



# Love in Grief

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Love and fear are often described as opposites, which may not even be true.

But some kinds of love and kindness do feel bigger and more capable than the isolation and distress that naturally come with our fear.

Mourning a death (or several deaths) allows for expressions of love and remembrance that can take many forms, including the pain of wild sorrow and the uplift of gratitude and warm memories.

This edition of 'Love in Grief' offers a variety of voices and resources that may help expand your capacity to notice love in your own living and grieving.

Kelli Anderson begins our storytelling on page 2, with the messiness of grief and the courage required to be with loss.

New artwork from Yukon illustrator Tanya Handley is featured as part of an article on page 3, describing how it's normal and healthy to talk with our loved ones after they die.

A piece on page 4 about kinds of love names different flavours of love that people experience; it can help to have more words, to more precisely recognize and name our losses.

We share research about the "taboo" mixture of sexuality and grief with an article on memories after the death of an intimate partner and the common experience of sexual reminiscing.

Mark Callan shares his story of losing a boyhood hero and the love in that loss.

On page 7, Amy Garcia-Baker describes her experience at her father's

funeral, and what she learned as a grief counsellor with Hospice Yukon.

Writing by Janie Brown from the wonderful Callanish community of people impacted by cancer shares her story of why the "stages of grief" didn't work for her, and what she found instead.

Anne Macaire offers beautiful reflections on her time as a grief counsellor and her own experience of grief when her husband of 40 years unexpectedly died in an accident.

Book ideas and poems and other resources also fill these pages. May you find something here that warms you.

*Heather Finton is Hospice Yukon's Communications Coordinator*

THIS IS SHOWING UP EVERY DAY



THIS IS ALSO SHOWING UP EVERY DAY



## *Closeted Grief*

When grief is new and fresh, when it is still raw and torn and beating in your chest, it is too big to fit neatly in the space you have. Your closet doors will be open, unable to hold back the messiness. Your grief will spool out onto the floor and sit there, exposed. Present at every moment.

You cohabitate with the grief, tiptoeing its perimeter, sopping up the puddles when they start to reach the soft fabric of the carpet. You contemplate putting down a few drop cloths.

In your vulnerability you may invite someone in while your closet is in disarray. This person might not have the capacity to stand in this mess with you. They may tell you briskly to get your shit together. They, of course, are responding to their own feelings of shame. Their grief is kept in the crawlspace or the attic or buried under the shed out back. Your openness reveals all their closed spots.

A trusted friend may come along; showing up unannounced with wine or baked goods. They simply sit next to you on the floor in front of your wobbly towers. No suggestions of how to organize or rearrange. They hold vigil with you. They may reach out to pluck an item off your pile. Turning it over tenderly in their hands.

It is a tiny bundle, the weight is the same as the baby you never got to take home. Your friend will lift this bundle. Caress it against their cheek. Locking eyes with you they whisper, "I have one just like this." That statement will release all the shame you had tied up with this bundle. You will finally be able to sit it neatly on a shelf.

A therapist - a professional closet organizer - can provide support as you do the work of rearranging. Offering techniques to clear out the items your grief clings to - the rage, the sleepless nights, the heaviness. They know how to stack your boxes on a secure foundation to prevent topples. "Everyone has a closet like this," they assure you.

Over weeks and months, your grief recedes and shrinks. At the same time your closet grows and shifts to make space for your pain. This process can be agonizingly slow; at first you don't take notice. You begin to pick up the pieces. You do the hard work of examining the fragments and filing away what you can. You can get the doors latched and as time passes you only experience grief when a pile of boxes, that you had thought secure, unexpectedly falls over and requires immediate attention.

Eventually, with time, you will be able to open that closet and you will find that items are not the way you left them. The closet that holds your grief also holds your most tender moments of love, like the memory of your grandmother's soft skin and the smell of her house on a Sunday afternoon.

All grief flows back to love.



