

Please contact The Rev. Maureen Doherty, Grief Support Facilitator, Phone: 319-505-3048  
email: ContinuousCare@LockeFuneralHome.com

All Sessions are free and open to the public.

June 4, 11, 18, 25

**Grief Support Thursdays on ZOOM**  
TIME: 5:30 p.m. DATES: May 14, 21, 28

For ZOOM meeting link and information

Please call us at 319-233-6138 or 319-233-3146

**Weekly Meetings:**

Put these dates on your calendar!  
**Continuous Care ZOOM**

Want to be on our mailing list?  
Give us a call, and we can add you to our  
quarterly newsletter list.



# THE CARE COURIER



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## “Grief Support in a Most Complex Time”

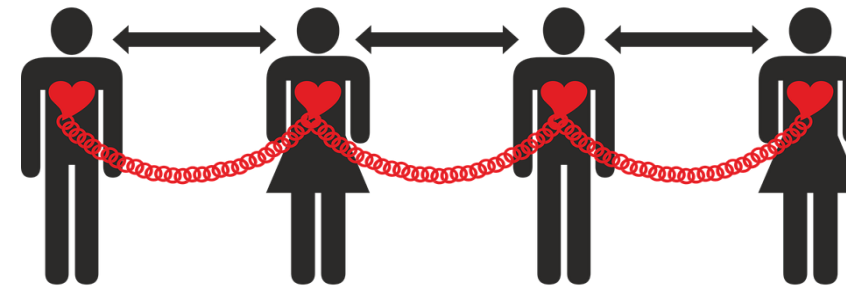
-The Rev. Maureen Doherty, Grief Support Facilitator

How often do we say, “the world has changed since we last connected with you?” Truly, that is the case now. We did not send out a “Courier” in March because the COVID-19 pandemic had flipped the way we were all going about day to day business so much. The “flips,” the “unknowns” continue and we have no idea how long this will last. For each of you who have lost loved ones this time has been unimaginable. Even though you may have gotten used to being alone, this time has complicated that; being alone in the past did not mean never going out, not seeing family, not being able to gather with friends for dinner, and not being able to join others in our Grief Support Group. Now, everyone is learning new ways going forward, sometimes bigger steps backwards, some are finding new interests. Some of you may be helping families or suddenly working from home and being teachers, leaving you little time to ponder your loss and yet thankful for arms around you. Some wonder what is next after getting up each day? We say often, “the grief journey is not a journey to walk alone.” We want you to know that we are with you in whatever way we can be to support you at this time.

As I write this, I know that some of you who are reading have the grief of not being able to be with loved ones at the time of their death weighing heavily on your heart. Funerals were not a gathering of friends and family; they were a time for a few to gather to say farewell. Your time now is alone in ways we did not imagine. Your experiences will be a great support to others and you will teach us.

As you begin each day it is critical that you ask yourself how you can “get through” this time of grief in a way that you stay physically, mentally and spiritually healthy. Some are learning new computer skills, some finding themselves ZOOMing into this group and that group, and some are finding that this “old thing” called the telephone can be a friend! It is critical that you find a way to connect with one or more people who will listen to you, who will walk with you and who will be with you in whatever way possible when you need a human presence.

(continues on page 2)



## Token Loss

To the dragon  
any loss is  
total. His rest  
is disrupted  
if a single  
jewel encrusted  
goblet has  
been stolen.  
The circle  
of himself  
in the nest  
of his gold  
has been  
broken. No  
loss is token.

by Kay Ryan

## In This Issue

- “Grief Support in a Most Complex Time”
- “If You Are The Cook” from [Tear Soup](#)
- “Tell Me How To Grieve”
- Dates for Continuous Care ZOOM meetings

We are getting our Grief Support Group back together again, yes ZOOMing! We felt that for each of you, being able to share where you are in your journey with others who have lost loved ones is critical and we cannot just stop. So, while sitting at a screen is not the same as gathering in our room at Kimball Ridge, it is a time where you can be together, you can be heard, you can laugh, cry, scream and be glad to have been with others who get where you are. The directions for our gatherings are on the back of this Courier. Please call us and give us your email so that we can connect.

As you journey there are things that come up constantly and things that you need to be mindful of. In the delightful book [Tear Soup, A Recipe for Healing After Loss](#), by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck Deklyen, Grandma places you in the kitchen to ponder ingredients. You might be there alone, you might be a man finding your way around the kitchen. You might be a child cooking alone or a friend who has come to join you in cooking. Today we invite you “to be the cook.” Follow Grandma as she mixes the pot. As you are able to mix the soup know that you are healing; you are going forward. If you would like more info on cooking with Grandma, let us know.

