It wasn’t at all like I remembered, but I was convinced that it needed to be. Our first family gathering after mom and dad died didn’t at all resemble what our family gatherings used to be. I always thought our family was close and so at ease with each other, but all that seemed to change after our parents were gone. I was convinced that a combination of time and, as siblings, trying harder to recreate what once was – laughter, playfulness, good conversation and time just to hang out together – was all that it would take. No matter how hard I tried, no matter what I tried, no matter the length of time, our gatherings would fall short of the mark. Each time I walked away disappointed, sad and frustrated. It literally took me years to face the reality of the truth of our family ‘closeness’ – the truth of our gatherings without mom and dad – the truth of my relationship with each one of my siblings – the truth of our family. The truth is mom and dad were the center of our family – the central reason for our coming together, not because my siblings and I were so close. Now, instead of being disappointed, sad and frustrated, I look more realistically at our family gatherings. I remember fondly and treasure what used to be, but I now value the relationship I have with each of my siblings – relationships that are in ways more authentic and real than they ever were.

Sometimes, consciously and unconsciously, we sabotage our healing in grief. “Sabotage” is a strong word but I believe it both accurately describes our behavior and acknowledges the significance of what happens because of our behavior. The sabotaging (damaging, harming, impairing, interfering, and/or interrupting) can come from an image we carry of what healing in grief is supposed to look like. Often that image of healing means getting our lives and our worlds back as closely to the way things were prior to the death of our loved one. We are convinced that to heal means getting our lives back to the way they were – if we just try a little harder – if we just have a bit more faith – if we just don’t talk about certain things – if we just go about our normal lives again we’ll be healed. In reality, though, authentic healing in grief is about integrating our deep loss into our lives so that we can become whole again in new and changed ways. It isn’t about recreating or reliving what once was because we are changed and the world is changed. Literally, our lives are now about creating a new normal in us and in the world we live.

At times we sabotage our healing in grief because of fear. Fear of what is – fear of what we may need to face – fear of what the future may bring – fear that we may never experience joy or happiness or life again – fear of feeling pain and being in darkness and mystery. Fear can cause such undo suffering for us and in us. Indeed, fear is often the motivating factor for resisting the reality of our lives – the truth of how we feel – the truth of our loss(es) – the truth of our pain. There can be great pain in loss and this pain is a normal and healthy response to loss. Acknowledging our pain, befriending it, allowing it, is one of the only ways we can survive grief. We do ourselves such a dis-service when we try to cover it up, push it aside, ignore it, pretend it isn’t there or try to rush through it. Suffering and pain are not the same thing and often, although giving us an illusion of being better, the true ramification of sabotage is
Recognizing the distinction between what is pain (and needs support) and what is suffering (and needs to be changed) is vital for our healing. Grief is painful enough without our adding to it.

Here are some other ways we might be sabotaging our healing:

- When we don’t eat, get enough sleep or in general don’t take care of our body’s needs in healthy ways
- When we choose to spend too much time with toxic people – we intuitively know (trust your gut) who the toxic people are in our lives (those who don’t “get it” and can’t be in our pain with us)
- When we rehash events leading up to the death and punish ourselves for not preventing it, not knowing more, or not doing more (which leads to a heavy dose of typically false guilt and regret)
- When we choose to carry deep resentment and/or blame (which may be stifling, suffocating and alienating to ourselves and to those around us)
- When we expect or assume that life can only unfold a certain way or when we are closed to any other way but our own – when we confine ourselves to the world of “shoulds” and closure and control
- When we compare our progress in grief with that of another OR when we compare our loss with that of another (which will diminish and trivialize our loss or theirs)
- When we rush, push and force things to happen, expecting instant results
- When we don't allow ourselves ‘breaks’ in grief – like smiling, laughing, and having fun
- When we insist upon defining strength as not being vulnerable

I’m sure there are other ways we go about sabotaging our healing. Perhaps, if we allow ourselves time to reflect and look at our behavior, we can discover ways we’ve hindered our healing. And, perhaps we can muster the courage and the self-compassion to stop our sabotaging so that we can once again fully live – in new and changed ways.

In Megan Devine’s book IT’S OK THAT YOU’RE NOT OK she writes, “We can never change the reality of pain. But we can reduce so much suffering when we allow each other to speak what is true, without putting a gag order on our hearts. We can stop hiding from ourselves, and hiding from each other, in some misguided attempt to be ‘safe.’ We can stop hiding what it is to be human.”

