GRIEF AND LOSS: THE HEALING PROPERTIES OF LITERARY AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

The requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Letters

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Madison, New Jersey

May 2022

ABSTRACT

Grief and Loss: The Healing Properties
Of Literary and Artistic
Expression

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
Drew University May 2022

This dissertation explores the fundamentals of grief, who and how we grieve, and inspiration illustrated by authors and artists who have returned from their own grief journeys to a new wholeness in their lives. To conceptualize grief and loss, the research and examples of behavioral reactions are framed in the context of an interdisciplinary spectrum. This compilation of objective findings examines the authenticity of written and visual works, linking past experiences to current events to create new concepts and support the argument of the relief and the resilient potential of literary and artistic expressions.

To address the topic of healing, I have selected a specific group of post-World War I authors and artists who are unified in their ideas of grief, loss, and resilience through expressive forms. Kenneth J. Doka's research into the psychosocial aspect of grief and loss speaks to the possibilities for recovery, while the memoirs of C. S. Lewis and Tom Crider relate personal experiences as inspiration by example. Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso created visual diaries about the devastation of great loss for their audience to witness. Each creative form brings forth the commonality in losses and the potential for recovery.

Having experienced a number of personal losses, I searched through the broken

shards of my life by placing myself in conversation with literary and artistic figures to seek inspiration and inspiration by example, so as to gain a new sense of healing the self. Inherent in artistic and literary presentations are factors that have been proven to be historically successful in recovering a healthy emotional state for those who have suffered. Words and images can allow the individual to purposefully express ideas that go beyond or challenge surface thinking, providing inspiration, permission to hope, and validation. Expressive arts help us to welcome the painful truth and find the courage to balance life's adversities.

This study demonstrates that the art of reflection on the past is an important factor in human recovery, whereby individuals may be able to get in touch with their own feelings, linking their troubled past with new meanings in their present.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and my grandmother who transitioned from life when I was yet a child.

Their everlasting instructions on the pursuit of education and continual learning would serve to steer me on a better course through the waters of life.

As a result, the benefits of gaining wisdom would shine a light on understanding the meanings of real-life situations.

That wisdom would help me to grow stronger and become better able to weather the adversities set out before me.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Liana F. Piehler, Ph.D, and Laura Winters, Ph.D.

With their guidance and support, I was able to recover my past, embrace a present awareness, and forge on to a new beginning of insights to heal a wounded self.

They encouraged me not only to have a voice but also to listen to that voice as it emerged to speak my truth to be heard by others.

PREFACE

The heart of my paper is borne out of personal experiences with death, loss, and grief. By my eighth birthday, I had lost my grandmother, my mother, and four pets: Bob (dog), Bernie (rabbit), Billy (goat), and Dick (rooster). Although I sensed something had gone wrong in my life, those feelings could not be recognized as grief because grief was something felt only by adults, or so I thought. I became consumed with self-centered and self-indulged sadness, which led to a state of selective mutism. Having to live within a disapproved childhood of detachment, this act of solitude created an outside child, with an outside family, in an outside place. In order to cope with the numerous losses, I buried the pain until I became numb and disguised it as a horrific injustice. How else might a young child respond in a life of limited resources and a storm in the heart that defied tranquility? Lost in the chaos of my own thinking, there I lingered, not knowing how to pray and hopelessly wishing for nothing.

All of my interest became focused on my classroom studies, which provided an alternative universe into which I could retreat to escape my pain. My premise was: if I learned about life, I could possibly learn to understand life in hopes that self-knowledge might ripen into wisdom. The “why” questions haunted me unanswered for many years. But as I looked forward to who I could become, even the worst days of pain, there remained a tiny glimmer of hope.

In this interdisciplinary study, my voice was able to emerge as a resounding force for others to hear. Nestled among an array of writers and artists, I have been permitted to reclaim that silenced voice, regaining strength from all those who had already traveled their journeys and returned to a new awakening. If they could, I can also. In the company

of others, the chaos in my mind became quieted while encouraging me to listen to my own voice. The words of authors and the images of artists reliably targeted my feelings and spoke to my heart, even if they were bitter or dark and filled with despair.

The authors and artists were able to perform their craft with pertinence to grief and loss while their contributions argued their own relevance and necessity. Their accurate retelling of their stories allows us to inhabit the interior reflections of fellow human beings. That exploration of humanity heightens the awareness of the difference between the pathway to human flourishing and the off-ramp to disaster. We should always consider what we can do personally in order to prevent or circumvent unbearable pain for others.

The intent in writing on this subject was not to cloak everyone in grief but to provide a lighted pathway out of it. We are never too young to benefit from peace, resilience, or recovery. We are never too old to harness the mindfulness of true meaning in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

This interdisciplinary study explores the universal themes of grief and loss in language and imagery in the context of cognition, affect, and perception tempered with matters of the heart. One goal of this dissertation is to help all those who are suffering or who have suffered to articulate the chaos of their emotions and come to realize that they too can eventually attain a new wholeness. Lifelong loss and grief, inevitable as they may be, are as old as humanity itself and present themselves in inescapable fact. The body of work presented here issues in some of the ways in which grief may be expressed to promote resiliency moving toward a positive outcome. The interdisciplinary approach purposefully and intentionally uses the narrative as a valid method for weaving personal histories together in a way that makes sense so that communities can understand and interpret events in daily life. The lenses of multiple contexts allow room for every voice and every story to be heard, valued, and included in the larger community that is capable of engaging in a collective advocacy in the world.

The compilation of literary resources is drawn from selected short stories, novels, biographies, and memoirs that focus on grief and loss through a treasure trove of literature and creative expressions. The story as metaphor can reach into the darkest and most barren places and help the individual find nourishment, hope, and healing within a community of others. “Metaphoric stories” as described by Marla J. Arvary (217) have universal themes of loss, despair, redemption, resilience, and recovery. These remarkable works are illuminated in poetry, non-fiction, art, essay, and performance focused on the pain, the grief, and the coping skills shrouded in the healing process that follows loss. The healing process, for the purpose of this document, indicates not expressly the

meaning to cure, but instead to greatly improve one's quality of wholeness in life—a way to again experience a complete life as opposed to shards of brokenness.

The selected researchers discussed in this study investigate the experiences of others to demonstrate the need to externalize the internal pain of grief in hope that they might learn to help their participants to cope in healthy and meaningful ways within and beyond their grief. These social scientists explore theory and praxis to transform their research into a meaning-making process, reconstructing lives through a relearning of the world, repairing relationships, and rediscovering the self. Each scholar provides a powerful authentication of the strength of resilience and healing in their specific subjects. This documentation of scholarly support in the areas of grief, loss, and recovery has come to be beneficial for professionals and laymen alike.

Neimeyer has done extensive work in psychotherapy related to death, grief, and loss from the perspective of meaning and relearning one's new normal. In over 200 published articles, books, and chapters, his body of work has continued to involve the psychological responses to death and loss, using the methodology of the reconstruction of meaning. After facing the loss of his own father by suicide and the anticipatory loss of the vitality of his mother, his hope was that something in the sharing of his research would speak to the minds and hearts of readers as to the complexity in reconstruction of their lives during unwelcomed, uninvited transformations. The intent of his work was to invite multiple audiences into conversations with respectful mutual concerns of shared relevance in the meaning-reconstruction approach to grief in the lives of others struggling with loss. Neimeyer's aim was to relearn the world and restore coherence to chaos in the narrative of lives.

Kenneth J. Doka has taught, researched, lectured, and written in the areas of death, grief, and loss for more than twenty years. His works identify critical responses to individual experiences and adaptations in terms of the nature of loss, relationship/attachment, social variables, and personal variables. His personal variables relate to health, lifestyle, and stress management in instances of loss. On the other hand, social variables include age, gender, developmental level, social class, cultural beliefs, and internal/external support. Another main focus of Doka's research brought to the forefront the ideas of disenfranchisement and hidden sorrow. He further highlights how the inhibitions within a society promote feelings of insignificance: the insignificance of loss, the insignificance in relationships, and the insignificance in the capability to grieve. Also, to his credit, he has conferenced internationally, promoting the themes of disenfranchisement in the inability to validate loss and clinical intervention.

George A. Bonanno's work awakens us to an awareness of another side of sadness after a loss in an attempt to seek control of our thinking and our state of mind. Bonanno's research forges a positive perspective on grief and loss in his scientific evidence of our natural resilience and tendency to strive toward peace, genuine laughter, and joy. He concludes that genuine laughter and smiling are especially adaptive when people are feeling down. His research demonstrates a direct connection between adaptive positive responses and a better mental and physical health—a health bonus that provides a respite from the pain of loss. Just as sadness can envelop a group of people, laughter also has an infectious quality, even if it is brief and momentary, allowing everyone to take a short break from sadness. However, the path chosen to thrive in the face of adversity, including all emotions—even sadness—is a short-term solutions (Bonanno,

The Other Side of Sadness 199). Positive moments of comfort not only propel us out of sadness, but they also reconnect us to those around us. His premise is "bereaved persons can genuinely have pleasurable experiences to laugh or indulge in moments of joy" (*The Other Side of Sadness* 8). After any incidence of brokenness, we strive to return to a normalcy of peacefulness.

Viktor Frankl managed to emerge from some of the most traumatic events in life and death with an intact position of turning negative encounters into positive perspectives that reconstructed his view of his life. In his search for meaning and a deeper understanding, he brought to light a mindfulness of life as strength, intensity, and activity in one's desire to institute the comprehension of meaning, significance, and purpose in one's life. Our purpose in life is birthed from our values and gives rise to an articulation of meaning. Frankl was able to explain his theory of psychology in the development of logotherapy that taught us that the meanings that we attach to life encourage our acceptance of life, our ability to change the way we see our lives, our states of mind, and the way we see the world. His lessons for himself and others were to own the ability to change our attitudes when faced with adversity or unchangeable circumstances in loss or death. Some skeptics continue to question his efforts as defying the conventionality of trauma and theories of resilience. Yet, Frankl dedicated his time and effort to a vision that was more significant than himself, which allowed success to become a by-product of that dedication. Meanwhile, he charged each individual with the obligation of giving back to the world through finding meaning in one's life and therefore helping others to find meaning in their lives. We choose how we respond to any given adversity in life or death. We own that choice in our lives.

By incorporating the works of scholars, authors, and artists, this dissertation attempts to knit together the torn fabrics of our lives and reach into the darkest places to find hope, soul nourishment, and healing properties in order to reclaim the experiences of a new wholeness. We may question: How do literary and artistic expressions contribute to the process of healing in order to transform a life after a loss? The selected scholars were able to assist in accomplishing that feat through quantitative research characterized by narrative and artistic inquiry. Universal themes in grief are capable of being presented in language and imagery and can take us into an inner world, a world of form and emotion, of visions and feelings. This journey which was once called the spiritual or soul journey is now referred to as mindfulness and can be deeply healing. The pathway to healing and recovery from any semblance of loss is to allow oneself to merely go through it and come out on the other side to a new normal of positive behaviors.

Chapter 1

THE DIFFICULT LANGUAGE AND THE SHAPE OF GRIEF

Early social science attempted to establish a predictable progression through the stages of grief and the reactive response to the loss. More recent research has moved away from a cookie-cutter model to giving consideration to other variables that explore culture, developmental levels, and spirituality. Psychosocial definitions have framed the ideology of grief in the context of progressing from the negative effects of loss and continuing a process of positive, holistic healing. The Oxford English and the Webster New Collegiate dictionaries define the word *grief* as: "A normal response to loss that can dominate every aspect of life" and "suffering; pain. Mental suffering from bereavement, remorse . . . to feel grief, sorrow."

It is readily apparent that a dictionary rendition of the word "grief" falls painfully short of revealing the emotional depths of an individual's experiences in the loss of a significant attachment. Regarding all of the academic definitions, one must keep in mind that each person exhibits their own grief reaction in a unique way. Each person may be perceived differently than others in the same given community. Grief refers to one's personal experiences with loss, and the effect of those experiences on the individual's social, physical, and emotional health.

The mental, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions cannot be ignored in the human perspective of reactions to loss and its individualized specificity. The idea that grief is related only to death of a loved one can be expanded to include variation in responses to all types of losses. Losses related not only to living people but also to objects, animals,

places, or experiences; for example, loss of job, loss of faith, loss of relationships. Doka supports this idea in his research of societal losses:

> I think it's probably important to acknowledge and recognize that grief is a reaction to loss. We often confuse it as a reaction to death. But we also grieve non-death loss and attachments. It's really just a very natural reaction to loss and so we can experience grief obviously when someone we're attached to dies, but we can also experience it when we lose any significant form of attachment. (Doka, *New Directions* 7)

The conceptualization of grief can be explained and illustrated within the parameters of what may be typical and extend beyond some established experiences. In other words, the relationship of the attachment, the reason for the loss, the cause of death, the age or experience of the aggrieved, all play a part in the reactions of each person. That is not to say that defining grief and loss is not a difficult task. Grief and loss operate on a continuum—ever changing, ever evolving without any particular pattern or predictability, leading to a designated end. Some people may show signs of grief in dress or other ritual.

Still others may appear to have an initial response of shock and soon continue to perform daily tasks as usual. Yet, some may show no demonstrative indicators at all. However, there are some constants in the explanations:

- ongoing, no definite progression
- evolving, ever changing
- involving cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral experience
- secondary losses include the self, others, the nation, the world. (Doka and Martin, "How We Grieve: Culture, Class, and Gender" 338)

In terms of human suffering, no variation of a definition of grief can express the depth of the intense emotion in an individual experience.

However, from the perspective of Stephanie Ericsson, the author of *Companion Through the Darkness: Inner Dialogues of Grief*, we are able to read a personalized account of the grief she felt after the death of her husband while pregnant with their first child. Her description of grieving puts a face on an experience that touches the very soul.

> Grief is a tidal wave that over takes you,
>
> smashes down upon you with unimaginable force,
>
> sweeps you up into darkness,
>
> where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces,
>
> only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, reshaped . . .
>
> Grief will make a new person out of you,
>
> If it doesn't kill you in the making. (Ericsson 7)

The vivid rendition of Ericsson's explanation drives home the depths of feelings that could be felt in one's emotional state.

Self-reflection encourages us to focus on aspects of life and how our grief has affected us—emotionally, behaviorally, or spiritually. Communication, written or oral, is a key factor in the public or private forum. For Ericsson and others, journaling has provided a written form of self-reflection, and the language of poetry allowed for getting to the heart of the matter through speechless feelings. Her poetry gave her sorrow words.

People tend to understand poetry before they are able to locate a language by which to verbally signify their intellectual grasp of it. In the book *The Poems I Turn To*, Jason Shinder demonstrates the benefits of poetry: "The formalized language of poetry

can ritualize experiences and provide emotional focus. Man does not choose the poetry, the poetry chooses him" (xvi). We attach ourselves to the meaning that relates to us at the time of need.

In light of the fact that grief is a continual process, through ages, new concepts, flexibility in comprehension and societal beliefs, research has revealed new established norms of how to grieve from some of the original findings that were embraced by many people in the past. Recent research has exposed new dimensions in observations of human responses to grief and loss. When we examine the multifaceted experiences of grief and loss, consideration must be given to what has changed in life and how that change has affected life. One does not begin a journey through grieving and arrive at the end of that journey as the same person who existed before the loss. Along the way, feelings and experiences help the individual develop new insights. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying,* was a pioneer in the development of her five stages of grief. She devoted five chapters to the discussion of the process of grieving, in which each stage has specific characteristics. Her premise is that people may experience the same reactions in each stage: "People share their feelings of sorrow and uselessness, helplessness, and despair" (Kubler-Ross 48). The author refers to the order of these stages as:

1. Denial – Isolation – reject the reality of the situation, misunderstand words or refuse to face the facts (51).
2. Anger – intense emotions to deflect vulnerability, anger at inanimate objects, strangers, friends, family, or doctors (63).

3. Bargaining – in an attempt to gain control, there is a series of "what if" questions. To make a deal in an attempt to delay the inevitable (94).
4. Depression – reaction relating to loss: private preparation to separate or bid farewell to loved one (97).
5. Acceptance – a deeply personal and singular experience – the experience cannot be lessened or devoid of the emotional process. Feels the grief and allows the natural process to healing (123).

Many people do not face these stages in the prescribed manner as listed by Kubler-Ross. The key to understanding the stages is not to accept that each person must go through every single one of them with sequenced precision. Instead, it would be more helpful to look back at them as presumed guides in a process. All guidelines for behaviors should be put in the context of life and personal comprehension of grief and loss. People grieve differently. People accept their losses with different levels of intensity. Coping with loss is ultimately deeply, privately personal. In any instance, the thread of hope is essential in recovery.

Grief is universal, across all cultures in varying degrees and from perspectives. Kubler-Ross' stages and the movement through these stages is meant to achieve a peaceful adjustment in the process of healing. On the contrary, some scientists have considered her stages as myths related to the lack of objective data, questioning her theory's validity as it is based on her interviews with the terminally ill. Other recent researchers have discredited the stages altogether. But Denis Klass explains his view of the five-stage model. It is his contention that Kubler-Ross' model was widely accepted "because it was assimilated into a strong tradition of symbols in the culture." He goes on

to express that the basic thrust of her work was not an encounter with death and grieving, but “the creation of a symbol by which those in the personal sphere could fight the attempt to control death” (Klass 241–42).

In the clinical sense, symbolic representation in our culture is useful in providing a way of thinking about how meaning is created. The meanings families attach to their losses can be defined by their responses to the reality of grief and loss.

Every society has norms or rules that frame their handlings of grief and loss. It is important to remember that those rules govern not only behavior but social aspects of grief. Individuals are expected to think and act in socially acceptable ways within the realm of their social rules. Feelings and affect dictate how an individual is supposed to feel to justify a shared understanding.

Robert Zucker refers to Kubler-Ross’ identified stages by stating that “these stages were never intended to establish any strict rule of order for the bereaved . . . these stages accepted by the popular culture . . . suggest . . . that there is only one correct pathway to grieve” (Zucker 84). He went on to assert that “Grief does not look or feel the same for everyone. Your way of grieving is the result of a combination of factors that include your personality, family rituals, religious practices ethnic traditions, cultural rules, and even regional norms” (90).

Coincidentally, there may be patterns or themes in the ways an individual may respond to loss or grief. Both Klass and Zucker in recent research documented results that concluded that there is no step-by-step ladder of loss reactions or sequential blueprint of certainty in behaviors.

In another view opposing Kubler-Ross' stages, Bonanno, in his book, *The Other Side of Sadness*, refers to his research into sadness and laughter, his area of concern with stages that purports, "When you're grieving, there is never any joy, laughter or smiling" (38). His interviews with patients revealed, "in talking about their loss, people were crying one moment and laughing the next after recalling a specific memory" (41). There is solid research that laughter connects us to other people (Keltner and Bonanno 687–702). Bonanno goes on to say of laughter: "It's contagious and makes others feel better" (37). The notion of positive emotions contrasts Kubler-Ross' stages that indicate each stage must run to completion before another stage begins. It would be difficult to see where laughter and smiles play a part in the process. Then, we might say, there is no stage for positive emotions. However, as Bonanno has correctly asserted, positive emotions or good feelings occur in almost every kind of situation, even in situations as difficult as loss (Bonanno 36). People who show smiles and laughter have a tendency to cope better over time. Positive emotions allow a temporary reprieve from pain. To be able to oscillate between sadness and feeling good is a dual process. Sadness is "loss oriented" (Bonanno 41) and the focus is on some aspect of loss, whereas laughter is "restorative oriented" (Bonanno 41), allowing the individual to move beyond loss and focus on the other demands of life. Thus, we might be able to conclude that grief is not static on a continuum of a variety of emotions (Bonanno 41).

Bereavement is a period of mourning and grief following the death of a loved one or pet or other attachment. Mourning is the word that is used to describe the public rituals or symbols of bereavement, such as funeral services, wearing black clothing, closing a place of business temporarily, or lowering a flag to half-staff. As bereavement is highly

personal as well as a very complex idea, displays of the bereaved include reactions that can include but are not limited to behaviors that are physical, emotional, or spiritual. Responses are influenced by factors related to ethnicity or religious traditions; personal beliefs; concepts of life after death; and type of relationship ended by death: friend, spouse, partner, child, colleague, or medical professional.

One example of being able to deal with self-reflective bereavement is provided by Helen MacDonald, in her 2014 memoir, *H Is for Hawk.* She explores the meaning of bereavement in reference to the sudden loss of her father. She reasons, "Here is a word. *Bereavement*. Or, *Bereaved*. *Bereft*. It's from the Old English *breafian*, meaning 'to deprive of, take away, seize, rob.'" The words *robbed* and *seized* held a personal significance to what she felt had happened to her (MacDonald 13). In her bereavement and her aloneness was a feeling that could not be shared: her shocking loss. MacDonald initially tried to come to terms with a meaning for her bereavement in hopes that she could possibly learn to adjust to her feelings of loss.