### If You Are The Cook

Excerpt from page 48, [Tear Soup, A Recipe for Healing After Loss](#), by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck Deklyen:

- This is your grief—no one else’s. Your friends can’t feel your loss in the same way. It will not affect their life the way it affects yours. And you may resent them for that.

- At first you may think dying would be preferable to having to go through this pain. Just try to stay alive. Sudden mood swings are normal. You may suddenly be unreasonable and short.

- Try your best to educate your friends about what you need and how they can help. Be as honest as you can be about how you are feeling.

- Don’t give up on your friends if they let you down. But if they continue to be insensitive to your grief you may need to distance yourself for a while until you get stronger.

- At first you will probably want to talk to as many people as possible, but after a month or so, find one or two people whom you can count on for the long haul to just be there and listen when you need to talk.

- Write your thoughts in a journal. It will help you to process and also to remember the new insights you are learning.

- Consider attending a support group. Go at least three times before deciding if it is helpful to you.

- Be open to counseling.

- Exercise, sleep, drink plenty of fluids, and eat a well balanced diet.

- Pamper yourself. Take bubble baths. Get a massage.

- Try not to compare your grief with another’s. You don’t earn points for having a more painful experience than someone else has. And you won’t feel less grief if someone else’s loss is worse.



- You deserve to feel happy again. Being happy doesn’t mean you forget. Learn to be grateful for the good days.

- Don’t be too hard on yourself.

- Long after everyone else has forgotten your loss, you will continue to remember. Learn to be content with your private memories. ▪

### The Window

Your body is away from me  
but there is a window open  
from my heart to yours.  
From this window, like the moon  
I keep sending news secretly.

by Rumi

### “Tell Me How to Grieve” Thoughts on Leaning on Ceremony After a Death During the Pandemic by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

This pandemic is replete with tragedy, but one Colorado story not far from my home has been weighing on my heart.

In the Huffington Post on May 7, 2020, Mary Hagen Roberts published an essay about the death of her precious daughter, Laura, who had just turned 33. Laura died not of COVID-19 but of cancer. Her death came much faster than they expected. In early April, the stomach cancer had spread to Laura’s lungs, but because her symptoms mimicked those of the novel coronavirus, she was given a presumptive COVID-19 diagnosis and hospitalized. For a time, she was alone, isolated from her fiancé, Brett, her mother, and even the hospital staff.

Laura was discharged from the hospital on Easter Sunday. But she didn’t want Mary, who is in her 60s and has Addison’s disease, to leave the shelter of her home and risk contracting coronavirus. The “damn virus,” as Mary calls it, kept them apart.

And then a bronchoscopy revealed that Laura had perhaps just a month left to live. Despite the threat of the virus, Mary packed a bag and on April 23rd got in the car to drive the four hours to Laura’s home. Tragically, Laura died that day, minutes before Mary arrived.

“I have no idea how to carry on now that she is gone or what to do with my unbearable sorrow,” Mary writes. “Tell me how to grieve when we are not permitted to have a funeral or memorial service, when the precious body of my child disappears into the back of a repurposed funeral home minivan, never to be seen again. I want the rituals of mourning that our society—that I—have learned to rely on to process grief.”

What a tragic, tragic situation. Grief is always difficult and complicated, but Mary is suffering heightened grief complications because of the pandemic restrictions. My heart aches for her. Not only did her child die, which as a longtime grief counselor and parent I know to be among the most excruciating of life experiences, but she and Laura’s other loved ones have been unable to hold a funeral. They have been prevented from adequately honoring Laura, and they have been unable to gather. They remain separated from each other, isolated silos of grief, without the comfort of mutual

support.

Mary is wise. Her comments convey her understanding that funerals are essential because they help us meet our mourning needs. Funerals help us acknowledge and accept the reality of a death, share memories, convert our relationship with the person who died from one of presence to one of memory, give and receive social support, express our grief out loud, consider the meaning of life and death, and help us start to think about how eventually to live life forward with meaning and purpose.