Companioning the Bereaved Through Sabotage
By Melissa Minkley, MSW, CT, Healing Life’s Losses Grief Support Services, melissa.hllseasons@hotmail.com

As grief companions, we are rooted in the belief that although there are common reactions to loss, each person needs to grieve in their own way. Our role as companions is to assist the bereaved in understanding how this needs to look for them. As we guide the bereaved and empower them to authentically experience and express their grief, we also assist them with identifying those behaviors that may be inhibiting their ability to grieve and reconcile their loss. This task for companions can be challenging and uncomfortable at times since it requires us to confront a fragile and wounded griever. Why would we want to add to their distress and suffering? It is essential we remind ourselves that the heart of companioning is compassionate curiosity. Our role is to encourage the mourner to teach us about their grief, while we remain patient, humble and caring. Wolfelt’s companioning philosophy gives us the needed foundation for us to open our hearts to another person, while curiosity encourages us to support each other with humility and enter the wilderness with a willingness to wonder.

In the previous article Pete identifies ways the bereaved might be sabotaging their healing and acknowledges the courage and self-compassion needed to stop. Below are a few suggestions on how companions can facilitate addressing those self-defeating behaviors and provide support and guidance toward healing.

Beliefs & Behavior...One of the main reasons why the bereaved participate in behaviors that sabotage healing is the thought that what they are doing is the ‘right thing to do’. These beliefs may be rooted internally or received from outside sources. Some people believe that crying is a sign of weakness, while others may have been told they shouldn’t cry so much because, “it only makes it worse.” Whatever the destructive belief, it only encourages the bereaved to behave in ways that cause them to be stuck and impede their healing process. The
following questions are non-threatening approaches inviting the bereaved to reflect on their beliefs about grief and identify those beliefs that are contributing to behaviors which may hinder their healing.

* What are your overall beliefs about grief? What are your expectations on how one should grieve?
* What roles/duties have you assumed in life that you continue to do now that are challenging and emotionally/physically draining?
* Can you / do you identify and acknowledge your feelings? How do you express your feelings? Do you find yourself judging your feelings?
* When do you feel most supported? How does it feel to receive support from others?
* When do you feel least supported? Do you make your needs know to others? If so, how? If not, why not?

Once a good understanding of how the bereaved views grief and the grief process, companions can encourage them to explore the behaviors and feelings that are a result of these beliefs, and identify which ones encourage healing and which ones sabotage healing. This will hopefully lead to a discussion regarding what changes or actions need to happen and how they will make these changes.

Self-care & Self-compassion... A significant reason why the bereaved find themselves sabotaging the grief process is due to lack of self-care and self-compassion. Self-care are the actions and attitudes which contribute to our overall well-being. Since grief is emotionally and physically draining it is necessary the bereaved put themselves and their needs as a priority. This can be challenging for some people because they are accustom to caring for and serving others. Our role as companions is to strongly encourage the bereaved to take compassionate gentle care of themselves. This includes getting plenty of rest, eating well, exercising, relaxing, participating in hobbies and spending time with supportive people.

Another component of self-care is the compassion bereaved offer to themselves. Self-compassion refers to a sense of tenderness for our own suffering. It is giving to ourselves the same kindness and care we would give to a friend. Self-compassion allows bereaved to honor their struggles and hurt rather than criticizing and judging them. It invites them to embrace and befriend their grief rather than fearing it and getting distracted from it. Self-compassion allows them to open their hearts and receive the nurturing support needed from oneself. We can encourage the bereaved to practice self-compassion by reminding them to tend to themselves with kindness during trying times. Invite them to explore how it might feel for them to provide self-compassion and where any difficulties might arise in doing so. Perhaps they’ve tried offering themselves self-compassion and were challenged – investigate what some of the obstacles may have been in offering themselves self-compassion and invite them to strategize ways to soften or diminish the challenges.