Beginning in the early 2000s, researchers such as Doka, Zucker, and Neimeyer raised and increased awareness in consideration of other types of losses experienced in bereavement. Those losses were called "silent losses," as in early pregnancy deaths before births, as well as illnesses like Alzheimer's or other diseases that destroy the personality (Doka and Abner 189). Also, other losses may be related to relationship separations, loss of social status or loss of professional positions. Any change—even positive change—involves loss because of any move from one situation into another. Getting a new position, relocating the family, or marriage are changes that are considered positive changes that also involve some element of loss. As a consequence of life, loss

causes pain or some level of adjustment. Understanding how to cope with small losses prepares an individual to effectively manage major occurrences.

When we lose someone we dearly love, with whom we shared a good life, deep pain results. It reflects the immense role that person played in our life and the huge vacancy left by their absence. Not only are we deprived of the intimacy of that relationship but we lose companionship, laughter, sharing, and displays of affection. C. S. Lewis expresses his loss in bereavement after the eventual passing of his wife: “I will return to her as often as possible in gladness. I will even salute her with a laugh. The less I mourn her, the nearer I seem to her” (Lewis 56). Lewis recognized his losses before and after death but countered his feelings with gladness in remembrance.

Those in the bereavement process allow themselves to feel the depths of pain and hopefully seek out ways to direct their emotions to face the reality of loss rather than become consumed with helplessness and immobilization. Pain may not be a choice, but the road to healing and a new sense of living depend upon an individual’s specific behaviors on his/her journey. Although bereavement is accepted as a normal response to death or loss, nothing prepares the person for this inevitable emotional state.

During the period of bereavement, a loss might be perceived as an actual loss or a symbolic loss. Actual loss refers to the death or ending of a specific relationship or bond or an attachment that no longer is available. Those losses could be the results of various means such as: terminal illness, crime, transportation, military, suicide, or national or world disasters. In contrast, a symbolic loss encompasses all of the events that can never be accomplished as a result of the actual loss. We often hear of those kinds of symbolic losses in the victim’s statements in the loss of a loved one caused by a crime. Victim

families are allowed to express their concerns of denied privileges due to the loss of a loved one.

Actual loss is the realization of being without. MacDonald writes in *H Is for Hawk* an account of the sudden loss of her father and the fear of the eventual loss of her goshawk, Mabel: "You see that life will become a thing made of holes. Absence. Losses. Things that were there and are no longer" (171). Though Helen realizes that she will always miss her father, concurrently she must meet her problems head on and ultimately adjust to her losses that life sends her way.

Mabel, Helen's goshawk, is her connection to the wild which her father taught her to respect along with her connection to humanity. Through her relationship with Mabel, Helen attempts to begin the process of healing from the grief and the shocking loss of her father. Yet, she harbors the fear of losing Mabel, and as a result her connection to the wild she so respects: "You pour your whole heart, your skill, your very soul, into a thing—into training a hawk. . . . to relinquish control over it . . . the hawk leaves the fist, and you cannot control the outcome" (177). Helen's dilemma is navigating the space between losses: one an actual loss and the other a symbolic loss; she cannot control either one. Helen also dreamed of reuniting and maintaining a relationship with her father and her goshawk by escaping into their world through her dreams: "I'd had that dream of the hawk slipping away into the air. I'd wanted to follow it, fly with it, vanish into another world . . . . But, I am not the hawk" (219). Part of the struggles we suffer are caused by the inability to let go and not allowing ourselves to embrace the present while maintaining love in the absence of our loved one.

Symbolic loss entails all life's events that have not happened and never will be realized as the result of an actual loss: graduations, marriages, career goals, or age milestones. Ericsson reflects on her inner thoughts in an example of her symbolic loss in her *Companion Through the Darkness*:

> Oh, if only someone had prepared me for a setback . . . . Anniversaries of births, deaths, special moments of remembrance, dreadful times or triumphant victories can exhume past pain as if it were fresh. It seems to be an instinctual ritual performed by our subconscious that pays homage to the shadow of a lost dream. (177)

As a way of coping with her own sense of loss, MacDonald tries to rationalize her symbolic loss of a relationship and her symbolic loss of wisdom of her father and his teachings of life's lessons by using word definitions which are devoid of her true emotions. Also, her rationalization came in the form of dreams. "I started dreaming of hawks all the time---Here's another word: *raptor* meaning, 'bird of prey'. From the Latin *raptor*, meaning 'robber' from *rapere*, meaning 'seize'" (18). MacDonald had become obsessed with birds of prey as a child, and the image in her dreams was her father, a man she strongly associated with her passion for birds.

Both of her definitions of *bereavement* (13) represent herself as the bereaved (13) in the loss of her father. Her bereavement was a symbolic reaction to the loss in her dreams of the hawks. She suffered the loss of companionship of her father from whom she had learned that patience was as crucial in life as so in bird watching, but she had not afforded herself that same patience in her bereavement on her journey to healing: "I

wanted to fly with the hawk to find my father; find him and bring him home" (220). She too, along with Ericsson, struggles with letting go instead of letting love.

In realizing one's losses, actual or symbolic, the bereaved should accept the loss but cherish the moment. Ericsson, in her message for those in bereavement, shares her lessons in resilience rather than becoming consumed with the losing aspect of her journey: "Loss, especially sudden, unexpected loss, reprioritizes life" (59). She elaborates: "I know what some people don't know---that in the end; there are losses. . . . I see them as losses. Yes, and I have learned that if I give too much of myself, I can lose. Is this part of loving? Losing is part of loving. Loving means losing. It's apparently part of the equation" (110). Ericsson's acceptance of the reality encouraged her to honor her child's memory but also create moments that held meaning for herself and her child. Her inner dialogue spoke to the soul of the bereaved, "on the day she was born, all I saw was her little face" (165). "Try and hold on to yesterday and we become blind to today" (164). We can see in the examples of Ericsson and MacDonald that symbolic losses are those that involve psychological or spiritual attachments such as hopes, faith, and lost dreams. Their perspectives on loss demonstrate the need for a positive move toward resilience. Symbolic losses may cause painful episodes years after a loved one has passed. After the funerals and gatherings and life closing events, the bereaved persons must move on into life to further deal with the aftermath. It is time for those surviving to travel beyond the shadows and once again enjoy the sunlight. Those who have passed on live in the remembrances of all those left behind in terms of the symbolism of the lives they would have lived.

There are societal external rules or norms that govern how people are expected to behave in grief. On the other hand, there are also societal internal rules that set up expectations of internal states of mind—how we think, how we feel, and even how we believe. These rules direct what losses we grieve, how we grieve them, what is a legitimate loss, and how others respond with sympathy and support (Doka, *Hidden Sorrow* 4).

There are multiple and diverse types of loss identified by those who practice medicine, researchers, therapists, clinical psychologists, the clergy community, and sociological professionals. A review of those losses includes, but is not limited to, anticipatory, cumulative, chronic, or complicated grief. Inhibited, distorted, or absence of grief are also included in enfranchised grief. *Enfranchised grief* refers to those norms that are socially accepted as set forth in Doka's "grieving rules" (Doka, *New Directions* 6). Those norms exist not only as informally expected behaviors but also as formal statements in company policies in human resource regulations in extending bereavement leave depending upon the relationship connections to the losses. For instance, in the United States and many other societies, grieving rules are limited to the deaths of the immediate family members only. Yet, human beings exist in intimate networks that include both kin and non-kin.

People form attachments to fellow humans, animals, places, and things. And persons experience a wide range of losses: deaths, separations, divorces, and other changes and transitions. When relationships are severed for any variety of reasons, the individual grieves, expresses, or adapts to the loss in many ways, sometimes outside of

the grieving rules set forth by Earl A. Grollman ("What You Always Wanted to Know about Your Jewish Client's Perspectives" 31).

The concept of disenfranchised grief was introduced by Doka in 1985. His explanation of the phrase *disenfranchised grief* is "grief that a people experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned" (*Hidden Sorrow* 4). For instance, someone suffers a loss but has no right to mourn according to society's rules. This disenfranchised behavior may arise out of several situations. Death or any other kind of loss that is often socially unrecognized or unsanctioned might be related to a miscarriage, loss of job, or death of a partner; those suffering these losses are disenfranchised by societal norms (Deck and Folta 79). The non-kin relationships may simply be misunderstood or unappreciated. The roles of lovers, neighbors, foster parents, colleagues, caregivers, to name a few, may be long lasting and intimately interactive. Still, the aggrieved may not be afforded the opportunity to publicly grieve the loss. Family and friends expect less of a reaction and in turn provide less social support for the griever. As explored in empirical research conducted by Coor, Doka, and Thorn Zanich, people differentiate losses based upon the nature of the relationship, the nature of the loss, and the nature of the griever. When there is no social acknowledgement of a griever's relationship to the deceased or recognition of loss, the ability to provide support or to assist the bereaved is difficult at best (Deck and Folta 79–88).

Doka describes other interpersonal losses that transcend the boundaries of immediate families. Some of those interpersonal relationships that are not sanctioned by society or do not merit grief nor socially defined as significant are abortion or prenatal

deaths, patients, co-workers, and step-children. Non-death-related losses include incarceration, a change in religious belief, or medical issues such as Alzheimer's disease. Numerous other transitions in life can have undercurrents of loss. Aging and developmental challenges lead to losses associated with different points in the life span (Doka, *Hidden Sorrow* 4; Doka, *New Directions* 4).

Besides these two broad categories of loss—relationships not recognized and loss not acknowledged—Doka goes on to explain two other types of disenfranchised losses. In the first of these types of losses, the griever is excluded. The person is not socially defined as capable of grief. The very old or the very young are perceived as having little or no comprehension of reactions to death in significant relationships. Also, persons with developmental disabilities or mental illnesses are excluded from discussions and rituals (Doka, *New Directions* 10–14), though the research bears out that the developmentally disabled are able to understand the concept of death (Doka, *New Directions* 13). In the second of these types of losses, the circumstances of the death—the nature of the death—may cause others to constrain or limit the support extended to the bereaved. Victims of suicide or survivors of a suicide may feel a sense of stigma, fearing the negative reactions from outsiders. Some deaths provoke anxiety; e.g. mutilating loss, death of a child, homicides, or erotic asphyxiation may cause family embarrassment and are likely to be classified as disenfranchised. Yet, other occurrences may cause support to be minimized, in cases of execution or a devalued disease such as drug abuse or alcoholism. The griever is restrained from experiencing the full brunt of loss, and support may be withheld punitively by family and friends (Doka, *New Directions* 19). By helping people to recognize such losses, support may be made more available to the bereaved, and their

pain understood and thereby lessened. Disenfranchised grievers need what all grievers need: validation, support, empathy, and opportunity to take part in the cultural rituals.

Anticipatory mourning in grief is disenfranchised due to the fact that the loss cannot be grieved because it is a future loss. Therese Rando's extensive work in *Anticipatory Mourning* (2000) studied the experiences of loss in life threatening illnesses of those who will one day die. Those profound losses cannot be publicly acknowledged; the person is still biologically alive. As part of the journey of those involved, they mourn all of the losses along the lifetime of the shared life (Rando 54).

We observe the anticipated loss and suffering of Jack, the husband and Joy, the wife in a film of their life together. Jack shares moments of their life as he and his wife Joy faces a cold reality in the 1993 film *Shadowlands* (Attenborough and Eastman). Having married Joy with the full knowledge that she was terminally ill, Jack suffers mental anguish resulting from three years of living in constant fear of "the sheer exhaustion of spending those last few weeks in constant caring for his dying wife" (Lewis xxvi). Jack mourns their altered relationship in the remembrance of the activities they shared in much happier times of life. As Lewis explains in his 1961 memoir that serves as the basis for this film, "One never meets just cancer or war, or unhappiness. One only meets each hour or moment that comes. All manners of ups and downs. Many bad spots in our best times, many good ones in our worst" (Lewis 12). In *Shadowlands*, Joy and Jack's honeymoon walk in the meadow in Herefordshire is interrupted by the pounding rain. They take shelter under the roof of an open-sided shed where bales of cotton are stored. It is here that Joy reminds Jack that even though her cancer is in remission, the

remission will not hold indefinitely (Attenborough and Eastman). This communication is a reminder of the anticipated future they will imminently face.

Yet, Joy kept on encouraging Jack to be in the moment: “The pain then is part of the happiness now.” The happiness that had been so prevalent in their lives has turned to anticipation of “that last night” (Lewis 13).

Jack’s grief is fundamentally for what was being currently lost and for the loss in the future. Anticipating the moments of passing times together and the awareness of his loved one being taken away, cloud his reasoning, although, one’s absence cannot be fully realized until the person is no longer available (Rando 55). Even in the shadow of the ultimate loss in death, other losses that precipitated mourning have already occurred. The loss comes about in the absence of daily routine activities that are lacking in the relationship.

Self-disenfranchisement is a sociological concept. Being disenfranchised constitutes a loss in itself. It is a loss that causes injurious narcissistic harm to one’s self-regard and the way one experiences, values, secures, and defines oneself. When this form of treatment does not allow the possibility of mourning, the self is turned inward, seeking repair, but instead continues to attack itself with its unworthiness. In other words, the turn of the self against the self occurs (Kauffman, “The Psychology of Disenfranchised Grief” 63–64). An individual may disenfranchise himself or herself or may collaborate in his or her own disenfranchisement. The individual’s views are not societal but arise from within the self. Jeffrey Kauffman interprets his intrapsychic sociological process as that in which individuals own their own disenfranchisement. They internalize sanctions (Kauffman, *The Shame of Death, Grief, and Trauma* 61). For example, the individual may feel

embarrassed over the loss, thus inhibiting the expression of his grief and feel denied a due grief process.

These feelings are not societal—the failure of others to acknowledge and recognize loss, but the self-imposed sources of disenfranchisement (Costa 25). Self-disenfranchisement, which creates a source of shame and inhibition, is not the actual views of others but the imagined views of others. Shame is a social emotion by which an individual may feel isolated in the company of others (Costa 26). Tyree states that shame occurs when one is embarrassed about one's own emotions as demonstrated in Lewis' *A Grief Observed*: "An odd by-product of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to anyone I meet. At work, at the club, in the street . . . . Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers. To some I'm worse than an embarrassment" (95). There cannot be a more vivid picture of isolation or exclusion than the life of a leper in biblical references.

As a consequence of self-disenfranchised grief without societal support, the bereaved may become disillusioned with and alienated from their community and faith. This lack of support fosters a sense of loneliness and abandonment. Helplessness and powerlessness are closely related to feelings of being ashamed, inferior, and inadequate. Kauffman argues that the progression of one's own feelings of shame lead to guilt inhibition that brings on complications in the mourning process; thus, consequences associated with guilt lead to complications in grief.

Even though there have been studies that emphasize the relationship between shame and death, less focus has connected guilt and shame. Schermer explains that guilt is recognized as being preferable to shame because guilt is easier to process cognitively

and verbally than is shame (34). According to Tyree, men have a particular vulnerability to shame. They are often conflicted in their responses to loss—expectations of themselves and societal expectations. Men who have experienced parental loss in childhood often describe a feeling of being abandoned again in the loss of their spouses (Tyree 98). They find themselves again in the context of helpless childhood. "Shame is the likely outcome," says Tyree (98). In *Shadowlands*, Jack related his experience with the death of a parent and the connection to the loss of a spouse as expressed by Kauffman's theory.

It is during his walking of the campus grounds that Jack tells Joy of his reaction to his mother's death: "my mother's death. . . . the end of my world. That was when I first questioned my faith as a child" (Attenborough and Eastman). Men are also susceptible to societal expectations imposed on them. An individual can be ashamed of his or her own emotions. When a sense of helplessness is severely inhibited, a sense of self may become disordered; losing touch with one's feelings, a sense of self-alienation, or a weakened sense of self may result (Kauffman, "Intrapsychic Dimension of Disenfranchised Grief" 27).

Also, previous experiences become a part of present reactions to grief. Doka informs, "when a new loss occurs, old disenfranchisement will affect the new situation and may enforce a repetition of the earlier inhibited grief pattern" (Kauffman, "Intrapsychic Dimension of Disenfranchised Grief" 27).

> How can I assume a harbor? A lee shore, more likely, a black night, a deafening gale, breakers ahead—and any lights shown from land probably being waved by

> wreckers. Such was H's (his wife's) landfall. Such was my mother's. I say their landfall; not their arrivals. (Lewis 33–34)

In the passage above, Lewis describes his mother's death from cancer along with his reaction to his wife's death from cancer. He uses the metaphor of ships on a dark, stormy night heading for shore to meet a crashing end: "their landfall, not their arrival" (34). "Tonight, all the hells of young grief have opened again. . . . Everything repeats" (Lewis 56). His previous experience with death became part of a later reaction to loss, a repetition in grieving loss.

Acceptance of the loss provides a beginning step in the grieving process. The language of grief helps to bring the reality home. Yet, people seemingly feel more comfortable if they do not encounter words or images about their losses. Social recognition is significant to an individual's response to loss. Even though grief exhibits various forms or patterns among religions, rituals, and customs, mourning and the ability to move on, or at least move forward, support the bereaved through their emotional journeys.

Chapter 2

AGE, GENDER, AND CULTURE:

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEATH, GRIEF, AND LOSS

As we begin to examine the effects of loss and grief, careful consideration must be given to the developmental perspective and the role it plays in understanding grief. The knowledge of human development is fundamental in comprehending human behaviors. Often attentively applied to early childhood and old age, developmental perceptions have value across the entire human life span. Therefore, sensitivity to full life experience lends itself to any attempt at acknowledging behaviors in bereavement, loss, grief, and mourning within the context of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, accordingly (Corr, "Developmental Perspectives" 145). For each growth segment of development, one should ask:

1. What are central developmental issues in this portion of the human life span?
2. What are the distinctive features for each level?

In general, it has been well accepted by laymen and professionals alike that each person grieves differently depending upon the circumstances of the death or loss. However, the research reveals in no uncertain terms that not only age but also gender and culture play an integral part in the way death is perceived and variations in the reactions to the loss.

The meanings and concepts of death and loss represent a wide variety of implications and their effects on the physical, psychological, and sociological manifestations of those who have experienced devastating life changes. As researchers and therapists have attempted to prescribe how individuals should cope with their difficulties, recent studies by Doka refute their claims that there is a systematic

progression through the stages of grief but conclude that there is only one way to grieve—your way (McConnell 25).

Childhood

The very young and the pre-school age child (under five years old) do not have the cognitive capacity to understand the abstract concept of death or the concept of gone "forever." Death is viewed as temporary and reversible. This idea is borne out in Erik Erikson's book, *Childhood and Society*. They do not perceive death as separation from life. Even after being told their parent is not coming back, the young child may ask an hour later, "When is Mommy coming home?" or may search for the separated person and become anxious as result of the separation (Erikson 247).

Early childhood and pre-school age children may repeatedly search for the deceased person, with endless questions about the death process. Linda Goldman asserts: "Children's questions are a window to their souls—and a mirror to their inner thoughts and feelings" in her book*: Great Answers to Difficult Questions About Death* (Goldman 11). Their grieving feelings are expressed through play instead of words. On occasion, children might appear unaffected or act as if nothing has happened. This behavior should not be interpreted as the child being oblivious to the loss or accepting the death. In an attempt to avoid the pain of a loss so early in their lives, children may divert their attention away from the person's death to a displaced emotional response by regressing to an earlier stage of development or a display of unexplained anger. This example illustrates a self-disenfranchised behavior: disallowing grief by withholding recognition or disguising the loss. When children have been left out of the entire recognition of loss and the grief process in the death of a parent, they are therefore being denied the

opportunity to grieve in a proper manner. Feeling betrayed and isolated from the truth, the child may retreat into a state of non-verbal or selective mutism detachment from the family. A child may be disallowed any expression of loss and deprived of support during the loss, causing unresolved issues in later life in dealing with death. The self-imposed silence and restrictive behaviors contribute to harmful and conflictive behaviors in dealing with any loss.

In older childhood and pre-adolescence (six- to twelve-year-olds), there are some overlapping behaviors that mimic those of younger children and those of adolescents. Still, this age group exhibits unique qualities specific to their grief. During this stage of development, self-confidence begins to form as well as new cognitive structures in logical thinking (Piaget 208). Typically, the pre-teen has fully gained a firm control of the fundamentals of death: the body has stopped working, the dead don't return to life, and all living things die. Yet, while understanding death tends to generate all sorts of painful feelings, it is quite apparent that there is a keen sense of curiosity about the details of death. In the depths of their curiosity, the pre-teen may on the surface seem cold and detached in their pursuits. Ten- to twelve-year-olds appear to grieve more with their heads and less with their hearts. In spite of a lack of an observable emotion or strange insensitivity, this is an age when children think more and feel less, and still grieve in their own unique ways. No matter what may be considered inappropriate, one must take into consideration the age and stage of developmental capacity for each child (Zucker 43).

To understand death, pre-adolescents attempt to comprehend both biological and the emotional process of death. They are, however, more able to absorb the facts surrounding the death of someone than the feelings surrounding the death, according to

Theresa Huntley (17). There are concerns about practical issues after death, such as how the household will survive without the deceased or how they themselves will be taken care of: “Who will take care of me now? Who will bring home the money to buy food and clothes?” (Doka, *Children Mourning* 21). The youngster also might have questions that re-examine religious and cultural beliefs about death.