*Kelli Anderson is a Yukon writer.*

*You can find more of her writing on*

*Substack <https://liminalspaceproject.substack.com/>*

## *It's normal to talk with people after they die*

There's a name for something that many of us do naturally after a loved one dies... we find simple ways – rituals, actually – to stay connected. It's a healthy thing to do.

In grief theory, these healthy habits are called “continuing bonds” and they help us continue our relationship with our loved one even after they are gone.

The truth is, we don't ever need to ‘move on’ or ‘let go’. Integrating a loss, and finding a new way to stay connected to someone we have loved is something we will do for the rest of our lives.

Figuring out what our new relationship with them can look like may help us move with a little more ease in our dance with some of the more difficult feelings of grief.

Some examples of how these loving bonds can be strengthened include talking to their photograph, wearing their clothing, listening to a song that brings back memories, making their favourite meal.

We may choose to light a candle at the same time each day for a while, or tell them our worries in hopes of imagining their advice.

At Hospice Yukon, we hear many stories of people who sound a little embarrassed but say “it may sound crazy, but when I \_\_\_\_\_ (*fill in the blank!*), I feel like they are nearby.”

These moments are completely normal and they help us stay connected to love.



*Image created for Hospice Yukon by artist Tanya Handley*

Some people tell us stories of vivid dreams where their loved one communicates. Others notice wildlife, like a bird or a deer that arrives at “just the right moment” to convey a sense of their presence.

Continuing bonds can also be something that we create by choice, such as deciding to take a weekly walk to a place we enjoyed together, or choosing to say goodnight to their photo.

These choices can also give us some sense of control at a time when life can feel very uncertain.

By creating continuing bonds in our lives, we may come to learn that:

- Grief is ongoing (it doesn't end)
- It's normal and healthy to stay connected with our loved ones
- Our unique little habits can help us cope with our grief.

People die, but love continues on.

## Kinds of Love

Sure, grief is love. But sometimes grief is not love. Sometimes it is *the absence* of love. Sometimes it is the love we craved from a parent that never came. Sometimes it is the love we put into another person and never received in return.

Love sounds so singular. And yet nothing about love (nor grief) feels singular. They both feel expansive, layered, and complex.

In Greek literature, there are several different words that are translated as "love" in English. It feels hard to reflect on love without considering these types of love.

Some of the most famous are:

**Eros** - This is the love of desire, sexual passion, and lust. Eros is associated with intense physical attraction (it's the route of the word 'erotic', which you can tuck away for trivia night).

**Philia** - This is the love of friendship. It is rooted in deep affection, loyalty, care, respect, and trust. Though often associated with just platonic friendships, philia isn't limited to non-sexual and non-romantic relationships.

**Pragma** - This is a mature love, one that is often tied to duty, reason, and shared goals. Though long-standing romantic relationships are what often first come to mind, pragma is not limited to romantic partnerships, Pragma is essential within families and very close friendships. It involves deep understanding and acceptance of the other person, with their flaws and imperfections.

**Ludus** - This is a carefree, immature, and playful love. It is at the other end of the spectrum from pragma. It is a love that is early and flirty.

**Storge** - This is devoted family love. It is sometimes described as the natural and instinctual love that exists between family members, like a parent and a child. This type

of love can be one-sided, with one person feeling a greater sense of care or duty than the other.

**Agape** - This is universal or unconditional love. It is the love that roots altruism and selflessness. It is the love that underpins a healthy society, as it describes care and concern we have for others, even if they are not directly connected to us.

**Philautia** - This is self-love but not vanity or ego. It is closer to self-esteem and self-acceptance. It is the love that means extending the same care and compassion to ourselves that we would for someone else.