Companioning is about creating safe and sacred spaces for mourning to occur and for healing to be possible. Compassionate curiosity will assist the bereaved in finding the strength and courage to move through their grief. Alan Wolfelt’s companioning approach offers kindness and compassion that invites the mourner to reflect on the pain from their loss while seeking opportunities for healing and growth. It minimizes the fear of confronting our grief as well as the obstacles that get in the way of ones healing.
Upcoming Opportunities for Grief Companions and the Bereaved

**Thursday, September 20, 6:00-8:00pm (for Bereaved)**

_Honoring Grief...Surviving and Perhaps Even Thriving_

Southeast WI Grief Network Annual Grief Education Conference - FREE to the General Public  
Presenter: Pete Reinl, CSG  
Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, Wauwatosa Outpatient Campus  
5th Floor Conference Center  
201 N. Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa, WI 53226  
For more information go to [www.sewgn.com](http://www.sewgn.com)

_“We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival.”_ Winston Churchill

The death of someone in our lives can be one of the hardest and most painful – most gut wrenching and heart-aching – profound and life changing experiences we will ever have. Simply, how does one survive something that seems literally unbearable at times? We’ll explore ways to honor our pain by sharing an understanding of the grief process, acknowledging the powerful impact grief has on who we are, and recognizing the significance of our own personal unique expression of grief. As well, we’ll discuss practical strategies for walking the journey so we can survive. Although perhaps unimaginable now, when we honor our grief in healthy and intentional ways, we can one day thrive – never the same, but still thrive, and in surprising ways. Please join us as a spirit of hope and healing await you.

**Friday, September 21, 7:30am – Noon (for Grief Companions)**

_Supporting Families As They Navigate Overdose Loss and Other Stigmatized Grief_

Southeast WI Grief Network Annual Grief Education Conference - Cost: $50.00  
Presenters: Sarah Montgomery and Amy Stapleton from the Chesapeake Life Center, Maryland  
Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, Wauwatosa Outpatient Campus  
5th Floor Conference Center  
201 N. Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa, WI 53226  
For more information go to [www.sewgn.com](http://www.sewgn.com)

**Saturday, September 29, 9:00am – 6:00pm (for Bereaved)**

_Resting In the Dark...Emerging In the Light_

_A Spiritual Retreat for the Bereaved_

Cost: $65 (scholarships are available)  
Facilitators: Melissa Minkley and Pete Reinl  
Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI  
For more information go to [www.sienaretreatcenter.org](http://www.sienaretreatcenter.org)

_“What the caterpillar calls the end of life, the Master calls, ‘the butterfly.’”_
Saturdays, Oct. 20 and 27, 8:30am – 4:30pm (for Grief Companions)
Supportive Grief Companion Workshop
Caring for Yourself…Caring for Others
Presenters: Melissa Minkley and Pete Reinl
Cost: $150
Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI
For more information visit www.sienaretreatcenter.org

“The most important issue in caregiving today is caring for the caregivers. If you do not learn both the importance of and how to take care of yourself, you will not be able to give care to others for very long. The pressure will be too intense, and the work will become drudgery.” Doug Manning

People decide to become grief companions for a variety of reasons and find themselves taking on this vocation because of their own experiences with loss. This ministry is both meaningful and rewarding, but it also has its challenges. The role of companioning requires the ability to compassionately witness someone else’s deep suffering. This can lead to what is commonly known as “compassion fatigue.” Everyone needs a support system to be an authentic and effective companion. This workshop will explore intentional ways grief companions can care for themselves as they care for others. It will focus on attending to one’s own ongoing healing and wellness. It is absolutely essential that grief companions understand and recognize compassion fatigue and know how to address it.

Components of Caring for Yourself…Caring for Others:
• Understand the true and sometimes subtle nature of compassion fatigue
• Study various losses experienced because of compassion fatigue
• Survey the spiritual dynamics of compassion fatigue
• Recognize signs of compassion fatigue
• Learn strategies to help address compassion fatigue
• Discover the essential meaning and role of boundaries
• Explore personal responses to witnessing others who are suffering
• Create a personal self-care wellness plan

Gatherings Will Include
• Presentation, Instruction, Reinforcing & Educational Activities
• Small and Large Group Interaction
• Meditation and Griever Friendly Rituals
• Opportunities to Practice Skills
• Opportunities for Personal Integration

Workshop Requirements:
• Attendance at both Saturday gatherings

Participants Will Receive
• One grief related book
• Practical handouts
• 1.5 continuing education units (15 contact hours)

OCTOBER continued on the next page...
Wednesday, October 24, 6:30-8:30pm (for Bereaved)

Honoring Grief...Finding Our Way through the Holidays
Presenter: Pete Reinl
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
12700 W. Howard Ave., New Berlin, WI 53151
For more information visit www.hllseasons.com

This educational and supportive seminar for grieving adults will explore and honor the common and unique effects of loss, the power and impact of the grieving process, the significance of mourning in healing, and practical strategies to find our way through the holidays. Please join us as a spirit of hope and healing awaits you.