Loss can be experienced before the actual death occurs in the loss of a functioning relationship with a person in the anticipatory stage of a terminal illness. For instance, in the film *Shadowlands,* an early teen boy named Doug stands in the frame of a six-paned window with his nose pressed firmly on the middle pane and each palm planted on alternate panes of glass. Below, in silence, he watches as a medic wagon stops in the curve of the courtyard. Opening the rear door, the attendants pull out the stretcher carrying his terminally ill mother, covered with a velvet burgundy blanket, exposing only her face (Attenborough and Eastman). At the window, Doug’s legs feel rubbery numbness. He watches as Joy, his mother, was returning to the comfort of home in her final days. Doug had already experienced the loss of a functioning parent in his daily life due to her debilitating illness. Now he would have to grapple with the notion of a short visit home before her impending death. Living in a new place, he does not have the support of his peers so he sought comfort in his relationship with Jack, his step-father, who had lost his mother at about the same age as he (Lewis xx). Although he has the resilience of youth upon which to rely when his mother died, he had yet to learn that some human relationships end in pain.

In concert with children in the middle years, pre-adolescents may perceive themselves as being a contributor to the cause of someone’s death. Feelings of guilt and

regret can lead to thoughts and actions that they are to blame. An example would be, “it was my fault because I did not share my game when a friend dies.” They may develop concerns of safety for himself or other family members: “The world is no longer safe.” Developmentally, they are on a different bereavement path with an uncertain emotional journey.

Adolescence

During the adolescent developmental period (13–18+), substantial neurological, social, and biological changes foster unique opportunities, risks, and vulnerabilities as revealed in an article by Benjamin Oosterhoff and Julie Kaplow (373). During this stage, adolescents have a cognitive awareness of themselves in the world but the spiritual comprehension of self is not readily apparent. They see life as “being unfair” while “searching for the meanings of life and death” (Piaget 208). Erikson identifies this period of growth as a time when teens begin to visualize themselves as unique in their roles in the family, yet remain unsure about their self-identity—who they want to be in the world. They vacillate between the need to be independent of their families and at the same time fearing separation from the family unit. Although teens are cognitively able to process the abstract concepts of life and death, on the other hand they have trouble managing strong emotions after the deaths of family members, friends, or teachers while in the unsettling of an emerging independence. The progression through growth phases brings about changes in developmental concepts as the teen matures.

Zucker explains how the appreciation for the depths of their losses changes as significant milestones are reached (46). For instance, there are many “small deaths” in a teen’s life. Small deaths occur when entering and leaving adolescence, ending a

relationship, moving to a different neighborhood or school, or becoming a member of a blended family. During adolescence, the death of their early childhood years is significant in the context of several other developmental experiences: family versus world placement, as Erikson (307) describes in *Childhood and Society*. Earl A. Grollman also defines *small deaths* as any change or adaptation to a new pattern (*Bereaved Children and Teens* 227). Grief is a natural response to loss, except it does not feel natural for the teen. Teens have difficulty in control of emotions, thoughts, and the possibilities of becoming over-whelmed with their unique experiences. Their emotions can range from the deepest sadness to explosive happiness. After a family death, a teen, on the verge of having fun again, may question his/her behavior: "My loved one is dead and here I am laughing. What kind of person am I?" Grollman's book *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers* offers ways of coping for youths by highlighting the benefits of laughter: "Human tragedy may be so overwhelming that you must reduce it before you can put it into words (106). He goes on to explain: "When someone close to them dies, their grief is a process of bodily sensations; thoughts, emotions, and behaviors surface in response to the death. The circumstances of the death, the past relationship with the deceased and the future realizations of living on without the person, all contribute to the behavioral responses in the teen" (Grollman, *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers* 27–28).

Some behaviors are constructive and encourage facing grief head-on. Positive examples may include connecting with trusted friends, creating art, and of course freely expressing emotions. Grollman adds writing to the list as a means for teens to cope with their grief. He coined the phrase *paper psychiatrists* in writing down one's thoughts to give a release to feelings. Writing provides a safe place to pour out sadness, regrets,

loneliness, and fears (*Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers* 108). Other responses are of a destructive nature and cause long-term consequences in an attempt to escape pain. These responses include as alcohol abuse, reckless social behaviors, social withdrawal, excessive sleeping, and high-risk behaviors—methods that temporarily numb the pain as listed in Doka's rules for grieving. The process of grief is influenced by a combination of factors: emotional and developmental levels of the teen, previous experience with death, nature of relationship with the deceased, circumstances of the death, and prominence of social support system (Corr, "Developmental Perspectives" 149–50).

Conversely, teens tend to be more feeling-focused grievers than those who are in the seven–twelve age group. In Zucker's book *The Journey Through Grief and Loss*, the late teens, in their pursuits to control how death happens or how to prevent death from happening, become confused with the notion of universality as if to say, "That can't happen to us" (44). Meanwhile, when death does enter their social sphere, they grapple with survivor guilt, heightened anxiety, and a plethora of difficult emotions for which they have no course of action. That is not to say that all teens react with the same degree of intensity to their losses. Similar to pre-teens, they might appear emotionless and tend to the tasks at hand or prioritize their personal needs such as attending a job interview, completing college applications, or even continuing to report to work. In their egocentrism, they may be hesitant to express their grief for fear of becoming overcome with their feelings or for fear of being judged for the lack of attentiveness.

Many adolescents regard themselves as especially unique and act as if they do not understand the rules that govern others also govern themselves (Corr and Balk 202). Janet Bode interviewed teens who had experienced death in her book *Death Is Hard to Live*

With. One boy exclaims: "'I can't make sense of all this. It's scary. I don't like to think about death. (But I think about all my relatives). I had dreams where my mother's in the house, cooking and everything. I woke up and nobody's there'" (Bode 32). In this teen's thoughts, we can observe numerous overlapping conceptual developmental levels from childhood fears to the control of when death happens.

Seeking ways to accommodate deeply personal connectiveness, Corr and Balk refer to the concept of egocentrism as the "personal fable." The related fable is concerned with the adolescent's uniqueness that leads them to believe that their grief is so personal and so unique that no one could possibly understand what they are experiencing. "How can you know how I feel? You don't live inside of me. You have no idea" (Grollman, *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers* 102).

Occurring more so among adolescents than in any other group, Oosterhoff and Kaplow attribute sudden losses as the leading causes of death for adolescents in the forms of accidents, homicides, and suicides. Each form of death is the result of human action which subsequently increases the likelihood that many youths will experience the sudden or unexpected death of a peer or close friend. In Celeste M. Johnson's article "When African-American Teen Girls' Friends Are Murdered," she explores violent deaths, human-induced and unanticipated deaths, and the emotional reactions among African-American teens. Her study reveals that some teens engage in private strategies as they grieve: "Being by myself, --like everybody needs time to themselves. When I'm by myself now and in the past, I just sit and write my poetry" (367). Some choose public rituals: "All of us, we wore shirts with, like, his face on it . . . our shirts made with his picture" (367). Some teens found the social context of support from family and friends:

"When they come in my room and just maybe rubbed my hand or rubbed my back. . . . That was the most comforting" (367). Another teen described a social and creative means of support: "Everybody made one [a picture] and put it up in the grand hallway in our school. In art class, each person drew a picture of how we remembered her" (367). When friends die from violence during the teen years, the adolescent's cognitive maturation might be challenged as they are developing an egotistical and invincible self-perception. The study resulted in the conclusion that girls were able to find meaning in their losses, which influenced their resilience.

For the aforementioned reasons, adolescents are more likely than not to experience bereavement due to sudden deaths. But one of the most significant characteristics of the adolescent is the ability to rebound from tragedies. Both Doka and D. E. Balk agree that teens are challenged in navigating death among their peers while fraught with feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and other tumultuous disturbances in bereavement. However, the two researchers point out the resiliency of teens in the aftermath of a significant loss. Their resiliency is the result of a culmination from a combination of factors that may include, but are not limited to, personalities, family rituals, spiritual practices, ethnic customs, cultural rules, and even regional norms (Zucker 90). Encounters with loss and death are a part of living in our society and in every society. The grief process is a unique discovery of one's personal journey. In order for adolescents to genuinely make inroads into handling their grief, they must encounter a repertoire of support systems within their environments through positive interactions in their caring relationships.

Adulthood

The manner in which adults deal with the process of grief and loss are representative behaviors across the life span. However, there are some specific implications relative to age and previous experiences with death and loss. Charles A. Corr divided adulthood into three categories in their studies of grief and mourning from an adult perspective. Those three groupings were designated as early adult (twenty–twenty-nine), middle adult (thirty–forty-two), and later adult (forty-three–forty-nine) years of ages ("Developmental Perspectives"). The age grouping may vary among other social scientists for the purposes of their own research and methodologies. While adolescents may be concerned with their own mortality as they attempt to handle the deaths of friends and families, early adults are inclined to ignore issues of mortality. Their main focus is the preoccupation with the external world—establishing relationships, family planning, or mapping out a career path to financial independence. Doka and Corr, along with some other contemporary theorists, are in agreement that the full awareness of mortality only begins to come into fruition during the period of middle adulthood (Corr, "Developmental Perspectives" 152).

Even though early adults are attentive to the practicalities of planning life's intricacies, situations may arise that totally derail those projections. Willa S. Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) describes one such example of two young people who encounter divergent paths because both life and death got in their way. Each person was involved with mapping out careers and with maintaining and establishing old and new relationships in the external world. Questions of mortality were not on their horizon yet.

Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda, one an orphan, one not, both have the potential to embark on an adult journey anchored in friendship. Circumstances of differences in social status, economic level, and familial setting separate them, yet they share a bond that would endure several transformations. As an older Jim explains, "Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress," and Fuchs elaborates: "'He done everything natural. You know he was always sort of fixy, and fixy he was to the last'" (Cather 45). This untimely death of Antonia's father leaves her torn between her optimism for the future and the immediacy of family obligations. Her relationship with Jim Burden languishes in the face of long absences and unforeseen life challenges. When Jim asks her about continuing her learning at school, "Antonia stood up, lifting and dropping her shoulders . . . 'I ain't got time to learn. I can work like a man now. My father, he went much to school. He know a great deal. . . . You won't forget my father, Jim?'" (56). Jim Burden goes on to pursue a career as a lawyer while Antonia is left to cope with family and career challenges. Their early adult lives encounter numerous losses in a life lived but not a life planned. "I told Antonia that I would come back, but life got in the way" (Cather137). This is one example of transformation caused by loss and death in early adulthood.

Some losses are non-death-related, but there are deaths that are directly related to disease and accidental causes. The leading causes of death in early adulthood are HIV-related and accidents, followed by cancer, heart ailments, and suicide. In light of the fact that mortality becomes an issue as adults assume responsibilities for a spouse/partner, and/or children, thoughts of spiritual traditions, family values and societal customs consume most of their attention. In general, adults are usually impacted most powerfully

by the death of a child, a spouse/partner, or a parent – in that progression. The meaning of each loss is significant to the nature and timing of the death. Corr explains this sentiment: "The death of a parent is the death of my past; the death of my spouse/partner is the death of my present; the death of my child is the death of my future" (Corr, "Developmental Perspectives" 153). This dynamic perspective of stages in development has far-reaching concerns across the life span. Therefore, with experiences of human-induced deaths and deaths caused by degenerative diseases, adults are challenged to face a more personalized sense of mortality as they encounter deaths of varying relationships and attachments.

In middle adulthood, there is a more focused sense of mortality; a keener awareness of finitude emerges during this segment of adult life. Erikson characterizes that part of life as a time when more emphasis is placed on one's time as being limited and the creation of a desire to establish a legacy to pass to the next generation; this is a stage of generativity. He theorizes that generativity becomes a central issue because it involves establishing and guiding those born in the next generation (Erikson 267). Daniel L. Levinson describes a similar phenomenon:

> Knowing that his own death is not far off, he is eager to affirm life for himself/herself and for generations to come. He wants to be more creative. The creative impulse is not merely to "make" something. It is to bring something into being. To give birth; to generate life. (222)

Despite a developing awareness of death, the impression is not to imply that there is a preoccupation with morbidity. The mid-life adult is in the prime of life; death is likely to be decades away. But the realization that death will come may stimulate the urge to live the remaining years well. The idea of mortality may be the most significant psychological

event in middle adulthood. Doka goes on to highlight three major implications for adults dealing with mortality: it changes the nature of time; it can cause anxiety; and it may bring on signs of avoidance or denial; further, an awareness of mortality leads to a quest for the meaning of life (Doka, "Completing the Picture" 141).

The middle-aged adult is concerned with practical ideas of death and the inevitability of aging and dying. According to Levinson, there is an increase in mortality rates in deaths of peers from causes other than suicide. Facing the aging of one's parents creates a new relationship with them and prompts thoughts of one's own aging and death (Levinson 213). Miriam S. Moss and Sydney D. Moss conceptualize the notions of the aging progression:

> The loss of a parent represents the removal of a buffer against death. As long as the parent was alive, the child feels protected, since the parent by the rational order of things was expected to die first. Without this buffer, there is a strong reminder that the child is now the older generation and cannot easily deny his/her own mortality. (Moss and Moss, "Death of the Very Old" 73).

As perspectives change, so does the middle adult's concept of their place in life and death.

It is in the latter years of adulthood that one's sense of timing shifts from looking forward and planning to looking backward at the past. At this period of time, adults reconsider the value of their lives and how much is left of life to experience. How one reacts to personal death has been impacted by how that person has lived. William Faulkner writes about the attitude of one of his character toward her death. Addie Bundren's death in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) gives us a clear indication of how she had

lived. Addie Bundren, in the face of her anticipatory death, in failing health, recounts enduring a loveless marriage, and a metaphorically dead relationship with her spouse and children. From her youth, her father had always taught her that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (Faulkner 169). Having lived such a bitter, uncertain, and meaningless existence, death would not have robbed Addie of the joy of living; she welcomed the release from her suffering. She and her family had suffered numerous incidents of "little deaths" as are also experienced in early adults and the elderly.

Those "little deaths" result in lost interactions of loved ones, family functions, and sibling relationships that affect everyone in their individual ways (Marshall, *Last Chapters* 133). Addie's attitude had been reflected in the personalities and actions of each child, resulting in "little deaths" in their relationships. Unable to love her children openly, her troubled view of life became infectious in them: "My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all" (Faulkner 175). Not only emotionally detached, Addie had not had a functional relationship as a contributing member in the lives of any of her family members.

Addie had lingered in a state of not only questioning her unstable identity, but uncertain of her human existence. She perceived herself as being alone in the world and unloved by everyone. Her marital status was symbolically dead early on—fraught with thoughts of her perception of trickery, empty words with no action furthered her nihilistic views of humanity and God. By surrendering her life to death, Addie felt she had paid an emotional debt and was free to die, "Then I could get ready to die" (176). It was only after her death that a sense of obligation was fulfilled, with much dysfunction. The

promise was kept to deliver her body to a chosen resting place; “I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right” (173). Addie’s life taught us how to survive, but her death taught us how to live. A life full of value and a life lived well may determine one’s outlook at the time of life’s end. A valued existence can bring joy to a life at its end.

Older Adulthood

As we consider another stage of life, old age, Corr explains the term “maturity” or what Erikson labeled “old age” as establishing a sense of wholeness and completion, how various pieces of life fit together, and how the whole becomes meaningful (Corr, “Developmental Perspectives” 155). During this regrouping of ideas, the elderly recapture the past within a personalized scope of narrative authority; it was their story to tell. Some distinctive features of grief and mourning in the elderly rest with life expectancy, healthier lifestyles, better healthcare, and overall improved wellness have resulted in greater diversity among contemporary older persons. Corr’s delineations in age: young old (65–74), old old (75–84), and very old (85+) differ from the stages designed by Doka in that they specify a much later period of life.

According to Corr, the elderly account for approximately three quarters of all deaths in our society; in contrast, they make up only 13% of the population. The leading causes of deaths among the elderly are diseases of the heart, cancer, cerebrovascular diseases (strokes), chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, pneumonia, and influenza.

The research and literature consistently agree that the elderly are significantly less fearful of death than younger adults (Tomer 281). That attitude toward death may be viewed in the context of a variety of rationales. The elderly frequently have conversations

on the topic of death through their experiences of the deaths of others, and may be conditioned to accept death as a part of life. Even though the aged often equate their lives as of less value than the lives of younger persons, they are able to appreciate the idea that they have themselves lived long, full lives. This age group perceives death as a constant companion, but they are more likely to suffer bereavement overload due to their familiarity with deaths in relation to numbers, variety, and rapidity. In such cases, there may not be time or resources to allow for grief and mourning of one significant loss before another one occurs, thus causing complicated grief. The nature and circumstances of those losses for older grievers arise from the death of a spouse, life partner, friend, or other significant peer. They also may have survivor guilt in the death of an adult child, an out-of-sequence death, wishing they had died instead of the child. This guilt also extends to grandchildren and great- grandchildren (Corr, "Developmental Perspectives" 158).

Death was seen to be less threatening than debility, isolation, or dependence. These characteristics give rise to a time in the elder's life when they seem to have recognized a diminished quality, as the elder is unable to perform most basic functions of daily living. The elderly are not totally dissimilar to the middle and later age adults except for the distinct nature of "little deaths" suffered by the older grievers. "Little deaths," identified by Corr ("Developmental Perspectives" 157) and others, are associated with illness, disability, and loss. Those ailments are manifested physically: pain and loss of muscle control; psychological: confusion and social isolation; spiritual: meaning of life; social: loss of mobility or institutionalization, or the goodness of environment in which such losses occur (Fortner et al. 101–102). All of the attributes of illness correspond to a higher degree of death anxiety in older persons. Adrian Tomer's

work found no significance of gender differences as a predictor of death anxiety among the elderly.

The elderly are able to bring past experiences to consciousness, assess or reinterpret them, and seek to integrate them in a somewhat coherent story to make them meaningful. In this stage (65+), old conflicts are resolved and given new meaning. This resolution can be achieved as accounting to oneself for one's past life and as a preparation for death. Elderly persons had lived a worthwhile life or as Victor Marshall related, "one's life had been 'a good story' as opposed to an unsuccessful wasted life" (Marshall, *Last Chapter* 134). The elderly person had lived a satisfying life, a life consistent with his/her values and wishes of an earlier lifestyle. Developmental perspectives are among the many considerations in the efforts to understand grief and loss or to help in coping with loss. Assumptions cannot be made to mistakenly believe that an individual can proceed through life unchanged and unaltered along the journey of life's adjustments. Humans are mostly alike at birth but become increasingly diverse on particular paths of development, impacted by unpredictable life experiences.

Special Needs

In general terms, developmentally disabled persons are categorized as those children (birth to five years old) who have shown delays in their growth or specific congenital or acquired conditions. Also included in that category are those children who are five years old and older with severe, chronic disabilities or impairments. Both groups perform below their chronological age in academic and social behaviors, as confirmed by Claire Lavin ("Disenfranchised Grief and the Developmentally Disabled" 229). The sub-groups of the developmentally disabled share as many variations among themselves as

any other group of persons, although they may be similar physically, socially, and emotionally in areas of need. Some special needs individuals have impairments in cognitive abilities. Their cognitive differences must be given considerable attention in everyday life functioning. However, limited comprehension does not diminish the feelings of grief and distress in the losses of loved ones. Lavin points out "a person with cognitive limitations may be perceived as unable to understand death, and therefore not in need of any assistance when someone dies" ("Disenfranchised Grief and the Developmentally Disabled" 229). For example, "Jenny, as a young child, had not been informed of her mother's death. Her family had reasoned that since she was mentally challenged, she would not understand what had occurred and they spared her the burden during a difficult time in her life" ("Disenfranchised Grief and the Developmentally Disabled" 229) Young children and those who are disabled are considered either to be incapable of grief or to not have a need to grieve. Although children with special needs may express or non-express their grief and feelings differently, the grief is still just as impactful. Special needs persons already have some familiarity of loss, with loss of abilities, loss of respect at times, and loss of self-esteem at times; however, they are ignored as the forgotten griever. Their disabilities overshadow the other aspects of their identity (Lavin "Disenfranchised Grief and the Developmentally Disabled" 312).

They are viewed as needing of over-protection, being emotionally fragile, and being unable to cope. Parents and well-meaning caregivers, having made misguided attempts to protect children, might be unprepared in word choice or lack the knowledge to help the child to find healthy ways to express their feelings. This rationale to spare them of the pain of death and loss is even more applicable to those who are disabled or

developmentally delayed. Disability is not justification for exclusion. The very act of exclusion may be a painful reminder of their experiences with unacceptability. Avoidance of the truth, realization of personal loss, and reluctance to confront the issue of death, can result in, for child and adult alike, a defense of "magical thinking." Magical thinking is used to attempt to negotiate with fate (Granot 41). The magic is revealed in thinking, "If I don't talk about it, it did not happen" or "If I take the blame, I can bring my friend back." Dealing with the childhood grief of those with special needs requires honesty, awareness, availability, and appropriate inclusiveness.

