

From The Editor: On My Much-Loved Dear Dead Ones

If the dead be truly dead, why should they still be walking in my heart?

~ Winnepap; Shoshone Medicine Man

The last public event I attended, just before the shutdown in early March of 2020, was a funeral. A friend's husband had died, not of COVID-19 but of cancer, just days before the very act of having any sort of memorial gathering or funeral would be considered extremely unsafe.

Patrick had died. But as they say, "Funerals are for the living." And so, for his family and for me, I went. Once home again, the reality of the pandemic began to set in. The world, as we knew it, shut down.

Just a few days later, I received news of a lovely couple in our extended family who were both critically ill and nearly succumbed to the virus. Thankfully, they survived. But then word came of another friend's death, and then another. Elderly cousins of my mother's died within a week of one another, both from complications of COVID-19. In an effort to keep track of these mounting deaths, so many to remember, to grieve, to not forget, I taped a list inside my kitchen cupboard

door. I numbered the names and their death dates. This alarming accounting felt too stark to hang in plain view; not that anyone other than my husband was ever in our house during those dark days to ask, "That's a list of your dead loved ones? Who does that?"

Not all the deaths I record are in my circle of intimates. Some were acquaintances, or distant relatives, or classmates. In every note of condolence, always at a loss for the right thing to say, I include, "Love never dies." It's true, with or without a list to help remember names or dates, those we love who have died, recently or long ago, remain a permanent presence in our lives and hearts and memories. But to see an ever-growing recent list is daunting. How many more? How long? Thankfully, at the fall MCDES conference, the lesson of permanence was a valuable reminder. Pauline Boss and Ted Bowman, speaking from both personal and professional viewpoints, confirmed it. Yes, love (with tender on-going grieving) and presence, lives on!

Thanks to two of our Dorothy Geis Scholars, Rachael Freed and Amy Dircks, who review the fall conference in this issue. If you were unable to join us last October, their overviews will make you wish you'd been there. Charlie Greenman, a MCDES member and retired licensed psychologist, also felt inspired to share his insights following his day with MCDES. Thanks, Charlie! MCDES conferences are unique and strangely personal, even online. As always, we appreciate any

and all members' generous written contributions or leads for future articles, sdardis@aol.com.



Sharon Dardis

In an effort to continue to provide member-worthy programming, every conference ends with a survey, sent to attendees, to evaluate the day for content and suggestions for improvement and/or topics for future offerings. Included in this issue is a brief recap of our latest survey from the fall Zoom gathering. Thanks so much to all those attendees who offered valuable feedback by returning their evaluations. Every opinion is considered and used for future conference planning.

Stories connect us. MCDES Chair, Florence Wright uses her own experiences with grief and loss to further highlight and illustrate the topic addressed at the fall conference, that of intermixing the personal and the professional in the work of death, dying and bereavement. As she puts it, "In this, there is a certain kinship I feel with you all." Read her message and be comforted; you are not alone.

We appreciate Carolyn Kinzel's holiday contribution to this December issue, reminding us of familiar, helpful suggestions to support those who are grieving. Carolyn, president and founder of Brighter Days Family Grief Center in St. Paul, includes links to learn more about her organization, which serves grieving children and families. Thank you, Carolyn.

Thanks to Eunie Alasaker for yet another engaging book review. The beauty of this digital newsletter allows us to include interactive links for readers to

Coalition News is published quarterly by the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support. Your submissions are encouraged.

Editor: Sharon Dardis Layout: Verla Johansson

Deadline for March newsletter: **February 1, 2022.** (covers March, April and May events).

Please send your items to:

Sharon Dardis

9267 Wedgewood Dr., Woodbury, MN 55125

612-940-6405 or SDardis@aol.com.

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.

Editor continued from page 2

dig deeper. If you're not familiar with author Kate Bowler and her books and podcasts, this is a good place to start. And by the way, if you've read a book you think our members might enjoy, please know we welcome reviews of books, poems, and even movies relating to the topic of grief, loss, and bereavement, sdardis@aol.com.

Speaking of poetry, MCDES continues to make connections with wonderful poets throughout the country, whose words speak to and comfort us. Thanks to Vermont poet, James Crews, who so generously granted permission to reprint his lovely poem, "Self Compassion." His newest book, *The Path to Kindness: Poems of Connection and Joy*, will be released in April 2022. His response to our request to reprint, was, "I believe in sharing poetry far and wide." Thanks, James! <http://jamescrews.net>.

And speaking of poets, thank you again to prolific Ted Bowman for his latest reflections, in this issue, on the act of being thankful whilst grieving. Ted's connections to MCDES are far-reaching. As a former board member and conference presenter, as well as frequent contributor to these pages, we are grateful for his presence in our professional, as well as personal lives. Thank you, Ted, for keeping MCDES ever-close to your very creative and compassionate heart.

More good news: We are proud of MCDES' past and current board members who continue to teach and contribute. Check out the link under "Sundries" on page 13, to hear a panel discussion with Ted Bowman, MDiv, past board member, and Rev. Ron Bell, a current board member.

In the midst of this ongoing pandemic and other crises, and in an effort

to continue to support those who serve the dying and bereaved, your MCDES Board and Education Committee have invited Darcy Harris, a Professor of Thanatology at King's University in London, Canada, to join us for the spring conference on May 6, 2022. She will address "Self Compassion: Sustaining the Ability to Care in Challenging Times." Please consider a day for self-care and join us for this day-long Zoom experience of networking, education and support. CEUs are available. Online registration will be available in early March 2022.

As always, check out the Sundries, Resources, and Calendar sections for other upcoming trainings, symposiums, and conferences. If you have future events you would like listed, please note the next newsletter deadline is February 1st, sdardis@aol.com.

Today, the sadly ever-growing list of "my much-loved dear dead ones" still hangs inside my cupboard door. I'm not sure when or if I'll take it down, or if I will ever stop recording names. I even imagine my own name written there! As a "senior," I understand (and fear) the undeniable fact that, as we age, these losses, pandemic or not, will continue. As the latest variants wax and wane, there are other unrelated tragedies, other deaths to add, some not virus-related; some, almost too tragic for words. Yet, the thought of the deads' presence still "walking in our hearts" rings lovely and true. Love both "leaves with us in death" and "stays with us in life." Of that, I am certain.

In her book, *Loving and Leaving the Good Life*, author Helen Nearing tells of intoning an old Native American chant at the bedside of her dying husband of 53 years: "Walk tall as the trees; live strong as the mountains; be gentle as the spring winds, keep the

warmth of summer in your heart, and the Great Spirit will always be with you."

All my much-loved dear dead ones still walk in my heart. They linger in all seasons. I say their names as a reminder that they lived. Their love and memories return to me, in my waking and sometimes, when I'm especially open and yearning, they appear in my dreams. Love never dies.

Wishing you a holiday season filled with whatever warms and sustains your hearts. MCDES is thankful for all you do, so well, for so many. Stay safe, well, and in touch. We hope to see you all at the Spring Zoom conference on Friday, May 6th.