### So Is Grief Love?

With the incredible nuance of the ancient Greek words for love, I get closer to finding the statement 'grief is love' a little bit more complete. Because all these loves, they are enormous. They define us. And when we grieve, it isn't just that our love for the person has no where to go, but these other loves are impacted

Our agape can suddenly erode when the world feels unfair or unjust, when we start feeling resentful of friends and strangers. Our philautia takes a hit because sometimes the person we lost was who helped us create and build our self-love, learning to see and appreciate ourselves through their eyes, their love, and their support. We can worry and wonder if it will exist without them.

Even with all these words for love, there is still one more I find myself reaching for.

I want a word for **the love you only find in loss**. It is the love for a person that we just couldn't possibly have known or understood while they were still here. It is only through their absence that we find out just how deep and strong it is.

- Adapted from *The Many Types of Love and Loss* at [www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)

## *Exploring intimacy, memory and grief after the loss of a partner*

Even the most beautiful love stories end.

And often, they end with one partner left behind and grieving.

It's one of the most private and least discussed aspects of grief: sexuality after the death of a romantic partner.

A new study in the *Journal of Sex Research* examines how bereaved individuals maintain intimate connections with deceased partners through memory.

Death is already a difficult topic, and sexuality carries its own taboos.

Continuing bonds, a grief theory that suggests emotional connections with the deceased often persist through memory and reflection, is at the centre of the research. The study examines sexual reminiscing, or recalling sexual or intimate memories of the deceased partner.



The results show sexual reminiscing is both common and significant: eighty and a half per cent of participants reported sexually reminiscing about their deceased partner; 31.8 per cent reported doing so at least weekly; and 64.8 per cent described the experiences as positive.

The findings have important implications for health-care providers and therapists who support grieving individuals. The researchers hope that conversations about intimacy and memory become normalized in bereavement care.

*Adapted from an article by Nicole Squires*  
<https://gazette.mun.ca/research/continuing-bonds/>

### ***Grief is Love***

*Grief is love and the confusion caused by not knowing how to love someone who is gone.*

*Grief is love's frustration, bitterness, anger, and resentment at death's destruction.*

*Grief is love realizing, if it wants to thrive, it has to be creative and find new ways to connect and be fulfilled.*

*Grief is love's unwillingness to give up. It's stretching bonds and redefining limits in order to create a space where you can love someone in their eternal absence.*

**www.whatsyourgrief.com**

## *Goodbye Must Always Come*

To me, he was an emblem of youth: a glowing surge of energy, pride, and likeable hubris that made him admired by many he met. And, like most figures in the mythology of young manhood, he was taken too soon. Almost 25 years ago, Michel Trudeau was swept into Kokanee Lake by a cement-like avalanche of snow that clenched him in its grasp and would not let go. Mike loved this Earth so much that eventually it swallowed him into its heart deep in the Kootenay Mountains of British Columbia. I cannot think of a more fitting end for him.

What I can think of is the pain that this event brought to his family and friends, indeed to many across this country, who had grown to love him in his years in the spotlight of his father's shadow. He was his own man on his own path who loved his family dearly, yet from the start, forged his idiosyncratic way through the tangled deadfall of publicity that characterized his early years. The pain we felt was real: while Mike lay where he was meant to be at the bottom of that lake, we still wanted more of him for ourselves.

I spent two summers with Mike in the wilderness of Northern Ontario and Quebec. He was a camp counsellor during those years, and I was fortunate enough to have been one of his charges. In this time, we journeyed from lake to lake, from portage to portage with the bare necessities and a sense of adventure possessed only by boys of a certain age. Those summers I learned not only how to be a young man, but also how to be a citizen of this planet in such a way that I attribute much of who I am today to those weeks on the silver waters and rocky outcrops of the boreal forest.