Due to the limited cognitive and verbal skills of persons with special needs, they communicate by their behaviors rather than by words. Such behaviors may be mistaken as unfeeling or inappropriate when actually they are expressions of their grief. The choice of vocabulary to explain death is pertinent to the individual's literal level of comprehension. The use of euphemistic words such as "passed away," "in heaven," and "asleep" instead of precise wording to describe death may be confusing. Children already have trouble with dubious words; they view death as reversible and temporary, rather than with the adult sense of finality. If the deceased is said to be away in heaven, the child, in innocence, may ask to go to visit in his or her literal level of comprehension. They see the world through an egocentric lens similar to that of a much younger child (Grollman, *Bereaved Children and Teens* 43).

Grollman's work in the deaths of siblings points out misconceptions about deaths among family members and the guilt associated with survivors. Persons with developmental challenges may feel that their angry words or thoughts contributed to the deaths. Feelings of guilt often complicate the grieving process to a greater extent for the

disabled. Here another instance of magical thinking arises, “If I had been a better sister, she would not have died” or “If I had shared my ice cream, my friend would still be here.” Other children feel guilty just for being alive, for having wished their sibling dead.

Sometimes that guilt may be reflected toward another person in the form of anger. Surviving children may be confronted with a variety of frightening thoughts following the death of a sibling. During the life of children, including children with special needs, they repeatedly adjust and adapt to the effects of loss in their lives. Very young children are also capable of having a short sadness span. They may find it intolerable to hold uncomfortable strong emotions for long periods of time. For example, after the death of a parent, a child may say, “If my dad does not come home soon, I’m going out to play.” Because of the ease of emotional transition, adults may think that the child has already forgotten, does not care, or doesn’t understand the death. Children do not forget, nor do they stop hurting from the pain any more easily than adults, but they are able to resume their lives faster and do not allow those emotions to break up their routines.

All children have likenesses; they all cry, they all laugh, and they all grieve or seek acceptance, but children with special needs differ in intensity. Their reactions to loss are shaped by many factors including emotional stability, previous experiences with loss, and intellectual capabilities. All children are capable of grief, but grief is expressed differently. It has been debated whether persons with special needs even have the ability to engage in a mourning process akin to that of other individuals. C. K. Buirski and P. Buirski support the argument that children are capable of mourning provided that their emotional surrounding facilitates the mourning process (Crenshaw 299).

The roles of schools and other learning settings play an important part for the school-aged child with special needs. The environment lends itself to shared information and shared support. Helpful strategies for learning encompass preparation, direct instruction, modeling, and emotional support (Lavin, "Disenfranchised Grief and the Developmentally Disabled" 237). Many teachable moments are available through personal behavioral activities: looking at photographs of the deceased and sharing memories, making and sending cards, listening to the deceased's favorite tunes, or making a box of memories of favorite items. These strategies support and reassure the child that their expressions of grief are valid.

Autism

Grief and loss are part of life for everyone but even more so with children and adults on the autism spectrum or ASD. Lavin has established diagnostic criteria for the identification of early detection of autism spectrum development. Some behaviors are apparent before the age of three: failure to form social relationships, delayed language development, and stereotyped repetitive patterns of behaviors (Lavin, "Disenfranchised Grief and Individuals with Developmental Disabilities" 310). An individual with autistic behaviors reacts to death and loss in similar ways as any other developmentally challenged person, with the exception of a few distinct markers. Persons on the autism spectrum have limited verbal expressions of grief, confusion in organizing memory, and difficulty processing and labeling emotions. Their processing of death may be delayed in reactions, causing possible outbursts of anger and hurting themselves or others. Age, past experiences, and the level of communication are factors to consider in their response to grief. Even though these children experience loss similar to their peers, the difference is

in the intensity of reactions (Gray 7). As literal thinkers, persons on the autism spectrum deal with their world in concrete terms and concrete understanding. Any change in routine has the potential for a tantrum. Another sharp contrast in persons on the autism spectrum and their peers may be displayed in the loss of a toy or a building block. A peer may shed a tear whereas the ASD child may find him or herself in the grips of despair.

Where an unplanned day out of school is a joyful welcome for some classmates, the change for the ASD child could trigger a retreat into a world of solitary sorrow. Therefore, in an attempt to best support an autism spectrum person, careful consideration must be given to every aspect of the individual's level of comprehension, and especially comprehension of literal facts since death is an abstract concept. The child's reactions to grief may range from a lack of expression, to withdrawal, to loss of interest in activities, as explained by Mohammed Ghaziuddin, Norman Alessi, and John F. Greden (498). All the more, caregivers should demonstrate an acceptance of the person's behavior at his or her level of development, allow time for thoughts and feelings, recognize feelings as genuine, and allow for unending questioning. For instance, the ASD student may not ask for clarification of a misunderstood idea in order not to appear less knowledgeable. To circumvent this mistake, a caregiver should ask the students to explain what they heard in their own words. In general, the recognition of experiences with death is still difficult to face for anyone. That adjustment is even more of a concern for those developmental challenges. Everyone, including the most challenged, must traverse their own paths when their painful time comes. One's most cherished gift of support provides for an easier transitional period of adjustment in acceptance of loss and experience of pain.

Gender

The responses of grief and loss are predicated upon multifaceted aspects and numerous dimensions of experience. Theoretically, grief encompasses areas of the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual concepts. In terms of gender, Terry L. Martin and Doka describe men as having a grieving pattern that is referred to as instrumental. They value maintaining control and operate in a cognitive or intellectual domain. Men seek distractions in work, recreation, or another activity. Infrequently, some engage in substance abuse. in contrast, women are generally intuitive, primarily emotional in pain, more expressive of grief, and more eager to elicit support. Both gender patterns differ in experience, expression, adaptation, and socialization. Men tend to channel their energy into activity and discuss their problems rather than their feelings. Grief may be influenced by gender but not determined by it (Martin and Doka, *Men Don't Cry* 99).

Grief, an individual's response to loss, is in a constant, not static, transitional state of development in the context of socialization. It would be socially biased to make the assumption that all grief must be experienced and expressed emotionally. Grieving is not always a feeling-focused process. Some people prefer to be actively engaged in grief-related activities such as building a keepsake, designing a quilt of expression, or planning a memorial gathering. Activity-engaged grief expressions are just as valid as the emotionally laden ones. William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* presents the Bundren family males as activity-driven members who grieve in their individual and collective ways. They make a concerted effort to complete the wishes of their deceased mother from the onset of her illness, to building her coffin, to the rescue of the body from fire and water, to the final resting place for burial in Jefferson.

Acting cognitively in grief, each person engages in a grief related pattern of their own purpose and expression. However, this is not to say that the roles of each gender cannot not share any commonality. Men can also be feeling focused and women can as well complete action-oriented tasks. Our society has different social expectations for men and women. In our society, the male is seen as a support person, given little support but expected to support others. The world does not see the male as the bereaved person he may be. Our culture discourages men from open emotions; at the same time, they are judged for not emoting. Women are expected to be more feeling oriented.

As a result of more complicated reactions, men are vulnerable to depression and chronic mourning. Catherine Sanders views female grievers to be socialized to be nurturing and emphatic, prone to guilty feelings and difficulty in expressing anger (Sanders 78). Grief is influenced by who we are, how we are made (identity), and what we have experienced and how we have been raised (socialization). Sympathy is guided not only by circumstances but other elements of one's biography, such as gender. Yet, gender is but one factor that influences grief patterns. Other variables include social class, cultural differences, and meanings assigned to emotional attachments. Gender roles both frame the experience of grief and play a significant part in the shaping of emotions. However, changes may occur from one individual or generation to another. Children learn gender roles first from and foremost from their parents. Social norms define *self-identification* in very young children as "boys" and "girls." In the pre-school years, a child usually acquires socially defined behaviors that influence attitudes associated with being male or female. Young children, however, mimic the behaviors of the parents. A son may react to grief in a stoic manner not unlike his father, according to Martin and

Doka: “He’s acting so adult, like a grown-up” (*Men Don’t Cry*, 109) Such remarks discourage the importance of emotional development leading to early adulthood.

Gender differences before adolescence have not been widely researched, especially with respect to grief. In the literature, gender was discussed only in the context of behavior (Sanders 123). Adolescence is a time of upheaval in emotional development and sexual identity, when individuals feel able to deal with anything and feel immune to harm. In relation to grief, very strong messages are conveyed as to what is appropriate in respective gender roles. Different societies and cultural groups have gender codes of behavior. Adolescent males experience more prohibitions against emotional experiences than females. For instance, a female student may be impatient with a male peer who has experienced a breakup in a close relationship. Comments such as, “get yourself together” or “get over her” deny the needed peer support for the male in his loss. David A. Crenshaw expresses a need for further research in the continued examination in bereavement research exploring the challenges of adolescence and grief and the nature of gender influences in their social worlds. Having a sense of omnipotence and feelings of invulnerability, the death of a peer or breakup of an intense friendship undermines their sense of control, confidence, and security in the world they are just beginning to explore. Any loss can damage self-image and self-confidence in adolescents during an especially sensitive period of growth. In a point of order, because depression, misery and unhappiness are common in adolescent development, it is often difficult to determine which reactions are caused by grief and which are simply a part of normal adolescent behavior.

Differences exist in expressions of grief shown by each gender during bereavement across the life span. Feelings and emotions tend to become more clearly differentiated between the sexes, partly due to social conditioning and learned behaviors. These differences gradually shift as one moves from childhood to older adulthood. Life begins being attached to one, then two, growing into an array of people, animals, and things. Connected webs of relationships are created and grow into inclusive circles. Yet, each connection must eventually be broken, separations suffered. Grief at any level is still painful. Despite gender, one suffers nevertheless in ways that are traditionally and culturally gender-biased (Sanders 132). Cultivated layering of experiences where loss was the central focus teaches each person the importance of valuing moments, relationships, and family.

Gender influenc patterns of grief, but gender is not deterministic in patterns, at least in Western cultures, as we are reminded by Martin and Doka. Other factors are temperamental, cultural, historic, generational, perhaps even biological. Additionally, socialization and developmental experiences may affect an individual's grieving pattern (Martin and Doka, *Men Don't Cry* 160).

Culture/Religiosity

Understanding culture requires the knowledge of how individuals define their heritage. A few of the factors that contribute to cultural identity include are geographic location, rural or urban settings, and the influence of family traditions. Cable used a broad definition of *culture* as "a way of life" (61). A way of life emerges from a shared belief system or common ethnicity, class, gender, or a common set of experiences. A group of people share a way of life and be profoundly affected by that tradition in the

way they grieve. Although each culture has its own traditions, rituals, and ways of expressing grief, culture is a critical shaping agent in determining grief patterns. Among those experiences of sorrow in different ethnic groups, there are more commonalities than differences. However, those variations provide a tapestry of enrichment from which other groups adopt and practice those shared customs. In terms of grief and mourning among Native, Asian, African, Haitian, Hispanic Americans and some European groups, there are some commonly shared practices: the wearing of dark clothing, the gatherings of family and friends, the displaying of symbolic items, and the role of leadership of the clergy in the funeral and the burial process. Religious or spiritual practices are similarly as variant as other cultural influences. Among the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Islamic and Jewish faiths, all practice some observance of a wake or mourning recognition before, during or after the death of a loved one. In all cultures and religious practices, there are variations among the roles of the survivors' view of death and the meanings of life.

Early in the year of 2020, a virus known to scientists as COVID-19, or more commonly called coronavirus, caused the infections of more than five million persons globally, resulting in more than 800,000 deaths in the United States alone. At one point, The United States accounted for the highest number of deaths among the nations. This pandemic caused a grip of collective grief around the globe. Our society scrambled for a new way to mourn the deceased in the overwhelmed healthcare system and the over-taxed end-of-life service providers. Instead of traditional funeral services, graveside-only ceremonies were held without options. Digital funerals provided a forum for relatives, which were in direct contrast to the gathering of persons to grieve together in support and

promote the healing process. Cremations were levied against those who least desired them in light of the fear of further spreading viral infections. The high regard for the protection and treatment of the deceased was left to the end-of-life caregivers as the families and friends were shut out and quarantined, lacking in knowledge, prohibited in grief. The families lingered in limbo with loss as a constant companion and hope a stranger. Yet, families and friends managed to find a new way to grieve as they traversed an unfamiliar road to some degree of a new normalcy in search of a place to retreat to grieve and mourn.

Our society experienced the need to re-evaluate the significance of death rituals and meaningful behaviors that accommodate healing for all those surviving their losses. American culture cannot be viewed through a lens projected to include only specific groups of people. America is a blended society of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups. As survivors begin a path to healing, they must first accept the reality of loss, next work through the pain of grief, attempt living in an environment in which the deceased is missing, and then move forward emotionally with life. The goal is to achieve resilience in hope of a healthy recovery. Just as a color wash fades with time, so does grief. People don’t forget; they adjust.

Chapter 3

RELATIONSHIP LOSS: WHO AND HOW WE GRIEVE

Loss of Child/Adult Child

Some of the most difficult challenges any one can face are finding means of coping with losses related to the death of a child, a spouse/partner, a sibling, or a parent. The level of grief engendered by those losses is particularly intense with complex reactions. Even though the loss of a loved one may be understood as a natural part of life, an individual may yet be overcome by the initial shock and sadness. Survivors have the task of initially accepting the reality of the loss instead of avoidance of the experience in disbelief, attempting to work through the pain to encourage healthy healing, and then making adjustments to the environment in which the deceased is missing.

When dealing with loss, in which emotions are felt, how they are expressed and how they are understood are matters related to cultural influences. In such diverse customs as "American," patterns of attachment, defining the meaning of different losses, whom one mourns, as well as the intensity of that loss, cultural implications are the common denominators. The feeling rules established by Doka determine not only what losses are grieved but how an individual grieves. Variant factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, and class also impact resiliency and healing for the aggrieved.

As loss affects everyone differently, variations in coping strategies are prevalent in aiding the individual to diminish and to overcome feelings of despair. In light of the fact that humans are naturally resilient, the research tells us that adjusting to loss while employing coping alternatives can be the catalyst for a renewed sense of meaning that offers purpose and direction to life. Losing a child is generally considered to be one of

the most severe, enduring, and debilitating forms of bereavement. Social scientists, writers, artists, and mental health professionals have examined alternative strategies to understand how the unimaginable loss of a child influences a bereaved parent's life beyond the immense grief experience. Even poets, in language and imagery that goes straight to the heart, have not been able to mute the pain of such a life-shattering loss. Whether that loss has been the result of health complications, an accident, suicide, or miscarriage, the death is no less traumatic, heart wrenching, or crushing to the survivors left behind. A child's death automatically creates an unnatural sequence in the life span. Due to the role identity conflict, questions of parental identification come into play. All assumptions about safety and justice in the world, the meaning of life, and interpersonal relationships are called into question by this shattered ceiling of security in the environment. In attempting to adjust to a new normalcy after a loss, parental challenges are intertwined, complex, and adaptive in nature. The role identity conflict leads to questions if parental identification is still applicable: "Do I continue to be recognized as a parent, especially without other children? Am I no longer a father? Is the lost child included in the count of children?" (Ungureanu and Sandberg 308).

Even though bereaved parents can never forget their children, there exist the paradox of not forgetting, and a continued relationship with the child and wanting to move on. In this continued relationship with the child, the parents may enter a period of emotional turmoil, emotional instability, and emotional sensitivity. The cumulative nature of the challenges that arise from a parent's life changes following the death of their children are complex and highly individualized.

Jane Nichols is one of a small number of social scientists that addresses the unique issues of unborn or newborn deaths and the disenfranchisement of parents. These are the parents who lack emotional and cultural support that is often available to other parents. Nichols relates an instance in which the clergy may be unwilling to baptize a premature death or even discourage any public gatherings in remembrance. As the parents mourn, the world around them seems to disregard their loss, absent of responsibility (Nichols 117). That being said, some counselors and therapists are among the ranks of those who do not recognize the potential for grief or the need for emotional support. As a result, the bereaved are left with the presumption that "nothing really happened"; therefore, the parents are deprived of the legitimized recognition of loss and left to work through their own paths of mourning. The fact remains that when an unborn or newborn dies, parents still grieve. To that end, they deserve the empathy, support, encouragement, and consideration of all those around them, lest they be left to fend for themselves in a state of indifference.

When a child dies, society grieves. Even those unfamiliar with the family ache when they hear of the loss of a young child who has been the source of admiration and laughter. Perennially, the death of a child is a tragic jolt. But the younger the baby, the less a community speaks of the child. People defer to speaking about the parents. Shelley Costa in her poem, "Side by Side," relates her own struggles against such alienation. Her son had died, before birth, of an internal accident. She had had the privilege of feeling his movements and honoring his existence. Neither she nor anyone else had the privilege of seeing or holding him alive. Having not been able to enjoy the presence of the infant, the community erased the loss of life in order to focus on the bereaved and to wish them the

best in moving on. In Costa's explanation of her mixed feelings, she enlightens us: "The confusing display of fidelity on one hand and the abandonment on the other caught me off balance" (Costa 25). Costa acknowledges her conflicting emotions in the loss of her child with little or no regard from others. The community took refuge in the social convention of behavior. They blindly condoned what was universally permissible (sympathy for a survivor) and distanced themselves from what was not (regard for the dead baby). Costa went on to explain the reasoning for the decisions of their actions; "to one they could not know . . . dissolving in shame of the unrecognized" (25). Costa chose to invite others to share her visions in her poetry. During the course of healing, she discovered a new way of perceiving her place in the community and a new perspective of self-confidence.

Parents can utilize numerous strategies as they deal with their grief. Those strategies are effective if they build upon adaptive strategies that parents count on as their strength. Eric Clapton dealt with the loss of his four-year-old son Connor through accidental death. Initially overwhelmed, Clapton withdrew into himself, concealing his emotions and remaining secluded. At some point in his bereavement, he forged a new philosophy that helped him get through his grief, day by day, by making use of his strong hand as a writer of verse: "Because no one knows which of us will be gone tomorrow or why. I learned that from my son" (Schumacher 298). Eric Clapton eulogized his son with a tender song, *Tears in Heaven*, in hopes that he and his son would reconnect in a metaphysical existence, if by chance they would ever cross paths again. In song, he wondered if Connor would still recognize him when they met again. This is a haunting question for many bereaved parents who lose young children. It had been Clapton's hope

and belief that somehow, in some spiritual way, his son would hear his song and the two would reconnect. In paying tribute he said, “I have to pay my respects to that boy, in my way” (McCracken and Semel 60). Clapton’s adaptive strategies, in order to begin to heal his emotional wounds, led him to rely on his stronger inner qualities as a producer and a performer, adjusting internally and/or externally to his loss (Rando 150). Instead of wondering about unsolvable questions, he decided to consider every day a blessing: “I have some kind of responsibility to remain positive and not dwell on the misfortune” (Schumacher 288). Eric Clapton’s healing process had begun with his relying on his self-prescribed inner strengths.

Losing a child of any age creates a situation of unforeseen devastation, but the loss of an adult child engenders a different set of circumstances for those loved ones in the parent/child relationship. The death of an adult child is unexpected and unnatural in the scheme of life span. The death often comes as the parent is aging; the loss may be one of many losses that the parent has experienced, especially if the child bears the role of caregiver. With the complexities of grieving, the parent may lose a critical source of support in his or her own life, especially if there is a dependency emotionally, physically, or financially. With the litany of other losses, the parent is subject to complications in adjusting and coping. Moreover, when the adult child is grown and independent, little recognition is given to the powerful bond that exists between the two. For instance, during the decision-making procedures like funeral and burial planning, the parent may not be included. Parents may also experience a lack of support due to the fact that sympathy and other grief considerations focus more directly on the other survivors like the adult child’s spouse and their children. However, it is critical to validate a parent’s

grief; the recognition of the death of a child, regardless of age or circumstances, is always a horrific encounter.

In light of the lack of human comfort, when an adult child dies, spiritual issues such as the rightness or the injustices of one's life may be called into question. In a quest for unanswered questions, Tom Crider wrote in an attempt to *Give Sorrow Words* after his only adult daughter died in a residential fire. His writings, interspersed with narrative and journaling, take us along on his journey of pain, in desperate search to find meaning in the sudden death of his only daughter.

Crider's Gretchen was a junior in college before she died from her injuries suffered in a fire and smoke inhalation. Left alone in abject grief and confusion, haunted by the ways in which he might have been able to prevent the tragedy, Crider recounts his year-long adventures of unrelenting grief without the support of traditional or new age religiosity. The narrative/journaling format of his book creates a way to record his inner thoughts combined with his writing craft in his search for reason and solace. By reading, he gleaned from the wisdom and texts of many segments of cultures—from edicts of Shakespeare to the teachings of Buddha, from biography to the Book of Job. Exploring the works of others led him into streams of stories, ideas, and poems flowing through time from minds and hearts of people of all cultures and ages (Crider, *Give Sorrow Words* X). He read the words of those who had been through similar storms, and when he wrote, it helped him to imagine a fellow sufferer by his side. In Crider's works, he shares the wisdom that helped him achieve peace in the meaning of his daughter's sudden death.

