The beauty of life is that we can each determine our own paths. How do you view courage in the face of adversity or challenge?

Ann Landers offers this: “Some people believe holding on and hanging in there are signs of great strength. However, there are times when it takes much more strength to know when to let go and then do it.”

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson



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Coalition News

March 2020

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Grief Resources

Jewish Grief Education/Support Group:
www.jfcsmpls.org.

Pathways—A Healing Center: www.pathwaysminneapolis.org.

The Grief Project: www.griefproject.org.

North Metro Grief Support Coalition:
763-413-2985.

Allina Support Groups:
www.allinahealth.org. Search for “grief support.”

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

Downtown Coalition for Grief Support:
www.mplsgriefsupport.com.

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

Children’s Grief Connection:
www.childrensgriefconnection.com.

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

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

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

West Suburban Coalition:
www.westsuburbangriefmn.org.

Youth Grief Services, Fairview:
www.fairview.org/youthgrief.

The Young Widowed Support Group:
mraem@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

Bloomington-Richfield Grief Coalition:
www.brgriefcoalition.com.

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

Edina Coalition for Grief Support:
www.edinagriefsupport.org.

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

Crisis Text Line: Text “MN” to 741741.

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