Mike would climb to the top of 60-foot granite cliffs and dive into the blue. He would take his shirt off in April and not put it back on until October, achieving probably the best tan any of us have ever seen. Mike would take in books of pseudo-hippie philosophy at night and read to us from journal entries that made us believe we were on the greatest journey ever undertaken. He would run over two-kilometre portages with a 70-pound aluminum Grumman canoe on his back while smoking a cigarette and singing - in sandals. Mike would speak of the harmony and balance present in the natural world in hushed tones normally reserved for places of worship. He had an emblematic tattoo that covered the upper right quadrant of his back and consisted of a Haida depiction of a Raven highlighted in red and black, a symbol of tricksterism and sly intelligence. You get the idea; Mike was a Kurt Cobain or a James Dean figure - so cool that the world couldn't take it.

And now, all these years later, I look back on him and there he is - perfectly intact, with a brilliant white smile and a glint in his eye telling me to take on whatever is coming my way with a laugh, and a shrug, and a belief that it's possible. Then he gives me a wedgie and throws me in the lake.

Youth never lasts forever. Like all the things we love the most, goodbye must always come eventually. Sometimes, though, the sadness that comes with these moments of farewell remains tangled in our hearts with the joy that kept them alive in the first place, and the result is a growth in spirit that cannot happen any other way. So, I thank you Mike, for all that you did for me in the short time that we were friends, and all that you do for me now.

*Mark Callan is an emerging Yukon writer who lives with his family in Whitehorse.*

## Learning from Love

I was asked to do a reading at my dad's funeral and I remember thinking that I would be fine, and that I could handle it. I was almost at the end of the reading when I said the word "love" and from that moment on I wasn't able to speak through the tears. The emotion took me by surprise. I realized that saying "love" was a reminder of the love I had for my dad. The sadness that he was gone came flooding in past the numbness that I had been experiencing up to that point.

While counselling people grieving their loved ones, I noticed that often a common thread emerged. The longer and deeper the love was, the longer and deeper the grief needed to be witnessed and honoured.

When thinking about how much we love someone, it can bring with it so many emotions. Early on it can be the deep sadness and disbelief of never seeing or feeling the touch of your loved one again. Memories can bring a pain so deep that people question if they will ever feel "normal" again. As time passes and more memories surface, the painful waves of grief aren't as strong and sometimes there is even some comfort in remembering. As we continue to move forward through the seasons of our lives, recalling stories or looking at pictures may bring a smile to our face or even laughter and joy.

Over the years I've learned there is no "right" way to grieve. Our loves and losses are all so different. I've also learned that if we can give space and time to honour the emotions that come with grief, we also honour the love that we have for our loved ones. While grief will always have a place in our heart, the painful part of grief may subside, but our love never will.

*Amy Garcia-Baker is a former Hospice Yukon grief counsellor who lives in Whitehorse.*



*Image created for Hospice Yukon by artist Tanya Handley*

## *Lasting Love in Grief*

*So you mustn't be frightened, if a sadness rises in front of you, larger than any you have ever seen;  
if an anxiety, like light and cloud-shadows, moves over your hands and over everything you do.  
You must realize that something is happening to you, that life has not forgotten you,  
that it holds you in its hand and will not let you fall.*

Rainer Maria Rilke "Letters to a Young Poet," 1904

This passage written by Rilke always deeply comforts me. The notion that no matter how afraid I am of my grief, or my sadness, there is also the strong sense that I am being held by life, that perhaps I am not as alone as I feel.

The moment I heard my mother's voice on the phone, thousands of miles away in Scotland where I was raised, I felt a huge sadness arise in me. At 67, my father had been diagnosed with a stage IV brain cancer, with a four-month prognosis. The sorrow that Rilke speaks of was 'larger than any I had ever seen,' and it scared me. I knew my life would never be the same again. My father died thirteen weeks after his diagnosis, at home, in the bed he and my mother had shared for forty years. The promise of grandchildren, retirement and old age for my parents crumbled, and our family's mourning began.