Recalling earlier times spent with Gretchen—driving her to school, doing daily necessities, and sharing unconditional love—afforded Crider a bright new purpose in life.

It was his belief that he would have had some influence in the life of his daughter, on her children and her grandchildren, and possibly on the future of the human race. Sudden, all that had vanished. In addition to his only child, his fatherhood had also vanished, which speaks to a lost identity (Crider, *Give Sorrow Words* 27). Since a child's death is an out-of-sequence occurrence, a parent would likely have had pangs of survivor guilt. In an attempt to explain the devastation of a loss, one may question – "Why?" Or "Why not me instead?" "Am I, like the other survivors of disaster, troubled not only by grief but by guilt at being the one who lived on?" (Crider, *Give Sorrow Words* 123). While still struggling with the grief, the guilt, the regret, and the outrage of helplessness, Crider was able to embrace the reality of Gretchen's sudden death. He examined his position of unreason and sought understanding, consolation, and healing in the thousands of meanings of the word *God*: "It's a word I don't reject in anger anymore" (Crider, *Give Sorrow Words* 159). With the help of fellow writers, introspection, and a reconnection in spirituality, Crider was able to expedite his healing journey.

Loss of Parent/Grandparent/Older Adult

Whether the deceased is a parent, grandparent, or any other related adult, the loss is the interruption of a human relationship. That particular relationship had been impactful in shaping lives from more than one perspective; as a parent, as a grandparent, or as a senior member of the family or community. Parents/grandparents are a reference point—one of the ways in which one defines their sense of self and their place in the world. One might say this family foundation was how they came into being—it was a condition of their existence. When adult children begin to see their parents age and sicken and die, that new normalcy brings a deeper insight into vain expectations of the perfect

parent, and they begin to embrace even the most imperfect connections. In light of the fact that few relationships are trouble free, death of a parent/grandparent no longer affords the child an opportunity to get it right or to build a bridge to forgiveness (Viorst 234). However, death does not become easier with age, nor is it a loss that fades with time. On the contrary, it stays with the survivor and shapes the rest of his or her life. The new path in life calls into question a relationship identity: "Am I still a daughter or son or grandchild?" Judith Viorst says, "The answer was and is 'Yes', but in a different way. Those relationships live on in our hearts, our minds, and our memories" (234). All too often, survivors are confronted with the "get over it" attitude when grieving a loss of an elderly parent/grandparent. Unanticipated or not, the wave of grief remains incomprehensible. To understand the depth of feelings in adult survivors is to realize that a loved one who no longer exists in time and space continues to be, yet a new reality. In other words, becoming an adult orphan can be one of the hardest of life's transition experiences.

The term *adult orphan* was explained as life altering: "losing a parent is like losing a part of oneself" (Viorst 237). A significant piece of identity is changed irrevocably. Thus, becoming a surviving adult orphan can be one of the hardest life transitions anyone can experience. Carol Staudacher states these observations in *A Time to Grieve*. She writes, "grief is a releasing process, a discovery process, and a healing process. One cannot release or recover or heal by the use of the brain alone. The brain must follow the heart" (Staudacher 153). The adult child may not be able to release, recover, or heal by using only the cognitive aspect of the brain. It is one's emotions that are most drastically affected in loss.

The grandparent provides another level of love, acceptance, and security. Grandparenthood is one step removed from the immediate stresses of child rearing and appears to allow the grandparent to forge more of an intimate connection with grandchildren, since the grandparent is always happy to break some of the rules of parenting. The grandparent is that person who thinks their grandchild is smarter than any scholar, writes better than Shakespeare, and every one of the grandchild's paintings should be hung in MOMA. That very special attachment causes a traumatic reaction at the time of loss. The grief of losing such a special bond seems insurmountable. That unbreakable bond may have been interrupted in death, but the privileged moments before death helped shape a lifetime of emotional and cultural stability.

Loss of Spouse/Partner

While it is traumatic to lose attachment in life, kin or non-kin, the interruption of a pair in a spousal/partner relationship is not without its special place in the grief process. Loss of a spouse/partner makes an impact at any time in one's life, and emotions of grieving are ageless. In a later stage of life, the loss of a husband, a wife, or a partner is a compendium of many different losses. The death may cause the survivor to mourn their companion, their lover, their intimate friend, their protector, their provider, or their partner in parenthood. Losing a lifetime companion when elderly has its own uniqueness. Immediate issues arise in additional daily tasks, declining health, loss of physical abilities, diminished sight, hearing loss, and decreased stamina as well as the loss of independence. Viorst attributes these numerous losses to not only mourning but also the singleness of not being a pair—the shattering of a whole life together. The loss leaves the survivor unequipped or unable to do the added new tasks for necessary everyday

existence (Viorst 257). Generally speaking, the natural order of life is for those in husbandly roles to die first, not the wives. If the role of the wife had been to care for necessities, to be with the mate, the mourning may be for the loss of the purpose of their existence. If the wife's sense of self was built upon their spouse's approving presence, then the survivor may also be mourning the loss of that self.

In this case, resilience is compounded. For one, the surviving partner may suffer the "widow effect." James A. Thorson and F. C. Powell's "widow's effect" refers to the possibility whereby there is an increased chance of dying quickly following the spouse/partner's death (126). And second, induced stress may enact the "broken heart syndrome" which increases the risk of cardiovascular difficulties (Caines 127). The death of a spouse/partner brings on excruciating pains of both physical and psychological reactions. After a loss, emotions may range from depression to fear to anger. Initially, a person may experience emotional numbness, in a dreamlike state, or the sudden loss can provoke panic. Occasionally, there may be periods of fear related to perceived circumstances in life without the mate. Irrationally or not, feelings of anger are common after a death. When a survivor loses not only a mate but a long-term partner, an everyday companion, and commonly a caregiver. Feelings of guilt may also plague the mate for being the survivor. In light of the numerous adjustments after a spousal death, the loss also destroys a social unit, imposes new roles, and confronts the living mate with a horrific loneliness.

Death is universal, inevitable, final, and irreversible. Divorce is not. Divorce is the other marital death. The breakup of a marriage is a loss like the death of a

spouse/partner, and is often mourned in closely parallel ways. Divorce can also, like widowhood, strip those who have been left behind of their sense of self.

In her painfully frank autobiography, *Widow*, Lynn Caine relates how her own life had no meaning when her marriage ended: “Our society is set up so that most women lose their identities when their husband leaves” (Caine 1). Subsequent interactions with the environment are substantially dissimilar as well. As a result, some family relationships become strained. A new societal status must be forged. A shift in parental responsibilities requires re-evaluation. The bereaved must mourn someone who has not died. Due to the intensity of the loss, some widows/widowers have been known to confess, “I would rather be a widow(er) than be divorced” (Doka, *Hidden Sorrow* 260). However, one must mourn the death of a marriage/union and let it go.

When we lose someone so very important to us, all we have is memory. Our hearts want the person back. Our mind does too. But the brain must follow the heart; the brain does not act alone. Joan Didion’s 2006 memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, describes in vivid prose how stunned she was by her husband’s death and how disorienting the experience was for her. The state of her mind revealed that “the power of grief to derange the mind may have caused her descent into a kind of ‘magical thinking’ which came alarmingly close to madness” (Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* 34). She relates also to us her unwillingness to accept the finality of loss (42–43). The shock of grief and its meaning for us became even more clearly defined a few years later when Didion’s memoir was adapted into a one-woman stage play, performed at the Booth Theater in New York City.

The front cover of the written script of the play displayed a somber, stoic woman in subdued grayish tones played by Vanessa Redgrave. The actor alone, in a monotone stare, opens the informative dialogue with this warning: “This happened on December 30, 2003. That may seem a while ago but it won’t when it happens to you. And it will happen to you. The details will be different, but it will happen to you. That’s what I’m here to tell you” (Didion, *A Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion* 1).

This is a depiction of Joan Didion’s journey into widowhood. On the contrary, not all grief is as debilitating as the performance represents. In most instances, widow(er)s are able to reevaluate their lives, tackle surviving independently, and rely on themselves for their happiness while mourning their grief. They may be able to incorporate the tragedy into their lives to create a new sense of meaning and harness a new sense of control.

Throughout the memoir, references are made to small, detailed remembrances of times shared with John during their drives, their adventurous walks together, their distinct articles of clothing, and their intimate conversations. Even time spent in Paris and California all speak to the amount of time she had invested in the marriage. The memoir and the stage versions both repeat some phrases as in disbelief or being unable to absorb the words and their meanings; “life changes fast,” “life as you know it ends,” and the suddenness of, “And then—gone” (Didion, *A Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion* 5).

Following every instruction of what a wife should do, she felt that she had done everything in her power because she wanted John back: “I was thinking as a small child thinks, as if my thoughts or wishes had the power to reverse the narrative, change the

outcome" (Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* 35). However, life had changed; so immediate, so permanent. Throughout the memoir, Didion tries to give the appearance that she was holding up well when she really hid behind a paper wall, therein giving the "cool customer" effect; the active avoidance approach (Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* 46). In the end, the power of grief ebbed and receded at will with periods of warding off self-pity. At some point in search of resilience, Didion allowed herself to take an active role in her own recovery and overcame the difficulties in reconstructing her world. Recalling the words so often uttered by John, "For once in your life, just let it go" (Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* 60).

Didion and Lewis suffered similar circumstance as a result of the loss of their spouses. Lewis' memoir, *A Grief Observed*, recounts one man's attempt to control and defeat his emotional turmoil after the death of his beloved wife, Helen. He describes the initial shock as grief descended over his entire existence. Lewis' brief marriage was entered into with an imminent expectation of death, as he was aware that his wife was terminally ill. The two of them realized that "their union would be brief and end in sorrow" (Lewis xviii).

Helen's death had changed everything. This loss was different than any previous loss he had endured in his life. Yet, in all of the sadness and turmoil, he was able to recall "how much happiness, even how much frolic they had together after all hope was gone" (Lewis xx). Their belief was that love and loss intertwine in the human condition, for all human relationships end in pain. Why? The greater the love, the more intense the grief. While searching for ways out of his pain, Lewis came to realize that what he longed to have: to end his grief, the return of Helen—it was impossible. His revelation was

gripping: “I not only lived each day in endless grief, but lived each day thinking about living in grief” (Lewis 10). The magnitude of the loss caused him to question his assumptions about his faith and his perceptions of the nature of God. Through his lifelong theological training, Lewis awakened a new understanding of grief as a journey; he was able to move ahead without despair. Having progressed through the trying phases of loss, he knew that on occasion, he would encounter both new and familiar aspects of grief as time passed. Still, it was soothing to embrace the idea that along the winding road, any bend could reveal a totally new landscape of comfort.

The loss of a mate with whom one has shared a history shatters the former conditions of life. But we can find solace in a new understanding and hopefully be able to learn to move from mourning a loss to celebrating our remembrances.

Friendship Losses Across the Life Span

Close friendships require a healthy sense of self and a genuine interest in other people. We connect with people through empathy, loyalty, and commitment. Friendship seems to almost always be the joining of a part of one person’s mind with a part of another person’s mind. This uniting complements the personal growth of each friend. In addition to helping each other to grow, giving pleasure, and providing aid and comfort, friendship shelters each person from loneliness. In our society, fraught with self-sufficiency, it still matters greatly that we are not alone. Friends are not only there in times of need; they walk life’s journey with together. Although some of them may be in the struggle together and others are absent, even the bad ones serve a purpose. From the bad friendships, we learn how not to treat others. But maintaining a close relationship causes us to let go of our fantasies and ideals of how a friendship should work. Although

we wish to form untainted bonds in friendships, there will still be times of disappointment as well as times of joy (Viorst 70).

A loss suffered in friendship is not just personal but interpersonal, for the spirit of friendship speaks to what matters and what is appreciated in a larger community. Losing a friend creates sadness over the loss of someone turned to in confusion, in celebration, or in crisis. The very act of loss engenders natural emotions and the need for constructive adjustments. Grieving a close friend is similar to mourning the death of a family member according to Jennifer Kromberg in her book *The Five Stages of Grieving the End of a Relationship*. The complexity of emotions arising from loss of a close friend can affect multiple areas of one's life. The death of a good friend makes it difficult to put feelings into words. Coping with the challenges of waves of intense emotions and momentous hardships requires strength, perseverance, and endurance. Grief is not just a solitary thing but something that is shared, that connects one to others. The sadness is not just about severing but also about joining. We grieve because friends matter to us. Through grief, we are connected to each other and to the world.

A loss in adult friendships has its own challenges and hardships, but the death of a teen friend can significantly impact a young person in ways that parents, teachers, and other adults may not understand. Their experiences of dealing with the death of a friend or relative are expressed in confusion and grief. At this time of their lives, teens may be more apt to rely on their teen friends rather than adults in their lives. A dismissive attitude leaves a teen griever alone with his or her own grief and feelings of disenfranchisement. Teens are not supposed to die. It is against all the rules of nature. After a peer dies, a teen, as well as any other individual, is confronted with the realities of

death and the reality of his own mortality. And sadly, teens face the feelings of being abandoned by their close friends.

In Bode's *Death Is Hard to Live With*, the teens she interviewed revealed how their worlds and their beliefs were shaken to the core. They responded in ways like, "They just don't understand me," or "No one knows how we feel," or "I had to hide my true feelings" (57). The benefit of a close friendship plays an integral part in an individual's health and well-being, no matter the age or stage of development. However, the teen age group has its own set of circumstances that are specific to that group and must be perceived as in need of separate guidelines for support.

In each loss in friendship, grief is as unique and as singular as the relationship that precedes it. Yet, two individuals can grieve differently for the same person. We can observe the behaviors of Bode's friend Stan Mack and her other friends. In honoring after her death, Mack remembered her in the graphic novel *Janet and M*e. The book had everything one might want to know about "cancerland" (Mack 10). It would be a way to explore the painful details of Bode's disease; its terror and denial, inept lies, heroic struggles of the patient, yet his story of how he took care of the woman he loved was told with charm and warmth (Mack 10). For eighteen years, Mack and Bode had worked and traveled together until some of their activities were sidelined due to a positive diagnosis of breast cancer. During the five years of her illness, Mack had assumed the role of primary caregiver. Bode's friends had grieved differently as Mack was able to step back as caregiver to allow Bode to relate to her friends whom she referred to as "the warrior women" who surrounded her in unflinching support (Mack 10). "I always feel better after talking to my friends," Bode confided in Mack (Mack 16). The graphic drawings with

Mack and Bode's friends alongside each page in brackets gave everyone a voice and it gave everyone, including Bode, a sense of life.

Another example of dedication in friendship was exhibited in a memoir of a young lady on an incidental trip to a library. There are times in life when we suffer losses that are non-death related. One author stood to lose all of her childhood friends, her identity, and numerous other earth-shattering losses that could have brought any soul to their knees. Jennifer Teege stumbled upon a book in her local library that made her feel cheated out of her history, her childhood, and her identity in her memoir, co-written with Nickola Sellmair: *My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family's Nazi Past*. Born to a German mother and a Nigerian father, Jennifer Teege became aware of a shocking secret at age thirty-eight that threatened to dismantle the entire cast of lifelong friendships from her childhood growing up on the streets of Munich, Germany. Here she was: a Black German woman who spoke Hebrew, who had gone to college in Israel and had befriended descendants of Holocaust survivors. Suddenly the literature had revealed that she was the granddaughter of a heinous perpetrator of war crimes. Amon Goeth, a Nazi commandant of the Plaszow concentration camp in Poland, was Jennifer's grandfather. Many came to know about him through Ralph Fiennes's portrayal of him in the 1993 film *Schindler's List* (Spielberg). In tandem with the weight of a blood-chilling awakening that jarred Jennifer to her very core, she struggled with ways to disclose her family lineage to her Israeli girlfriends, some of whom had lost family in the Holocaust. The very thought of having to tell them became even more terrifying. One friend immediately stopped returning her e-mails. In turmoil and despair, Jennifer started to seek an understanding of her grandfather's

horrific crimes against humanity while in pursuit of her own private absolution. Desperation led her on a quest to visit the locations of her grandfather's murderous actions and later return to Israel. Her travels took her to Plaszow and the former Jewish ghetto of Krakow. After a lapse of time during which she had not yet returned to Israel, her friends there continued to reach out to her in her absence. No reply. No reply. "Jenny, where are you? What's going on?" No reply. At one point she responded, "Call me in six months." "I couldn't tell my friends in Israel who I really was" (Teege and Sellmair 20). Considering a return to her friends, Jennifer realized how hard it would be. She felt as if she had been living a double life all those years: "Even though the family secret was not my fault, I had a guilty conscience" (Teege and Sellmair 190). As a result of psychoanalytic therapy and self-recovery, Jennifer decided that it would be helpful to speak out to show others another side of the Holocaust story. She would "carry a message of humanity." In her travels, Jennifer befriended an Israeli woman in Paris. There was an immediate connection in Noa's quick wit and sense of humor. Jennifer felt that Noa was able to give a name to her feelings that she had always found so hard to put into words. (156). Their friendship was one of the most extraordinary friendships she'd ever had (172)—and fortunately, a long and lasting one. For that reason, Jennifer could not nor would not lie to Noa.

Yet, she often wondered if her friend had lost anyone in the Holocaust or if she knew of anyone who had died in Plaszow. Jennifer received a resounding reply from her friends:

> We have all lost someone. The Holocaust is in our DNA, it is why we are here. But how is that your fault? Noa is missing you. Noa will listen to your story and

> help you however she can. You don't need to spare her. You need us to support and look after you now, not the other way around. Noa will always be your friend, in good times and bad. (Teege and Sellmair 192)

With the encouragement of friends, Jennifer was able to travel to Krakow, stand in front of classes, and tell them her story. The cathartic value of speaking with students left her with a renewed sense of humanity. That point in her life would not have been possible without the interpersonal friendships in which she dared to be rejected.

Loss of Pets/Animal Companions

The relationships animals share with people remain greatly undervalued despite the attention given to animal welfare, human-animal relations, and human-animal bonds in recent years. Due to the complexity of that human-animal bond, the label of "pet" requires a more all-encompassing improved image such as "animal companion," "animal friend," "animal member of the family," and "animal family" (Meyers 539). Humans bond with their animals who are available 24 hours a day, and thrive on contact, free of judgement, and an open display of affection. Their loyalty is never withdrawn due to illness, age, or physical description. Animals do not discriminate. The animal-human bond is strong and resilient enough to defray any and every defect, alteration, or human frailty. Animals are a valuable help. They require no training to unconditionally love, to totally accept, and they have a genuine desire to please the human. Animals have a long history of importance expressed in art, carvings, and literature. Animals see their owners through many transitions in their lives. They serve as life witnesses to their owners' expression of themselves that they never let other humans see; they witness their owners' weaknesses as well as their victories, periods of upheaval as well as times of stability and

comfort. Even though humans and animals share a variety of bonds, they are never a substitute or replacement for human-to-human relationships.

More value may be given to animals that assist people with challenges. A working or service animal such as a seeing eye or a hearing dog may provide for an essential need. They play multiple roles: a champion, a friend, or a hero. Assistance or guide dogs release individuals from their constraints of blindness, deafness, or immobility. An animal owner at any age shares benefits of a companion, a protector, or an exercise mate. They even help their owners socialize with others as they walk or talk about their animals (Meyers, "Disenfranchised Grief" 259). One such relationship was found in the examples of two writers, Gail Caldwell and Caroline Knapp. They met over a talk about their pets. During one of their long walks and even longer talks, they constructed a mutual love of their animal friends. The two dogs, Lucille and Clementine, were passionately monothematic in their conversations (Caldwell 17). At the time meeting, the two friends compared themselves to new moms as the dogs frolicked for hours in the woods of New England. It was during one of their "analytic walks" that Knapp revealed that she was writing about people's connections to dogs. Caldwell had had a long-standing relationship with dogs before Clementine but the pairing with this one, "the troublemaker," seized her heart with unequivocal love: "I understood this attachment for what it was: the instinctive and deep, probably maternal, feelings for a being who depends on you for her very survival. My respect for the human-animal connection was well earned" (Caldwell 37).

After the death of Caldwell's friend Knapp, Caldwell's dog barely survived a vicious attack by two pit bulls. Believing Knapp's spirit had saved Clementine from

death, Caldwell uttered out loud, “The Dead Protects Us” (Caldwell 174–75). Caldwell’s dog Clementine had been a witness to some of the most joyful years of her life and some of the saddest. Clementine had led her to one of the closest friendships ever, waited at home to greet her after returning from the hospital where Knapp was dying, and nipped her nose after returning home from the deaths of both her parents in Texas. But when Clementine came to her end, Caldwell whispered in her ear softly, “Go find Knapp. I know now that we never get over great losses, we absorb them, and they carve us into different, often kinder, creatures. Grief and memory create their own narrative” (Caldwell 183). The friendship of Caldwell and Knapp was cemented in the attachment to their animals which helped to define moments of that were most cherished that would extend beyond life.