Despite the common misconception, funerals are not rites of closure, because grief is lifelong. Rather, they are rites of initiation. They set us on a good grief path. And, as hundreds of grieving families in myriad complicated loss situations have taught me over the decades, it often feels impossible to embark on the grief journey in situations in which the mourners couldn’t be by the dying person’s side, spend adequate time with the body after the death, or hold the funeral they needed.

I often say that when words are inadequate, especially after a traumatic loss, it’s time to lean on ceremony. Ceremony provides a structure that holds us up. So without a funeral, what are Mary and the hundreds of thousands of families who have lost or will lose a loved one during the pandemic, regardless of cause of death, supposed to do?

First, I would suggest that if you find yourself in this heartbreaking circumstance, bear in mind that any ritual is better than no ritual. Spending even a little private time with the body helps mourners acknowledge the reality of the death and begin to make

the arduous transition from having a relationship of presence with the person who died to one of memory. And holding any kind of immediate ceremony is helpful, even if it’s online or an intimate graveside committal.

But after the immediate ceremony options, which I agree are woefully limited and inadequate right now, ceremony can still be called upon to provide that necessary support. I don’t know Mary or Brett. I didn’t know Laura. I would never presume to tell Mary—or anyone—how to grieve and mourn. Each person’s grief is always unique, and each person is always the only expert of their own grief.

But I do understand, as Mary does, that grief rituals help us survive what would otherwise be unsurvivable. And I also know that it’s never too late to have a ceremony—and that especially in challenging loss situations, it’s often helpful to have multiple ceremonies.

### Three Ceremonies to Foster Healing

I often recommend that families affected by traumatic death hold three additional ceremonies in the months after the death, spaced out over a period of about two years.

In this pandemic situation, I recommend a simple candle-lighting ceremony in your home as the first ceremony. Simply gather together with the members of your household and invite a few other primary mourners who have been sheltering in place if it’s safe to do so. Gather around a table on which you’ve placed photos and memorabilia of the person who died. You might begin your ceremony with a piece of music and read one or two short prayers or poems. Each guest can hold a small candle and light it as they share a memory or thought. A prayer, song, or piece of music makes a good close.

There are no set rules. Your ceremony can be religious or secular, in keeping with your beliefs. As long as the

ceremony helps you explore all of the healing functions of the funeral, it will help you embark on your journey.

Second, I invite you to have a simple gathering as soon as it is safe to do so. Sometimes a significant date makes sense, such as the birthday of your loved one or the anniversary of the death. You might think of this as a memorial service, and even if you had some type of small funeral or online ceremony shortly after the death, you still have the right to plan and hold this type of in-person gathering.

The third ceremony is often best held somewhere between 18 and 24 months after the death, or about a year after the second ceremony. I often recommend a gathering at the cemetery, cremation garden, or final resting place. Again, readings, music, and memory-sharing turn an informal gathering into a meaningful ritual. Redosing yourself at this point with the purposes of the funeral—reality, recall, support, expression, meaning, and transcendence—is a powerful healing elixir.

### When grief becomes mourning

Humans have held funeral ceremonies since the beginning of time because only ritual feels up to the task. The death of a loved one is a life-transforming event, and ritual sacredly acknowledges that significance.

What’s more, ceremony gives us something to do with our grief. It puts our inner thoughts and feelings—in other words, our grief—into motion. It helps us express ourselves in the company of others who care about us. It helps us mourn, which is the necessary outward expression of our inner grief. “I have no idea how to carry on. . . or what to do with my unbearable sorrow,” writes Mary. Denied the structure of ritual, she understandably does not know what to do with her grief.

In addition to the repeated use of ceremony (which can even be turned to informally, on a regular basis, in the form of personal daily grief rituals at home or in nearby locations), I humbly suggest that any form of outward mourning helps, over time, to reconcile grief. Talking to good listeners, participating in a support group, journaling, crying, seeing a counselor, putting together memory books or boxes, visiting the final resting place, and other mourning activities help us make the painful but necessary transition to life before a death to life after a death.

Our grief is our love in a new context, and like our love, sharing it and expressing it in ways we find comforting or meaningful—as much as and as often as it tugs at us—one day at a time—makes all the difference. I realize that being unable to physically gather and cry with others hampers some facets of this expression at the moment, so for now, Zoom gatherings and phone calls are the best alternatives we have.

I offer my sincere condolences to Mary and her family as they navigate this terrible time, as well as all other grieving families struggling with similar limitations during the pandemic. I hope you find ways to mourn openly, deeply, authentically as well as lean on ceremony now and in the months to come. Godspeed.