I read a lot of grief books in the aftermath of my beloved father's death, seeking wisdom and comfort. They described the stages of grief, with the underlying message that I will move on and recover from my grief, in time. I couldn't relate to most of these books until I found "The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love" by Thomas Attig. The author articulates so beautifully that what we most long for is the return of the person who has died. Knowing of course that this return will never happen is what awakens the excruciating pain of our loss. Attig suggests that rather than getting over, recovering, or moving on from grief, we can, in fact, build an enduring, even reciprocal, love, that can soften our pain.

We can rest in this lasting love. *Grieving is a transition from loving in presence, to loving in separation.* Attig's simple, yet profound thoughts, changed everything for me. I could stay attached to my father, and not have to try and let him go. So, now he is with me always, inside me, and I am comforted by his invisible presence.

In the three decades since my father died, my heart is filled with many more people whom I deeply mourn. The immense sadness comes and goes but I am no longer afraid of my grief. Death is the end of a life but not a relationship. I feel held by every relationship in lasting love and I know they won't let me fall. They will always be a part of me.

**Janie Brown, RN, MSN, MA**

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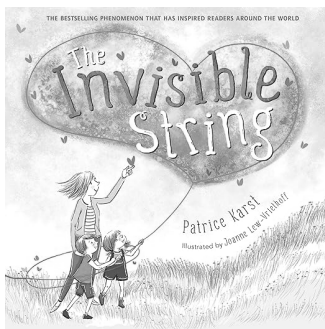
Author: *Radical Acts of Love: Twenty Conversations to Inspire Hope at the End of Life* (2020) Canongate, UK, Doubleday, Canada.



## From Our Library: Books about Love in Grief

**The Invisible String** by Patrice Karst is a children's book that illustrates the healing idea of continuing bonds.

We can be connected to our loved ones who have moved, are incarcerated, or have died, "by a very special string made of love."



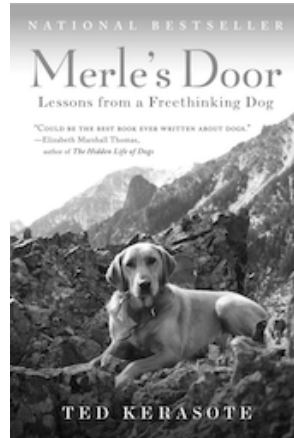
Invisible String crafts and activities can offer accessible ways to start conversations about memories and being connected to those we love.

**To find these books and more...**

**drop by our lending library for a book and a cup of tea.**

**We're open Mon - Fri  
11:30am to 3pm**

**Merle's Door: Lessons from a Freethinking Dog** by Ted Kerasote describes love for our animal companions and is a powerful story about human's best friend.



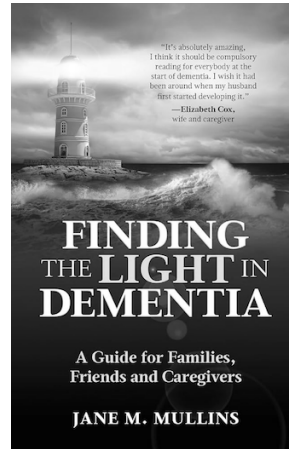
Often pet loss can be hidden or 'disenfranchised,' especially if our family or friends don't realize how important these relationships are.

Don't let others down play your loss or ask you to move on, if they do, then find those who get it!

Kerasote shows this in his love for Merle's adventures, free spirit, and the way he and his neighbours say goodbye to Merle at the end of his life.



"Shadow is not the opposite of light, it's proof that there is light" (from *When a Loved One Has Dementia*)



**Finding the Light in Dementia** by Jane M. Mullins and **When A Loved One Has Dementia** by Eveline Helminck are two books which both offer practical, gentle suggestions, honest anecdotes, and creative ideas for how to live acts of love during anticipatory grief and all the losses along the way when someone has dementia.