For the lonely child, an animal companion offers a great comfort in the unconditional acceptance of a dog or a cat or any other animal of choice. That human-animal bond might only be interrupted by the animal’s illness, retirement, or death. The impact on the human survivor is as unique as the relationship itself. But to better understand the bond between human and animal, one must fully appreciate the effect of the death or loss of a companion animal. Animal death exacts an impactful event for the older person. For the child, the death of a pet may be the first experience with physical death; therefore, the potency and impact of the loss on the child must be handled with loving care. In the child’s world, the death of a pet can be equally as devastating as the death of a human family member. JoAnn Jarolmen compares that impact on children, adolescents, and adults who have lost pets and finds that children and adolescents were similar in their reactions to the loss of a pet, but children grieved more than adults

(Jarolmen 150). The research further supports the wisdom in recognizing the importance of animals in the lives of children and the impact of the death of a beloved pet. Children and animals have a commonality that can manage to instinctively tug on our hearts without exception. The relationship appears to be a harmonious blend of energy, trust, wonder, and deep emotions. The child and animal make for the most picturesque selfie. However, animals also have a life span like humans, some shorter than others for a variety of reasons. The parental role in a premature loss of a beloved pet requires careful handling for the child. The loss of a pet may be the child's first experience with death and may become the foundation for other losses in the family. Therefore, animal losses must be acknowledged, and the grief their human companions feel must be enfranchised. An animal owner may be hesitant to solicit social support for fear of being criticized. At the time of an animal's passing, the human survivor may need objective guidance while in the state of an anguished heart, false hope, and a generous dose of denial. Therefore, everyone, including the veterinarian, should be sensitive to the health of the animals but also to the needs of their human companions. The human-animal bond can be as complex as any human-to-human relationship and no less impactful in terms of unconditional love, loyalty, and acceptance.

Non-Death-Related Losses

When we think of loss, we usually think of loss through death of people we've loved. But loss is a far more encompassing theme in our lives. For we lose not only in death, also by leaving or being left, by changing and letting go, and moving on. We lose in the loss of romantic dreams, impossible expectations, illusions of freedom and power, and the loss of our own younger self. All of humankind face the confrontation of lifelong

and necessary losses that are inescapable. Individually, we experience a range of losses that fall short of the loss of life. Human attachments are formed with other humans that can cause loss or separation. Those losses may include losses of relationships with friends, co-workers, clients, patients, and teachers. We also lose attachments in divorce, relocation, child adoption or foster care, employment, or incarceration separations. As mentioned in the pet loss section, there are non-human losses realized in the loss of animal friends, service animals, or companion animal in their transition from one home to another or retirement.

In their psychological deaths, people may cease to be aware of the self or suffer a chronic brain syndrome (Doka and Abner 219). The quality of life of that person to whom one was attached is no longer present. Physical losses may appear in the form of amputation, blindness, or paralysis. Religious conversions or membership in cult-like activities may cause sudden and significant personality change in living outside of the socially accepted rules in our society.

These psychological, physical, and spiritual losses are examples described by Doka and Abner (219). Rando identifies psychosocial loss, also known as symbolic loss, as losses that occur when there is a loss of one's health in the development of a chronic illness or the shattering of unfulfilled dreams. A physical loss is generally easily recognized and socially validated because it entails the absence of what was once concretely present. However, a psycho-social loss is no less of a loss for its being abstract and physically imperceptible. This kind of loss is something intangible or abstract (Rando 60–61). Alzheimer's disease is one such loss. It causes a significant change in the person once known to us. Alzheimer's has a great impact on personality while radically affecting

the lives of others around the patient. The person who was once a vital individual gradually loses mental, physical, and social abilities. Family members may lack opportunity for emotional expression or feel personally inhibited from expressing negative emotions. To outsiders, their expressions may be considered as expressions of disloyalty or unfeeling regarding their relative's state of health. The spouse may find his or her role ambiguous or confused. Their status is a new position of "pseudo-widow(er)," a term used by Doka to describe being legally bound but not behaviorally married (Doka and Abner 224). The spouse's role becomes strained with additional burdens in the relationship, absent of shared responsibilities.

Sarah Leavitt shares her warm remembrances of her mother who transitioned from a vibrant, educated person to someone who could only ask simple questions. These changes practically shredded the family who love her so very much in her heartfelt memoir, *Tangles – A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother, and Me*. *Tangle*s, a graphic novel, is an honest and deeply personal account of losing a parent to Alzheimer's disease and all of the role reversals, personality changes, and protracted loss that happens as a result of the illness. Sarah Leavitt recorded her experiences in a compilation of notes in order to be able to look back and remember all the "moments of craziness, beauty and tragedy—and not lose any of them" (Leavitt 7). She tells her story of how the family handled their extended crisis and how they were able to newly define their lives throughout their loss. Early symptoms became apparent when Midge (her mother) would be found sitting in the car alone, inattentive to household duties, and going for walks, forgetting the way to return home. Midge's mind regressed into something resembling a

childlike state. Sarah recalled when her mother first became incontinent, having to be bathed, dressed, and groomed.

The family reshaped its duties in order to form the essential circle of care around Sarah mother, whose condition worsened over time. They improvised new roles for themselves as the Midge they knew gradually slipped from their grasp. The graphics and text illustrate the strain that Alzheimer's put on everything—from the sufferer's well-being and sense of purpose to a loving marriage, to the physical demands of caring for someone who can no longer care for herself. There came a time when Sarah was forced to consider her own identity as an adult daughter and as a caregiver; to create her new relationship with her mother. As Sarah watches her mother changing, she asks her father about his experience of living with Midge after her diagnosis. "I don't know. I guess sometimes it turns out that everything you thought about how the future would be just isn't true," he replies (Leavitt 46). The family's lives were twisted into a tangle of changing relationships, new responsibilities, and personal loss.

The title *Tangles* made reference to the mother's illness, "Like the garden this summer . . . tangled but with spots of brightness" (Leavitt 224). The description of the relationship between Sarah and her mother becomes tangled in a number of unfamiliar ways. In time, Sarah begins to identify and reconnect with who she is as a person, a daughter, and a caregiver of a loved one: her mother. In retrospect, we are able to see that our losses are linked to eventual growth. Gaining awareness of how our responses have shaped our lives can possibly be the beginning of a new wisdom toward a hopeful change. Our losses may vary in form, but each person bears the responsibility for and expectation of change, letting go, and moving on in a newfound normalcy.

Chapter 4

AUTHORS AND ARTISTS: LESSONS TAUGHT, LESSONS LEARNED

This chapter will present a select group of authors and artists in various media and genres who reflect on their individual grief and losses. Virtually all of the expressive arts have broad healing applications for any type of loss, whether through literal bereavement, illness, injury, combat, or oppression. An audience may be able to learn from their experiences and gain the strength to achieve similar healing properties common in all humanity. The creative arts may be an adaptive strategy developed as an effective way to express the grieving of any loss. In a creative sense, grievers choose the time and place to remedy what they find too painful or difficult to control. The arts allow for cognitive as well as affective processing in sensitivity awareness. Expression or representation allows for a sense of validation, a normalizing of feelings, and an acceptance of reactions. Rando describes a few examples of creative arts during the grieving process, but these expressions are as varied as the arts themselves. Journaling and writing are well-established approaches to recovery. Other examples include painting, music, photography, storytelling, cinematography, and the use of videography (Rando 191).

In concert, creative arts may provide for an individual's outlet for dealing with loss while creating a new life with a redefined relationship with lost loved ones. In search of consolation, the goal remains to assure and to respect the use of each form of creative expression. It is one thing to find comfort in those with similar bereavement but quite different to read the thoughts of wordsmiths who are writers by craft. Those writers have the ability to purposely ferret out words to express an idea that often goes beyond the ease of rudimentary thinking. Readers are able to learn from these writers in ways that are

consistent with their own lives. Also, readers are able to find comfort in their voices that identify the nuances that fingerprint each artist. Writing things down is more than just an outpouring of feelings. Emotions on the page are always manufactured: retrospective, artful, and a declaration of the author's heart, but with well-thought-out designs on the reader's heart.

Memoir: The Art of Confession

Confessional literature always involve strategy, a judgement about what the impact on the reader will be, even if that judgement sometime proves to misjudged. When Art Spiegelman wrote his *Maus* books (1991), he hoped that the readers would understand his attempt to expose the horrific sufferings experiences by his parents during and after the Holocaust. He had not perceived that he would be vilified for violating his father's exacted promise of not revealing "certain private things" (Spiegelman 25).

Memoir writing offers an intimacy not usually expected. The reader is given privileged access to truths the author feels free to disclose, however awkward or painful they might be. As a piece of truth telling, memoir is expected to be reliable. The narrator's truth may be subjective, but the reader would like to believe that he or she is honest. To drive home the point, Judith Barrington instructs, "To write honestly about our lives requires that we work at and refine our artistic skills so that our memoirs can effectively communicate the hard-won, deep layers of truth that are rarely part of conventional social discourse" (Barrington 13).

Memoir writing is two-fold in nature. It is not so much writers talking about themselves and giving up a part of their being to make a path for the readers on their own particular journeys. Writers of personal narrative write down what happened to them in a

way that helps the reader fit some words to their own lives. The narrative is not only self-forming but also culture-forming, for it transcends personal experience and attempts universality that the readers can access. The purpose of testimony for the writer is introspection and self-reflection, lending shape to a life. The purpose of testimony for the reader is to expose complexities inside the writer's experience. Moreover, testimony reveals an act of humility. One writer, Anne McCracken, began her literary search for comfort that would end in a published book. Her intent was to simply find solace in the contact with other wounded souls. Being of the opinion that grief often inspires creativity, she reasoned that was why so much of the world's greatest literature has been written about grief and loss. Channeling her grief into her book *A Broken Heart Still Beats* "had been the most helpful thing she had ever done for herself since her son Allie died" (McCracken and Semel 262). Through reading and writing literary works, she felt as if she had extended Allie's life a little further. In this way, she remained in constant contact with her beloved son. Not to mention that during his lifetime, Allie had become an avid reader himself. Admittedly, he would confess, "I come from a reading family" (263).

Mary Semel, on the other hand, after losing her son Jake in an accident, came face to face with the cold reality that most wounds heal, even deep ones, but not the death of a child. For it is impossible to live wholeheartedly with a heart that is broken. Grief, like a shadow, goes everywhere you go. There are mini-losses in life like the loss of personal property, the loss of social status, or the loss of a friendship, that are not tragedies. Among human losses, the death of a child is a new measurement of tragedy. In spite of it all, Semel had to see her pain as a dot on the landscape of pain in order to begin to heal in

any sense of recovery. She eventually adopted the realization that pain lessens, eyes stop weeping: “Like a watercolor wash, time does soften our suffering” (McCracken and Semel 264).

Semel found a way to move on by giving up the life she had planned to find the life that was waiting for her. Mary embraced the new normalcy through her literary explorations in hope that her journey of recovery would light a trail for others to follow.

Crider, unlike Semel and McCracken, lost an adult child which shattered his life with an unexpected tragedy. Crider had cause to re-examine his struggle in spiritual, psychological, and emotional confusion in his memoir, *Give Sorrow Words*. We became acquainted with his loss of his beloved daughter Gretchen in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. He began to document his inward search for comfort and understanding. Using the combination of journaling and narrating his sorrow, a book emerged a year later that expressed the grief and deep love for his Gretchen.

Often feeling insignificant, Crider would hesitate when asked, “Do you have any children?” He no longer had a child and assumed no one wanted to hear his story of what had happened to Gretchen. His only answer when asked, “How are you doing?” would be “It’s hard, Leo, if you want the truth” (Crider, “Give Sorrow Words” 216). At that time, he had suffered a sudden loss of identity as a father, a friend, a helper for his only child. Before embarking on his own writings, Crider searched the literature instinctively for stories, poetry, memoir, and biography for shared experiences, reflections, and wisdom to find comfort in words passed down through the ages in the text of many cultures.

On a perilous voyage, one needs companionship. Crider found it when he read the words of those “who had been through similar storms, it helped him to envision fellow

sufferers by his side" (Crider 57). At one juncture, he thought that writing in his diary seemed pointless, nothing other than an elaborate form of mumbling to himself. He thought to himself, "Of what use is it to write pages and pages of weeping words, tangled thoughts, wishes, cries, sentences drenched in blood?" (56). The cathartic value alone was not enough to keep Crider going so he imagined a listener, a reader (157). But after all of the anguish and emotional turmoil began to diminish, Crider opened his mind and embraced his spiritual base of hopefulness, moving away from placing blame and indulging in fantasies unhinged by his grief. He wanted to pen an open letter to prospective readers of his book, *Give Sorrow Words*, to convey a message. Not knowing who or why this book would be chosen by others to read, he extended his heart and his hope in finding solace in its pages with a reminder that no one is alone in grief. He offered his heart-wrenching stories as comfort for all to read about his journey. Since literature had led him to the minds and the hearts of people of all cultures and ages, it was his hope that the readers would share in some of the words of comforts from his own experiences.

In the memoir *A Grief Observed*, Lewis records his grief in stark honesty and undressed simplicity revealing his innermost thoughts and feelings. He had suffered emotional and mental anguish, as well as physical exhaustion, after spending the last few weeks caring for his dying wife. Having experienced loss before—his mother at nine and friends killed in WWI—he had written about suffering. Neither his learning nor his experience had ever prepared him for the composite of both the greatest love and the greatest loss which is its counterpart.

With his mind stretched beyond capacity, Lewis turned to writing down his thoughts and his reactions to them in order to try to make some sense of the whirling chaos that was assaulting his mind. His writing served as a form of self-medicating, a coping behavior, while self-reflecting on the value of writing. Initially, with no intention of publishing his thoughts, Lewis reviewed some of his notes and insightfully concluded that his writing might be of help to others who were similarly afflicted with the turmoil of thoughts and feelings which grief had forced upon them.

Lewis concedes that love and loss are so intricately interwoven that "all human relationships end in pain" in his memoir. "The greater the love, the greater the loss" (XX). Lewis and his wife both spoke in reciprocal terms about love and loss and grief. In the film *Shadowland*, Helen reminds Jack (Lewis) during a moment of enjoyment that the happiness they shared then would resonate in the intensity of grief he would feel later. Conversely, Lewis anticipates in his memoir the unrelenting grief that he would feeling at the end would be the result of the enveloping happiness that they had shared earlier in life with his wife.

After all, one's goal is not to ignore grief or fear it; but to work through it in order to begin to heal. In the process, expression opens the way for a person to eventually begin to adjust to the change grief had brought into one's life. Lewis learned to focus on the positives to see him through—love, healing, encouragement, and support from loved ones during the most difficult times. He would caution his readers to keep moving forward in the healing journey one has already begun and to remember that acknowledged grief is an expression of the depth of love.

Poetry: The Words Choose You

Poetry is able to address every realm of what in our lives can feel broken, be that in the heart's injuries, intimate connections, love, friendship, or family relationships. The wordings in poetic expression can touch those grieving individuals who may recall a shattering life experience or be in need of relief from the pain of loss. The use of poetry serves many purposes in life and death. Denise Levertov in her book *Talking to Grief* brings an awareness of how loss has inspired some of our most moving poems, old and new.

The writing and reading of poetry provide their own reasons why people turn to it. People have a tendency to believe experience and even perhaps some have faith that language in itself is a reservoir, needed and almost infinitely useful. The images, words, metaphors, and sounds of poems harness passion and with it compassion that brings about mutual recognition. Poetry can not only capture the heaviest emotions but can also fixate on a moment in time. Often written during times of intense emotions, poetry is emotion driven while at the same time providing a release. The main objective in creative expression is exploring the meaning and the significance of the words in our lives. We do not choose the wording; the meanings choose us. Reading the experiences of others with grief and loss connects us with universal suffering, helping to ease feelings of loneliness and isolation. Poetry's message tells us that we are not singled out in our suffering; we are brought into the shared life of all who have lived with or died before us. Poems allow us to have courage through our suffering rather than try to escape it. In a creative endeavor, parts of a poem describe a painful experience and help the poet and readers understand it more fully by finding meaning in the suffering.

Writing as a coping mechanism thematically touches on universal experiences like life, death, love, and loss. Poems work to prompt understanding of emotions through empathy, and they encourage writers and readers to explore the ideals of hope. Threads of grief come across in poems in their own specific terms. For instance, Dylan Thomas delved into the grief for his father when he composed "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night." Thomas' poem urges us to fight for hope even when it does not come easily. Written for his dying father, the words, "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light" (ln. 3) highlight the theme to fight for, long for, and hang on to hope, even in the face of anticipated death (Thomas, *Dylan Thomas Collected Poems* 128). The father is encouraged to survive longer, living out his life to see how life had been bright for him before. The purpose of fighting against death is also to realize the importance of being alive. The powerful message in line 1 conveys when death approaches, one needs to know what made life meaningful. The poet argues that old men especially should not consent to die but again affirms the importance of being alive in the fight with full force and might in the realization that goodness comes from fighting a strong fight.

Whereas Dylan Thomas expresses hope in life to stave off death, Emily Dickinson looks at hope in life as our strength coming from within. Emily Dickinson penned for us, "'Hope' Is the Thing with Feathers," as a reminder that in order to find a path forward, all we have to do is look within. She writes, "Life goes on, hope remains, the birds will always sing" (94). Hope is metaphorically presented in the form of a strong-willed bird that lives within the human soul. Under any circumstance, there is power in hope, and it requires nothing of us: "Yet – never – in Extremity, / [Did} it ask . . . a crumb – of me" (Dickinson, ll. 11–12). Even in the most difficult times, "Hope" has

made many people feel comfortable. "'Hope' Is the Thing With Feathers" honors the human capacity to hope. The poem asserts that in the stormiest of times, the miracle of hope is a valuable part of each person, free for the asking, never requiring for anything in return. Humans may not always recognize their capacity for hope but "That perches in the soul" (line 2), is the poem's way of saying that hope is a fundamental part of a human. Hope is something that people can always turn to, just as a bird returns to its perch, providing comfort and solace with nothing to be paid in return. Poetry injects a burst of hope. That movement is part of the journey of grief and healing that helps connect us with our stories so that they can be released along with the pain.

There are many human fragilities beyond physical illness and physical fracture that need healing. Some are personal, some are collective, but the two realms are not disconnected. We don't live in compartments; we live in our lives. Inherent in poetry is the capacity to act as a force of healing by lifting the heavy heart. Can a poem heal? Louis Hoffman and Nathaniel Granger, Jr., responded with an affirmative, "Before there was psychotherapy, there was poetry . . . one of the oldest healing arts that has been utilized across many different cultures and throughout history" (Hoffman and Granger 16). As a result, as long as people suffer, there will be poetry. Anyone may feel like a good poet even if they have never written poetry before. In essence, one may find there are healing and growth benefits form merely engaging in the practice. The healing words of poetry have the potential to aid in the rebuilding of lives after loss and trauma. The arrangement of words has the capacity to provide both solace and relief by simply stating out loud the realities in our lives.

Music: The Invisible Art

Moving from the genres of prose and poetry, we begin to examine the properties of harmonious structures. A great deal of music has been written about grief and loss, and a great deal of music has been written out of grief and loss. Globally, loss, grief, and healing are evident in nearly all civilizations, cultures, faiths, communities, and developmental stages from infancy through the teenage years and adulthood into the senior years. Individual choice in music selection plays a significant part in the lives of everyone, affecting and speaking to powerful emotions that vary from grief and sadness to gleeful joy and delight. Music can calm the emotions or release denied or unexpressed emotional states of grieving. The emotions choose the genre and the mood.

Barbara Thompson and Neimeyer argue that music has the capability to take us to a time, a person, or a place we would like to revisit and delivers us in a real–time moment of loss and grief (Thompson and Neimeyer 38). It is a powerful means of expression because it unites body, mind, and spirit. Music has the ability to express the inexpressible and gives voice to a range of people's feelings. Reflecting on music can spark new insights for being in and moving through one's grief. The solipsistic bondage idea is counterproductive because it represents the opposite of what is needed to begin to dispel the feelings of being sad and alone in the world. The counterproductive act comes into play when a grieving person plays or listens to a sad song; they feel better because the song has a way of alleviating the aloneness of sadness. For instance, the playing of jazz for sad moments usually is motivated by the thought that life goes on, not necessarily bereft of pleasure. On one hand, there is sadness, but also at the same time there is the possibility of feeling some pleasure. Jazz, with its roots in improvisation, is an evolving

metaphor for emotional flexibility as demonstrated by the New Orleans musicians that are conditioned to play songs as “blue” or “joy” depending on the circumstances and how they feel. Besides grief and tragedy as universal experiences, music has another way of responding to grief; it celebrates life. There are countless world examples of life celebrations but in America, the New Orleans Jazz Funeral is one of the best representations.

Musical memories can call forth deeply personal relevant emotions, stories, and meanings connected with our loss, varying from lullabies to gospel to rock to opera to folk tunes. Also included are movie themes, ethnic roots, heavy metal, new wave, and beyond. For example, opera, folk, and possibly ballet are largely based on tragedy and grief. While much of jazz music arose out of grief, hymns may be an especially fruitful source of inspiration and solace. Lest we forget, courage and hope are considered as partners of grief. As music of today explodes in unimagined creative ways, those music styles will eventually fade into the oldies. The evolution of music will continue to speak to the generations to come in their quest for solace and comfort. In that evolution, performers use music to make bold and aggressive public statements of grief affecting an individual or a collective group. Wynton Marsalis created such a composition that has graced many stages in performance and eventually produced in the form of a 3-CD set of recordings titled *Blood on the Fields.* This groundbreaking composition was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Jazz in 1997, which was history making for that genre of music. Written and composed by Marsalis, *Blood on the Fields,* an oratorio, is a slave narrative, a continuum from slave ship to auction blocks through the ordeals of the killing fields. It was performed by The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra directed by Marsalis. The work

was initially conceived as a score that was tragic throughout with no redemption. However, Marsalis had a change in his perspective. To make the composition all tragic would not be in the spirit the African-American people represented. It was at this point that Marsalis realized that a situation can be tragic, but there will always be a chance of hope, recovery, and resilience, which was an important part of jazz expression.

The oratorio *Blood on the Fields*, performed April 1, 1994, opens with invocation to the spirit of the first people whose blood soaked American soil in the long and painful birth of the American republic. The musical composition exposes the prismatic metaphor: slavery as a genuine tragedy. *Blood on the Fields* details in music a historical perspective of unification in a combined effort to alleviate stress and anxiety from devastating collective loss. Some groups of people have discovered that music orchestration, more than other genres, goes to the heart of relief, tolerance, grief, and healing.

One of the most ancient and powerful healing modalities, music has made use of sounds, chants, sacred songs, toning, and drumming to achieve an altered state of consciousness conducive to healing. Any style of music can be healing, be it jazz, classical, alternative, or rock. In order to heal, we select music that energizes or creates emotional states that works for us. The experience in choice is completely individual and self-prescribed.

Dance: Essays in Motion

Grief and loss, universal experiences for all, are positively affected through the exploration of movement in dance, as dancers and choreographers seek to express the inner world of all those who are in search of solace. Inherent in the medium of dance is the capacity to experience grief and loss with immediacy and power expressed through

the body and touch. Barbara Thompson and Neimeyer, the authors of *Grief and the Expressive Arts*, in agreement with other social scientists have concluded that the use of art, symbols, rituals, and the creative process allow people to express very powerful and scary emotions. The concept of dance exists somewhere between symbol and language, where the reality of dance is more experienced than explained; more felt than understood. It transcends the limitations of speech. Loralee M. Scott-Conforti, in *Dancing in the Shadows*, provides a view of dance through the lens of depth psychology and discovers its capacity to effect transformation in both the performer and the audience. Her research uncovered psychic energy at the unconscious level. That wisdom of psychic understanding in ancient cultures historically incorporated dance as a rite of passage, as a preparation for warriors going into battle, and as a transition for returning home. Dance embodies both collective grief and collective celebration (Scott-Conforti 101).

Therefore, dance is not simply movement of the body; it operates at a much deeper level, encompassing more than physical reality. “The essence of dance moves us on a higher level of being; unconscious of both the artist and the audience,” says Judith Herman (9). Thus, dance becomes the vessel for that which transcends speech, transcends consciousness, and like an invisible force is only witnessed by the outpouring of what it moves. Only recently have the healing aspects of been recognized as a psychotherapeutic discipline for its beneficial effects. In order for an artist to address the inner forces that speak to the creative sources, whether they come from a place of beauty or tragedy, the artist is compelled to arouse the world to pay attention to this therapeutic energy. Dance provides an opportunity to give voice, literally or metaphorically, to the wounded yet resilient part of the self. Dance also reflects an integration of loss and finding meaning in

a changed life. Artists are able to expose their lives as well as open avenues for their audiences to look within for self-reliance through their performances. Bill T. Jones shared his life struggles through the art of dance. Coming from a life of impoverished beginning, he was included in that group of the world's most daring and controversial choreographers. He and fellow dancer Arnie Zane wanted the audience to see themselves on stage. The dance selections were performed to communicate the purposes of the artists with the intent for the audience to become a part of the stage performances.

Grief has always been an important part of Jones' work, especially after the AIDS-related death of Zane, his dance collaborator. In attempts to move forward in the art of dance, Jones found comfort in his belief that "you get over the loss when someone dies, but you never get over the person" (Jones and Gillespie 185). His production of "Still/Here" was one of most powerful artistic comments on the AIDS crisis. "Still/Here" has two distinct parts arising out of a very specific experience and concern of struggles learned through illness, the death of Zane, and the deaths of numerous others. Jones was able to conclude that the resources necessary to cope with life-threatening illness are the same as those necessary for truly owning one's life (Jones and Gillespie 252).

Motifs of sorrow, loss, despair, and mourning are common to many choreographers. Grief is the sole theme of some of the greatest works in dance history. Dance, a non-verbal art can easily express what words cannot. In 1989, Jones created a production titled "Forsythia," performed as a duet, celebrating Zane's favorite flowers after his death. Jones admittedly confessed that in the making of "Forsythia," he was trying to recreate a sense of the true camaraderie of his partnership with Zane.

Jones' works were able to relate to his audiences what his true feelings were about any number of social issues that may have been uncomfortable for all those who attempted to avoid behaviors that are difficult to face, whether they be sex, race, art, or death. His works were of a highly personal nature. It was no wonder that Jones had the courage to publicize his grief in search of recovery and resilience. He used the art of dance to express the deepest emotions in both himself and his audiences. For him, dance was not solely a sequence of beautiful body movements but also an avenue to survival in elegy and celebration of lost loved ones. Over time, a sense of loss has been depicted in dance at every narrative of life and death. In an interview with Julinda Ferguson, Alvin Ailey gave a heartfelt confession. When asked why people danced, he offered this reason: "when our hearts break, we dance, we dance, we dance" (Ferguson 40). Dance can be used to help an individual feel liberated, creative, and free. It not only provides a release of feelings but also moves an individual to create the healing spiral of his own being.

Art: An Image-Based Language

Since early in human awareness, people have tried various ways to express experiences of love, loss, dance, lyrics, and other creative media. Artists have found in their various media an avenue by which to direct grave situations into works of creative images and hopefully bring about emotional healing. Visual imagery is a powerful art form that has become more a part of our modern lives and cultures. Artistic drawings have a way of reminding the participants of events that have long passed but remain personally meaningful. Expressing feelings in art, poetry, and performance ushers in a way to both memorialize the relationship with the deceased and bring comfort in the grieving process.

As a creative outlet to express ourselves, healing with art is potent and effective. It is a creative catharsis as a means of healing ourselves and others. The simplicity of drawing is an art form that can help people to express grief without relying on verbal or written forms along with providing an outcome for people to make sense of death and loss experiences. Artists have long since used visual arts as a healing force. Also, many of them can turn from times of grief and loss to be productive in creativity. The artist's renditions are able to develop emotions into powerful images of universal suffering, disturbing images of starvation, wartimes, illness, and trauma into beautiful paintings that resonate in the soul for a lifetime. For example, one such painting is Picasso's *Guernica.*

Guernica (1937) is a painting known worldwide for its depiction of the artist's feelings of the horrors of war, trauma, suffering, and human destruction. The mural-sized oil painting is about eleven feet tall by 25 feet in width. The enormity of this piece of art speaks to its impact and power. Its images of a woman screaming in pain while holding her dead child and a horse with its mouth opened in terror and pain function to elicit terror and sorrow in human and animal loss. The images represent the painter's grief and anger felt for the desolation of an entire Spanish village. The painting caused such deep emotions among people worldwide that it became one of the most powerful anti-war representations in history. Although each individual may not know the exact meaning of the tortured figures in the painting, Picasso stated, "A painting is not thought out and settled in advance. While it is being done, it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished, it goes on changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it" (*Guernica: Testimony of War,* 1937). *Guernica* was Picasso's way of universalizing

powerful emotions with a sense of hope in the growing flower and the crack of light in the wall.

Art forms holds a special place in the experience of loss because it has the ability to transcend time and create images to bring about change in the consciousness to promote healing and hope. Art provides a way of knowing what it is we actually believe, and knowing our beliefs is required for confronting ourselves, our fears, and our resistance to change.

Our lifetimes have cultivated patterns and habits of thought embedded in our imagination. Our expectations of ourselves and the world are created from those patterns. Ungrieved losses are sources of deep pain that have etched patterns into our deepest selves. Such feelings are meaningful and a necessary part of being human. The use of artistic expression in its variety of forms gives testimony that art can, in its challenging way, ease and even help to heal sorrow. Every person facing loss is an artist, on some level, in their own sense. We are all able to make sketches of our inner expressions of feeling, even in absence of formal training. Our ability to heal is self-prescribed and comes from within. Artistic expression embraces the healing forces. Each creation is a step forward in the healing process. In essence, we become our own artist/healer. Art viewers are able to become more sensitive and more engaged with fellow humans and the world. We must remember that sadness and tears are a way of honoring someone whom we love. Grief may diminish or transform, but it does not end. For it is through the telling of all the stories of all people that we heal ourselves and the world.

Chapter 5

THE MINDFULNESS OF MEANING

To be mindful challenges us to awaken from routine mind-habits of past and future concerns. Mindfulness helps us to recognize what we are doing, and self-understanding expands the realm of our choices and new possibilities. Thus, we are able to engage the specificity of focus rather than lack controlled attention or regulated focus. We learn to be mindful when our thoughts are absent of past memories, future worries, and instant judgements. Thich Nhat Hanh instructs us on how to metaphorically be enlightened, be attentive, be aware, and be in the present: "When walking, walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet" (Nhat Hanh 12). Our focus is on the moment at hand, for each moment in life provides the opportunity to move toward self-understanding and purposefulness. Mindfulness fosters an awakening to what we are doing and why we are doing it.

The art of mindfulness can be a useful tool to avoid self-criticism and self-judgement while identifying and managing our difficult emotions. The ultimate goal of mindfulness cultivates perspectives on one's consciousness and identity. Through living our lives, we find that options have restrictions; human connections are too often flawed. We also come to realize that some hurts cannot be made better with a band-aid or a kiss, as impermanence haunts one's life.

Our romantic dreams are not ensured by charm, beauty, or wisdom. We can be rendered powerless when it comes to protecting ourselves and other loved ones from pain and danger, from coming of age, from coming of death, or from any number of life's losses. As a part of life, losses are universal and unavoidable yet an important ingredient

in adjusting to losing and leaving and letting go. Life is learning to give up in order to grow up; thus, there is a vital bond between losing and gaining. It is only through loss that we become our fully developed selves. Although losing is difficult and painful, losses are inextricably linked to growth. We own the ability to change our attitudes when faced with adversities or unchangeable circumstances (loss or death). The meanings that we attach to our acceptance of life's situations prompt us to be able to alter the way we see the world, our lives, and our own state of mind. Understanding one's life promotes the potential of a human being's ability to live and to adjust to a healthier lifestyle.

When searching for meaning, we must remain in the intentional presence with a sense of purpose, with an awareness of all things that contribute meaning to our lives. Careful observations develop the awareness of simple sensations such as the brush of the wind on the cheek, the rattle of an oncoming freight train, or the crunching sound of crusted snow underfoot. Self-reflection gives meaning to life: our thoughts, our feelings, and our visions. Our thinking is reframed when we promote well-being and create a sense of meaning in things, people, and experiences.

Our experiences are subjective and influenced by our emotional states. The discovery of the reasons why we live fortifies us to weather hard times, making them easier by finding meaning in our living. Meaningfulness gives attention and awareness to one's environment.

When individuals think of loss, they usually think in terms of losses related to the people or pets they love. The complicated layers of loss are more expansive, for loss comes in all sizes and degrees. Although some of these losses are through the acknowledgement of the finality of death, some losses are due to the causality of leaving

or being left, changing, letting go, or moving on. Lifelong losses, as inevitable as they may be, present themselves in inescapable fact. There are losses that involve conscious and unconscious dreams, friendships, unrealized expectations, and the need for power. Also, there is the loss of one's younger self so often disenfranchised, unrecognized as a loss. Some grievers maintain that in any given loss, "there is no loss which cannot lead to gain" (Viorst 264). But from moment to moment, the rest of us would gladly forgo the gain if we could only forgo the loss, yet life doesn't offer anyone such a sweet option.

The central focus to understanding and dealing with grief difficulties is directly related to the objectification in reference to one's own life. Our ability to be honest rests with the ability to be truthful in reflecting on our losses. Becoming aware of ways in which our responses to loss have been framed by living our lives can be the beginning of wise and hopeful change.

In the fraught coping with feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, confusion, or any other grief-related response, we have a natural tendency to search for peace and meaning. Inherent in meaning are realistic experiences of interacting with life's situations (environment) and others in our lives. Therefore, an individual's character is revealed in how he/she responds to a given situation in keeping with their philosophical perspective. Each of us controls our thinking, our responses, and our state of mind. We have our own meaning for life and how that life is conducted. Simply stated, the meaning of life is to give life meaning; though not universal but self-prescribed. As we strive to retain control over our environment, we come to acknowledge the difference between lived and desired experiences, meaninglessness, and the drive for self-actualization. When we begin to challenge imposed actions and instead discover the true self within, then we give

meaning to our lives. Each life is transformed over a lifetime, and those transformations resolve to be reflected in dealing with any experiences of loss.

Meaningfulness in life allows for observations from many dimensions of human experiences in being able to see life transparently from numerous perspectives—looking through the pain and accepting reality as it presents itself.

A true reality must consist of the acceptance of life's necessary losses. Healthy acceptance means being capably aware that one can leave and be left, be able to merge and separate, be both accompanied and alone. Another aspect of mature meaning in life is letting go of one's dearest dreams of childhood, gaining wisdom and skills in order to acquire what is desired within the limitations imposed by the realities of life. Those realities include diminished powers, restrictions from freedoms, and imperfect connections with loved ones. We are determined to have a sense of reality when we can decipher whether an experience actually exists or not because our thoughts and wishes are mental images and not actions happening in the present time. Life becomes more meaningful with the realization that time spent regretting what no longer is available diminishes the amount of energy spent appreciating what was once shared together. Loss can be most instructive when lessons can be learned about the self: action, thoughts, strengths, and perseverance. To suffer a loss of a loved one, a possession, or a relationship can be one of the most profound emotional experiences anyone would have to endure. Without exception, devastating losses cause painful difficulties and unsettle a life once known. To give meaning to our experiences, we create an opportunity to restructure and reinterpret aspects of our own lives. Self-discovery as a source of wisdom

can reveal inner strengths yet unexplored. Finding and making meaning on many levels involves relearning of the world and how it affects our lives.

In search of a deeper understanding, we gain cognition of the greatest tasks of finding meaning in life: work (something significant), love (caring for another), and courage (during difficult times). Meaning can further be explained as strength, intensity, and activity in one's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment the comprehension of the meaning, significance, and purpose of life. While some may be waiting to find their purpose, their purpose is already within their power. For purpose comes from within our values and connections made with all those surrounding us. Discovering our purpose encourages articulation of meaning in life. We differ in our reaction to loss according to the specific meaning attached to loss or death by the bereaved person and the meaning that is assigned to the loss. Each person grapples with all that a loss means and all that it causes one to feel, think, and do. But an effort must be made to move toward an appreciation of suffering as a process whereby one can reconstruct a new world of meaning and restore coherence to the narrative of one's life.

Personal stories of loss and resilience are among the world's most cherished forms of literature. In a timeless, universal way, such stories educate, inspire, and energize others to own, to tell, and to retell their stories of loss, joy, and hope. By sharing their lives in personal narrative, authors attempt to make sense of the experience, to create peace out of chaos, and to control the uncontrollable: the past.

Literature provides a voice for the disenfranchised, a connection from one world to another, through the power of story. The process of written thought provides a safe haven to locate the narratives outside of oneself; thus, the writer becomes an audience to

his/her own story, to be able to objectify the past and make sense of it. Writing gives voice to the silent and the silenced, paving the way to engage meaning in life and death. Also, writing plays an important role because our experiences are filled with memories, wishes, dreams, fantasies, insights, and questions. Through written forms, new truths and new perspectives are discovered. As a result, we are able to broaden the capacity for humanity and to live more meaningful lives. The truth comes from a deeper source of life: the heart. We use both the heart and the mind to confront the most difficult experiences in a lifetime. In making their stories public, writers not only claim their own voices but also locate their place in the world. Writers connect and join with others in the imperative to tell, to make sense of their lives, and to create meaning, for the act of writing is and always will be a struggle against remaining silent.

The narrative in all of its forms is representative of the human experience, and the sharing of those experiences, even in the struggle to make meanings of them, creates a sense of humanity. Journaling can also be an extraordinary friend in times of loss or joy. Lewis, and, Leavitt, and other journaling writers began by compiling their thoughts in notebooks and diaries long before they had any idea of formally publishing their works of personal loss while searching for meanings in the why.

In Chapter 4 on relationships, we met Lewis in the death of his wife and Leavitt in the loss of her mother to Alzheimer's and eventually to death. Lewis refers to his writings as personal scribble, yet finds it to be a safe way to get off the treadmill of thoughts in his mind. By writing it down, he was able to get a little outside of his own story and view his situation as an observer. Leavitt decided to be in the moment with her mother as she made notations of the deterioration of her mother's mental functioning. She captured

daily interaction of family dynamics also, recording meaningful incidences of joy and laughter before they would disappear. In Leavitt's case, she suffered the loss of a living person, once known to be vibrant and witty, as her mother faded into forgetfulness and fear, later to grieve her death. Yet, Leavitt's mindfulness did nothing to explain the meaningfulness of her suffering. But her book *Tangles* reveals the complexities of a disease and uncovers moments of shock, denial, hope, and happiness as she learns the meaning of coping with loss before and after the death her mother.

Memoirists Didion and Crider both suffered unimaginable losses respectively in the death of Didion's spouse and her adult daughter and the death of Crider's adult daughter in an accidental fire. They each wrote of a journey which we all have to take in one form or another. Didion's *Year of Magical Thinking* reveals her need to try and make sense of life with and without loved ones. She uses her own writings as an act of saying, "listen to me, see it my way, change your mind" (Didion, *Let Me Tell You* 45). Also, she writes to question the reality of her own feelings: "What am I thinking, what am I looking at, What I see, and what it means?" (Didion, *A Year of Magical Thinking* 49). Living under emotional maelstrom brought on by intense grief, she experiences the surfacing of sensations that made life seem unreal. Without a cause or explanation of loss, behaviors and judgements become clouded with a lack of clarity, meaning, or understanding of loss and losing. Human nature can invoke feelings of the need to search for answers and seek out ways to cope with the new reality before constructing a new sense of meaning. Didion's writing served as an outlet for her grief and also helped her to take an active role in her own recovery and resilience.

Similarly, Crider was able to write in order to *Give Sorrow Words* after he had searched for a book to relieve his grief; a book that he was never able to find. The conventional responses to the loss of his daughter offered no consolation. His writing aided him in finding solace as he searched for meaningful comfort. Crider's life had hit a tailspin after the death of beloved Gretchen, a twenty-one-year-old.

Finding no meaning in traditional or New Age spirituality, Crider turned his attention to other resources of stories, poetry, mythology, memoirs, and biographies with the hope of gleaning wisdom from many teachings and cultures that spoke to his grief, doubt, and confusion. And yet, he still questioned the rightness and the reality in Gretchen's death. He pondered the justification that children should die. After numerous attempts to come to terms with his tragedy, his meditation took the form of a year-long diary writing. By interspersing memories and narratives in his written accounts, he creates an inward progression of his search for solace and meaning uncovering his anger, pain, and resentment, gradually eroding into a sorrowful acceptance of an absence in his life. His writing, which began as a form of elaborate mumbling to himself, culminated in a written document that became a cathartic companion that helped him to imagine a fellow sufferer by his side. In giving words to his sorrow, Crider is able to share with us the inroads and journeys to finding meaning, peace, and resilience in an honest reality of comfort.

McCracken and Semel were awakened to the fact that *A Broken Heart Still Beats* after they experienced the deaths of their two young sons. In Chapter 4, we experienced the plight of these two writers in search of more meaningful words of comfort in the world's literature. By reading other authors' accounts—how they were able to survive the

worst incidences of loss and how they found comfort in their search for meaning, consolation, and resilience—the two writers observed that the authors had embraced the company of a wide variety of stories and poems about loss and hope. Being able to connect words to feelings of unspeakable losses make the darkness a little less dark and aloneness a little less alone. McCracken and Semel nurtured their aches inside as they searched for resources to help make sense of their losses.

Ultimately, their search led them to literature rich in personal explorations in recovery and resilience. By reading the experiences of others who had traveled along their roads in search for meaning, McCracken and Semel were able to learn what was ahead in their journeys by meeting those on the way back.