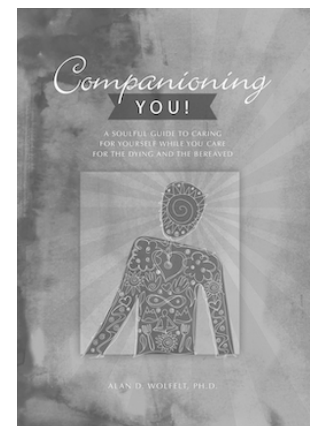
Dementia comes with many losses and much grief along the way, while the caregiver burden is extremely high.

These books offer ways to continue to connect with your loved one, create moments of meaning, and keep living.

They can support understanding of the dementia process and the dual role of caregiver and family member.

**Companioning You** by Alan D. Wolfelt breaks down what we are fed and feel burdened by about self care into practical individualized ideas and thoughtful prompts.

We can witness and acknowledge our own struggles as caregivers, companions, frontline professionals, and supporters of grieving friends.



These can become acts of love for ourselves. While it is often easier to turn love and compassion towards others, the maxim "treat your neighbour as yourself" circulates as wisdom for a reason.

With Wolfelt's gentle suggestions, perhaps we can start the hard work of learning how to treat ourselves with the compassion we would turn towards a grieving friend.

- By Carlie Graef

## Love in Grief

*By Anne Macaire*



I was a potter for 25 years, so creating containers was my work. When I moved on to become a counsellor, I took that work with me as a metaphor for how I provided support to the people who came to Hospice for guidance.

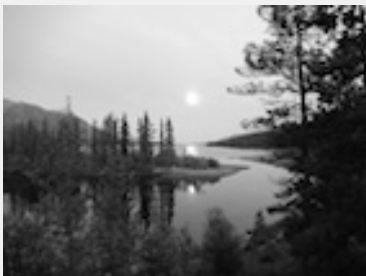
I created a container to tenderly hold each person that brought their story of love, loss and grief – the stories of our lives.

In creating this space, I did what felt natural to me. Slowing my breath, I listened and I breathed in all of the pain that was being expressed - the heart ache, the sorrow. Opening the heart, I welcomed the personal stories that were really the shared human experience of being alive- of loving and losing. Then breathing out, I turned all of that around and I breathed out love and compassion. Of course there was conversation, but this breathing and listening was the foundation of how I worked. It was the container for healing.

Much later, I discovered the Buddhist meditation practice of Tonglen, which was essentially what I had been doing. It made me realize that many meditation practices are simply things we naturally do that have been formalized. Tonglen is a practice of love and grief. And when we get to that place of just not knowing how we can navigate this world that seems to be falling apart at every turn, both personally and globally, this simple practice of just breathing and opening the heart can be a life saver. It isn't hiding from the hard things; it is embracing them.

In our culture we are masters at avoiding grief: there are so many ways we can distract ourselves from our feelings. Many of the people I saw said "I don't know how to do this." And we talked about leaning into the grief, into the pain - all of the difficult emotions. Giving ourselves permission to fall apart. Breathing into the heart our own pain and breathing out love and tenderness for ourselves. Love and grief are inextricable.

While I was working as a bereavement counsellor at Hospice, seven years ago, my husband died in an accident. We had been married for 40 years and he was my best friend. The day Eric died, my reality as I had known it ended as well. I was on an entirely new trajectory. Navigating this, I saw the work I had been doing at Hospice as an incredible gift. It was like I was in a foreign country and could speak the language. And the first thing that I knew was to give myself permission to do whatever I needed - to create that container of love that would help me to stay afloat.



Six months later I kayaked for 3 days alone out to our wilderness home where Eric had been living since his retirement. This was the place where he was most present and where the pain of his absence was most intense. It was also where I felt most profoundly held by nature. Grief and love were simultaneously my constant companions and I stayed for a month alone in this wilderness refuge. Being in nature enabled me to bear the unbearable - this is what love does.

Like many, I have a deep love of nature. And like many, I experience nature as an opening of the heart, inspiring a connection to essence, to joy, equanimity, spaciousness, compassion - all qualities of love.