During the process of writing, one can begin to objectify the past and try to gain a new perspective on it. The arrangement of words, phrases, and paragraphs comes together to form new meanings, give voice to silence, make order out of chaos, and give rise to new insights. But the lens through which we may view ourselves and may experience the realm of new meanings is uniquely ours and ours alone.

Resilience, Recovery, and Healing

The mindfulness in the search for meaning is a continuum that hopefully leads to gaining more awareness of why and how we respond to grief and loss. This ongoing journey should encourage the motivation to accept and embrace a new normal. To relearn a world that we have come to know requires a letting go of past relations in order to welcome a new connection to that world. The goal of that possible new life is to move from resilience to recovery to healing in a better condition of existence.

After experiencing individual grief and loss, we will to heal our bodies, our minds, and our spirits by attempting to bring about changes that serve the greatest good for all those involved. True healing creates a shift that encourages positive changes so that our awareness develops into a whole new sense and reality of normal.

The main process to healing promotes the effort to find or create new meaning in the life of the survivor as well as the death of the beloved one. The ultimate goal is to reorganize the pieces of a broken world and reconnect them again in a way that would permit a survivor to live in peace without ever-present discomfort. Healing occurs by degrees, and it is not readily apparent, in those who need to work through their feelings; it helps them to not become consumed with meaninglessness or hopelessness when parts of life seem less than worthwhile. All tasks, no matter how great or small, have a place in life. But eventually life has the potential to change from an ordeal to an opportunity. To grieve a loss is a releasing process, a discovery process, and a healing process. The mind alone does not release, discover, or heal. A renewed strength propels us to trust the heart to direct our steps in hopes that every day experienced with emotional pain would be replaced with relief, solace, and inspiration. Thompson and Neimeyer are in agreement with the idea that we use the heart and as well as the mind to confront the most difficult events in a lifetime (92). Healing varies from person to person, as everyone has the capacity to choose how they are able to respond to their loss. As we explore a number of routines and activities that are healing tools, this very exploration may cause change in helping to overcome the persistent thoughts of losing. These thoughts arise from pre-conceived and unrecognized beliefs that prevent acts of recovery. Affirmation,

meditation, and visualization can be useful in creating a frame of reference for maintaining a healthy mindset: focus, emotion, discipline, and flexibility.

We establish steps to healing by identifying issues, engaging in self-honesty (without judgement), and developing an intention to heal (speak out, write, meditate). Karen Frazier reminds us to celebrate our positives in life, assess our readiness to let go, and embrace gratitude in our efforts to work through our loss and healing (33). Everyone is responsible for what happens in their life, but that doesn't mean that they are to blame for it. All healing is self-healing, and all self-healing starts with the intent to change.

In the process of alleviating our pain, suffering takes our heart to places it has never been before. Often when we suffer, we feel helpless and powerless while in the throes of happenings that we can't control. The pain causes us to lose motivation and to become dispirited, joyless, hopeless, and drained of meaning. This is not to imply that suffering is necessary to find meaning; finding meaning is possible in spite of unavoidable pain. Finding meaning in suffering characterizes our unique potential in humanity to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph of human achievement. It provides an opportunity to transcend our own situation by facing a burden with dignity and purpose. Meaningfulness can ward off our suffering by creating something, having a unique experience or relationship after a devastating loss. For example, authors produce meaningful works, scientists discover treatments to cure disease, or a retiree may get involved with hobbies that may be beneficial to his or her community: a flower patch, vegetable garden, or coaching a game of Bocce. In life, if there is meaning in healing, it is unconditional meaning where neither living nor loss can detract from it.

Neimeyer, in his *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, establishes the need for a relearning of the world in the process of healing and recovery from grief and loss. Emotionally, we relearn to temper the pain of suffering. Psychologically, we renew our confidence, self-esteem, and self-identity. Socially, we reconfigure our interactions with others; "We even relearn our very selves, our character, histories, and roles and identities" (Attig, "Relearning the World" 41). This relearning is an ongoing process that Lewis discovered after the loss of his wife to cancer: "For in grief, nothing stays put. One keeps on emerging from a phase but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. . . . The same leg is cut off time after time" (Lewis 57). Lewis' journaling illustrated his personal transformations rooted in life and his relationship to it. It helped him to relearn how much his wife, Joy, meant to him and to gain a critical perspective on reality and the human condition of resilience. He allowed himself to feel his loss in the present moment. He faced it, embraced it, and remained mindful of it. He eventually learned to factor relearning into his everyday life. After all devastation and loss, the only thing left is love.

Dossey taught us lessons on love and its usefulness in the healing process. *Healing Beyond the Body* gave us a different perspective of healing than the usual context taught in medical schools. He purports that healing has something to do with consciousness; mindfulness is a useful alternative to medicine. He goes a step further to make a declaration, "love is useful in healing for it alleviates pain and suffering" (Dossey 259). Love is a way of providing evidence of who we are by revealing our hidden identity—that in some sense we are empathetic, altruistic, and generous. As the most

prominent motivating experience in human existence, love is the acknowledgement of deep feelings and of powerful emotions and impulses.

The teachings of Viktor Frankl introduce us to another lesson on healing through his development of Logotherapy which literally translates to “healing through meaning” (Frankl, *The Will to Meaning* XVIII). He encourages us to seek love along with beauty, justice, and a cause greater than oneself. He and Dossey agree that love allows us to see uniqueness and essential traits in each individual. However, meanings in life and love may differ from person to person, day to day. According to Frankl, another area in our search for healing is the pursuit of happiness. Happiness is not a destination at which to arrive but a means in a continual journey to a peaceful resolve of meaning and love. Cautiously, we are warned to “search for meaning as opposed to searching for happiness.” His paradoxical secret lies in “finding happiness in meaning by not pursuing it. For the pursuit of happiness can result in disappointment “(Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* 140). Those instructions urge us to let go of looking for happiness and search for meaning instead. People’s efforts toward healing are more effective to the extent that they are concerned with truth and comparable actions in behaviors that are honest. For true meaning is unconditional meaning.

Narrative/Storytelling as an Inquiry for Healing

In an attempt to heal from loss, the suffering is prerequisite to our relearning a world that consists of a culmination of elements not easy to unravel or comprehend. Relearning involves “simultaneously finding and making meaning on multiple levels of understanding” (Attig, “Relearning the World” 33). There is an interplay of meaning making and meaning finding in the effort to bring new meaning into existence. Those we

love die; we embark on a different journey of the heart by transferring from loving in presence to loving in absence. Neimeyer's studies in *Meaning Reconstruction* provide research findings by which we may become better able to contend with the challenge of relearning our worlds and coming to a new wholeness in our lives.

On the journey to healing, we continue with the lasting connections in our hearts, and with open hearts, we embrace a wonderful life issuing in a new wholeness inside ourselves. "Time heals" is a phrase that attempts to cast loss in a positive light (Attig *How We Grieve* 192). But it is what one does with that time that creates a path to healing. Both Attig and Tarockona argue that positive aspects of loss come about as a result of a process of relearning and reconnecting in a new way: "Life's most painful losses can present an opportunity for personal growth by transcending life's losses" (Attig *How We Grieve* 195). Loss leaves in its wake positive outcomes that proceed into healing the wounded.

It has long been recognized by social scientists like Neimeyer and Attig that narrative/storytelling as a form of inquiry is a dynamic process in the construction of meaning; for it is in language that meaning is constructed. Healing is achieved when the narrator can tell a story of loss that gives meaning to the loss and purpose to his or her life: "Regaining a balance between the extremes of being overwhelmed by emotions related to loss and avoiding feelings that become just too painful to except involve the process of healing" (Davis 247). Healing emotional problems, life crises, grief, personal growth, relationships, and spiritual growth are not inherently indicative of a cure but can mean a way to greatly improve one's life—getting better in the broadest sense to return to a new wholeness.

Even though the term *bibliotherapy* was not coined until 1916, the practice of using storytelling and reading for the purpose of healing dates back to ancient times (Crothers 295). Reading offers an escape into a parallel world; the ability to distance one's self from one's own circumstances by seeing them from without, suffered by someone else. Books enable us to enter and explore a world inside ourselves, allowing feelings to be externalized by engaging with a character. Reading has a way of pushing pain away into places where it no longer seems important in the immediate moment. The oldest known library motto in the world translates to: "the house of healing for the soul" (Lutz 36). The very idea that books can make us emotionally, psychologically, and even physically better pre-dates the very terminology that gives validity to the effects of literary resiliency.

According to F. R. Leavis, Matthew Arnold argued that great literature produces "the best that has been thought and written in all the world. Great literature makes us morally better by awakening 'our own best self'" (Leavis 259). That stance has come under intense scrutiny in light of the fact that some books have documented horrific worldwide acts of mass killings, war crimes, and other inhumane treatment. Famously civil and well-read persons have proven capable of some the most barbarous acts against humanity. For instance, John Newton, born of Evangelical parents, became known as a gifted author of prose and music. Newton converted to Christianity while he captained slave ships and engaged in the lucrative but brutal African Slave Trade during the Middle Passage (Benge and Benge 109–117). It is a fact that books don't always positively affect lives, but literature's power to heal and console outweighs its power to do harm.

Some of the most convincing arguments of the effectiveness of reading literature come from writers themselves. McCracken and Semel took a metaphorical journey to find themselves in life experiences through the eyes of other writers. In their book, *A Broken Heart Still Beats*, they compile the works of some of the most well-known writers and thinker, past and present, including Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), William Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Eric Clapton. These authors are just a few of those who had suffered experiences of loss and shared with other who may have been suffering in hopes that articulating their chaos might possibly help others to see that they, too, can eventually feel whole again. McCracken and Semel turned to writers of selected literature who had traversed many roads of loss before them and who had offered the voices of many which echoed pain, despair, and anger. The two authors found it to be most rewarding to read the thoughts of genuine writers of their craft. Through their literary expressions, they reminded us of the magnificence of humanity—though aggrieved, we can still enjoy a fresh honeysuckle breeze, the cadence of a sudden drench of raindrops, or the click clack of an oncoming freight train. By reading the works of others, they gained the wanted inspiration, the desired permission to hope, and the validation of their feelings they so craved. Each writer, having suffered a loss, brought a powerful authenticity to the collection of literary forms. Writers like Mark Twain, Robert Frost, and Anne Morrow Lindberg used their writing craft to struggle with and become reconciled with their permanent wounds. To know that these authors also survived and remained productive was a revelation. McCracken confesses, “In the midst of these authors, I can’t say I can’t survive” (McCracken and Semel xxiii). Losing possessions in a flood, losing societal esteem, or losing a scholarship is a loss, but not tragic. After a

great loss, the wounds never heal, the heart is always broken. The pain never really goes away, but neither does love. Along this journey, some degree of healing takes place.

As McCracken and Semel found, channeling grief into reading and writing literature could be one of the most helpful steps in the healing process. McCracken's search for great literature put her in conversation with other wounded souls (262). What better way to see what lies ahead on the journey to recovery than to meet those on their way back from theirs? Semel was led to search for great literature while navigating her own grief. She gained a new perspective and "everyday occurrences became a dot on the landscape. To heal at all, she had to adjust her views as such" (263). This level of thinking caused her to surmise, "You have to give up the life you have planned to find the life that is waiting for you" (264).

The experiences of grieving have existed for as long as humanity. Expressions of grief in the arts date back to the Paleolithic cave paintings, and they are evident in ritual chants, music, and dance across all cultures. Throughout the use of artistic exploration, we are urged into a new space, a new meaning, and a new dimension that helps us to become whole and healed. The arts provide innovative directions to healing using one's own creativity to make inroads to healing as the artist/healer to transform suffering from darkness into a new light. The authors of *Healing with the Arts*, Michael Samuel and Mary Lane, shared their healing journey by making use of the arts as a medium. Together their art and healing work helped them to realize their wholeness as they recreated themselves from their heart and soul and restored the nature of their love and creativity.

Creativity has been found to provide connectivity to the self. We can heal by simply being in a creative moment and allowing our thoughts, feelings, and body to

express what needs to be healed. We have the ability to create ourselves, our world, our friendships, our home, and even our bodies. In the same way, we are able to create love with our words, our thoughts, and our actions. Just as everyone is a healer, everyone has an inner artist. Creating art is an attempt to symbolize a deeply emotional experience, share it with others, affirm life-sustaining bonds and meanings, and find our places in a changed world. As we heal what is wounded inside, we become restored to wholeness again, "But this inner healing requires speaking from the heart and being able to authentically listen to its voice" (Samuels and Lane 162).

Throughout the variety of expressive arts, artists are able to be heard and to describe their situations in ways that are "beyond words" (Heath 53). The arts reach outside the constraints of cognitive language and into the figurative, musical performative, and visual vocabularies. This is not to disparage words and their meanings as an integral pathway by which to communicate our deepest emotions but to also comparatively allow for the inclusion of other modes of expressive modalities of relief in the healing process. Empowered through the act of creating lies an opportunity to engage in awakening from a silence that had defied verbalization. Creativity offers a chance for reflection and reconnection with one's deepest healing needs.

Creativity enables us to enter a world of imagination that brings about a meaningful change in our sense of the world and of the self, leading to an "aesthetic response, an appreciation for beauty whereby one perceives the world as pleasing and meaningful" (Thompson and Neimeyer 17). Despite our aggrieved states, we can always bring beauty into being—we respond to what is given and shape it so that we experience an aesthetic awareness. The beauty that ushers forth may not always be pleasant; it may

be what Neimeyer refers to as “terrible beauty” (as in the painting of Picasso’s *Guernica*) but nevertheless, we may feel its essential rightness as a response to pain. In Chapter 4, *Guernica* is referenced for its depiction of the atrocities of war. The painting is renowned worldwide as a powerfully anti-war artwork that expresses the artist’s outrage of human images of suffering (*Guernica: Testimony of War, 1937*). The completed work resulted in an aesthetically valued painting that touches the inner soul more deeply than any verbal counterpart does. Yet, in the representation of small areas of light lies the symbolic sense of hope.

Art holds a special place in our encounter with loss because it can transcend time and circumstance. The arts demand a willingness to surrender to the unknown and then trust in the process toward healing. In *The Other Side of Sadness* Bonanno presents and interprets his research to inform us that we as human beings are “wired” to cope well with loss “through a set of in-born psychological process that helps us to adjust to our circumstances in loss and healing” (Bonanno 198).

We learn to make sense out of our loss, perhaps by seeking to understand why it happened, what it means for us, and how it fits into a larger context of our lives. Even though there may be no clear-cut theme or description that might account for one’s resilience, customarily people are able spring back in the face of life’s most horrific events. Of course, not everyone manages as well. But resilience is one great human capacity that helps us to thrive when having to deal with adversity. For instance, one Modernist painter, Paul Klee, created artistic illustrations of his thoughts while confronting his own death, trauma, loss, and mourning at intervals in his life. In search of symbolic representations, for Klee, those paintings allowed him to explore a new visual

language by experimenting with innovative materials, a totally new sense of color, and abstract forms (Chipp 182). The paintings in later life produced a new sense of self and a new reality. In fact, Klee created the majority of his works in the last five months of his life, counteracting the division between "the threatening reality of his impending death and the fantasy of immortality" (Kattan 46). He incorporated those memories into paintings. One painting, titled *Death and Fire 1940*, illustrated Klee's heavy burdensome lines, his helplessness, and seeming indifference to life and death.

A quote from one of his diary entries sent to his wife gives a glimpse into another example of fraught emotion. It translates to: "I create in order not to cry, this is the last and the first reason" (Kattan 41). For Klee, artistic expression was not only a lifeline; it was also a way to reconsider life or even to hold off his death. He had the ability to connect his own personal story and creative renditions in the process transformational healing.

At the core of human existence are our experiences with love and loss. The depths of our loss may be predicated upon the depths of our love. Artistic expressions possess the potential for healing growth as they embody the usefulness of recovery, whether we employ the language arts, fine arts, or performing arts. The arts include any modality that releases our creativity— beauty, love, or light—into our lives. There is something to be gained even from our darker moments. The therapeutic properties in the arts are rich in imaginative strategies that are essential for recovery in the meaningfulness of self-expression that nourishes our minds, our lives, and our hopes. Human beings have a strong desire to feel better. Being able to exhibit those feelings artistically helps a person to feel better. Some modes of representation allow for a communication that appears to

be beyond words. For example, the act of singing is powerful because it unites body, mind, spirit and connects the self and others. Music paves the way for us to tune into ourselves and call forth deeply personal, emotional stories and meanings related to our losses.

Storytelling influences how we make meaning of our losses, perceive ourselves and others, and look forward to interpretations of our future. Examples of the arts with people experiencing loss, grief, and healing are evidenced in all civilizations, faith communities, and human developmental stages from infancy through later adulthood.

Creativity offers an experience of reflection and engagement with our deepest needs to heal inventing a connectedness to the self. The creative process releases us from our pain and enhances our views of humanness and understanding. Creativity and its implications for a new self-narrative of meaning after traumatic loss merit our awareness as a compassionate healing modality.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

An understanding of the events that happen in our lives is not something we suddenly discover over time but is manifested in moments that we self-define in every segment of our lives. Every human condition has something in common. As a result, there are also meanings which are shared by all humans across societies, cultures, and even more throughout the world. The meanings in life, as universal as they be, differ from person to person, day to day, moment to moment. As global as grieving may be, we are able to make sense of the meanings we attach to it relative to our own experiences. The specificity of meaning varies from person to person in the context of their given situation. Meaning-making characterizes the uniqueness of the potential of our humanity. The goal of moving on after trauma or loss is to learn what matters to that particular person and for that person to define the meaning of it. Learning to look at loss, we are really learning to see much more about the finer details of life. Hopefully, we grow from our losses and from the losses of others. In concert, we learn from loss, and we teach through loss. By gaining an awareness of the cries of others, we hear our own internal cries, frame them, control them, and as a result feel less strained.

We respect our losses and the losses of others, knowing that there is healing at the core of them, not apart from them, a healing that transcends culture. For the world is much more than what can be seen, touched, or measured. Therein lies a consciousness of a deeper spiritual meaning. Contrarily, to suffer a loss is in no way the only formula by which to find meaning. Despite inevitable loss, some degree of comfort and understanding can be achieved.

In response to any process of healing, careful consideration must address the mosaic of definitive characteristics. In learning to navigate the unsettling waters of how to absorb and retain all we need to know in order to heal the self and others, our center of attention must revolve around the concerns of race, religion, gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, and numerous other entities of inclusivity.

Our attitudes, our focus, and our determination affect how we perceive our grief in the context of hopefulness, solace, and meaning. Whether in suffering our losses or celebrating our joys, there is meaning in the transformational adjustments in the human condition. Without question, there is profound meaning in every activity that we face in our decision-making, be it tragedy or triumph.

The scholars, authors, and artists presented in this dissertation not only were in conversation in their cognitive knowledge concerning the understanding of the healing process but also collaborated in the affect domain as well as the heart in order to balance wisdom and compassion. Understanding our differences may come from our heads, but our common humanity originates in our hearts. Acts of compassion remind us of the magnificence of humankind. Though aggrieved, we can still enjoy an orange sunset or a sunny shower. The mind and the heart work hand in hand to comfort us in our most trying times. We count on the heart in trust to direct each of our steps in hopes that every emotionally painful experience would be replaced with relief, recovery, and inspiration.

Select literature provides the reader with the pleasure of escape into a parallel world along with the ability to distance oneself from their own circumstances by observing from without, suffered by someone else, and gathered up neatly in a worked-out plot. This scenario allows the reader to become both the participant and the witness in

story. The power of literature has the capacity to take us to places not yet imagined but which once seen, we never forget. Literature offers an orderliness that shields against disorder, lack of control, and inner chaos. Lewis shared with his readers that his motivation for writing was “to quiet the chaos in his mind and replace it with orderliness” (10). Reading and writing can both have a reciprocal effect. In the presence of great literature, the experience can convey a feeling of having the author’s hand on your shoulder, directing you to an interpretation in the context of your own set of specific circumstances.

Research, literature, and art are all avenues to healing in the midst of woundedness, loss, and grief. Our mindfulness directs our will to heal in looking to the future and reflecting on the past in search of meanings in our life existence—our purpose. Our purpose in life is not to so much to grieve our losses but to be able to create a way of thinking to move beyond our sorrow into a meaningful future, both immediate and long term.

The scholarly insights presented within these chapters have the potential to lead to a new or renewed societal understanding of grief and loss, one that acknowledges and recognizes loss in all of its manifestations. The possibilities of resiliency do not automatically assume that everything will be fully resolved or that everyone reaches a state of closure. Resiliency, recovery, or renewed pursuits create veins of hopefulness on a journey of life’s readjustments. Times of grief, celebration, despair, or jubilation all strike a chord with nearly every one of us. We are able to bear witness to our stories and the stories of others, whether they are uncomfortable, embarrassing, or endearing. Those stories provide a platform for gaining knowledge of ourselves and others by which

wisdom can come to fruition. It is in the telling and retelling of stories of all people that we heal ourselves and the world.

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