I remember a man saying after his beloved had died that nature was the only place big enough to hold his grief.

My sojourn into solitude isn't a path I necessarily recommend to others. I think for many being held in community is what is most needed. But it was my way.



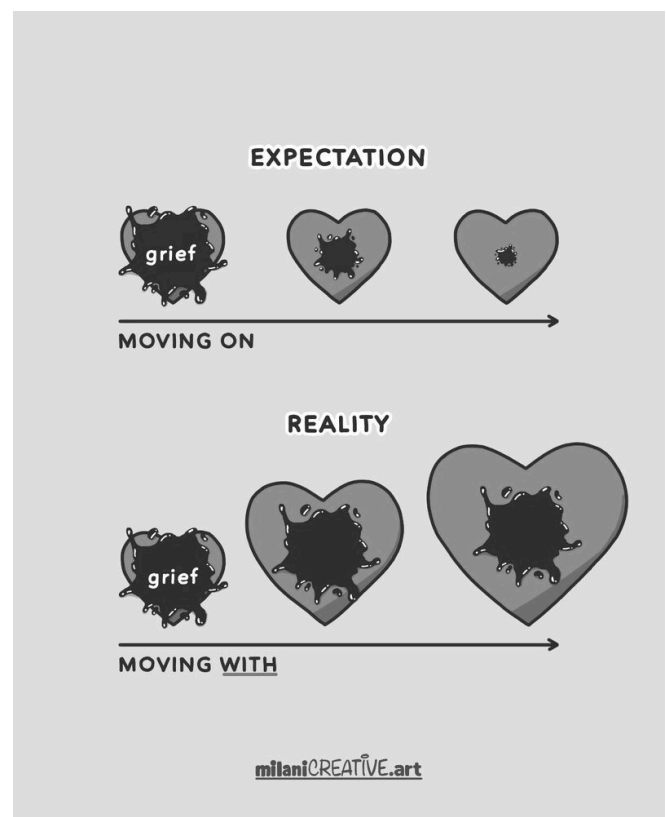
Now, having retired from counselling and grown older, I find the container metaphor expanding even more. Most mornings, I sit communing with the forest outside my windows. In the distance the mountains touch the sky. The beauty and serenity open my heart and I am filled with love and gratitude.

Simultaneously I mourn: for the devastation of the Earth, and the multitudes of people both near and far who suffer: despairing and forsaken. The more we open our hearts, the more vulnerable we are to the pain and suffering in the world. And yet, held in love, we become paradoxically stronger in our vulnerability. Held in love, we travel as companions to our grief.

## Adrift

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.  
 This is how the heart makes a duet of wonder and grief. The light spraying through the lace of the fern is as delicate as the fibers of memory forming their web around the knot in my throat. The breeze makes the birds move from branch to branch as this ache makes me look for those I've lost in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh of the next stranger. In the very center, under it all, what we have that no one can take away and all that we've lost face each other. It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured by a holiness that exists inside everything. I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

- Mark Nepo



## Programs and Services

### **Living with Loss- An Introduction to Healthy Grieving**

Gain a better understanding of the grief journey in this online education session. Offered four times per year.

### **Counselling**

One-on-one counselling support for those who are dying or grieving, and those who love and care for them.

### **Grief Support Groups**

We offer a variety of groups to help grieving people find support and connection with others who are also experiencing loss.  
Visit our website for upcoming offerings.

### **Healing Touch**

A relaxing energy therapy that supports holistic health.  
Volunteers trained in Healing Touch use gentle touch to clear and balance your energy system.

### **Lending Library & Kids Corner**

Our extensive library of books and resource material is open to the general public.

### **Professional Support**

Support, education and resources for professionals and caregivers.

These resources are provided at no charge.

**Tel. 867-667-7429    [info@hospiceyukon.net](mailto:info@hospiceyukon.net)**

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