Saturday, Nov.3, 9:00am-12:30pm (for Grief Companions)

Companions Supporting Companions Gathering
Facilitators: Melissa Minkley and Pete Reinl
Holy Apostles School Library
3875 S. 159th Street, New Berlin, WI 53151
For more information visit www.hllseasons.com

Purpose
CSC (Companions Supporting Companions) is a gathering for those who companion the bereaved to support each other personally, spiritually and in their work as companions.

Participants
Those who are invited to participate in CSC have completed the Honoring Grief...Intending To Heal companion training program.

Gatherings
- Sponsored by Healing Life’s Losses
- Autumn and Spring gatherings at Holy Apostles School library (Holy Apostles School address: 3875 S. 159th Street, New Berlin, WI 53151...Enter the main entrance doors to the school which face 159th Street. Take the first hallway immediately to the left and the school library is down the hall on the left.)
- Time: 9:00am – 12:30pm (to include lunch – bring your own bag lunch)
- Format (Pete and/or Melissa will facilitate)
  - Opening Sacred Circle
  - Personal Check-in
  - Share Positive Experiences of Companioning and Meaningful Resources
  - Address Companion concerns, challenges, issues
  - Closing Sacred Circle
  - Share Lunch

Group Ground Rules
- What's said here stays here
- Speak for yourself
- Everyone has an opportunity to share
- Ask for advice / suggestions if that is what you are seeking

Responsibilities
- Participants:
  - RSVP
  - Bring companioning resources to share
  - Openness to share both positive and challenging companion experiences
  - Willingness to listen and support
Bring bag lunch

What CSC is NOT...
- A training program
- Focused on education
- A substitute for a personal support group, spiritual guide and/or a counselor

Sunday, Dec.16, 9:00am – 6:00pm (for Bereaved)

Finding Our Way Through the Wilderness of Loss
A Spiritual Retreat for the Bereaved
Cost: $65 (scholarships are available)
Facilitators: Melissa Minkley and Pete Reinl
Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI
For more information go to www.sienaretreatcenter.org

“Like it’s not enough to experience the excruciating grief, sadness and loneliness of losing him, there are all these other painful losses I’m discovering and grieving because of his death!” Anonymous

There is a myriad of losses we experience because of the loss and these additional losses are grieved as profoundly as, perhaps even more deeply than, the original loss. These important losses are known as “secondary losses” or “loss of the assumptive world.” Simply, how do we navigate and find our way through this wilderness of loss? On this retreat we’ll:
- Unpack, acknowledge and honor these significant losses
- Identify healthy practical strategies to grieve and find a way through these losses
- Share in reflection, silence, discussion, prayer, meditation and ritual

This retreat experience is appropriate for adults who have experienced a significant loss of any kind.

Saturdays, 8:30am – 4:30pm (for Grief Companions)
Jan.26, Feb.23, Mar.23, Apr.27, July 13, 2019

Honoring Grief...Intending to Heal
Grief Support Companion Training Program
Cost: $475 (scholarships are available)
Training Team: Pete Reinl, Melissa Minkley and Ann Marie Uslemann
Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI
For more information go to www.sienaretreatcenter.org

JANUARY continued on the next page...
“Healing means, first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention.” Henri Nouwen

Honoring Grief…Intending to Heal is a training program for those who wish to companion the bereaved and/or are currently supporting the bereaved in various capacities. The approach of companioning serves as the foundation – the very root system in offering any modality of support to the bereaved be it as a counselor, support group facilitator, minister, pastor, social worker, hospice worker, chaplain, funeral home employee, volunteer, nurse, physician, spiritual director, friend, family member, etc. The companioning model makes a distinction between other models of treating, fixing, curing, analyzing or resolving another’s grief. Instead, companioning is “about being totally present to the mourner and even being a temporary guardian of the person’s soul.” (Wolfelt) The invitation in companioning is to allow oneself to be vulnerable enough to “get into people’s buckets” (Manning) of sadness, pain, confusion, anger, relief, guilt, shame, etc. In other words, to learn to be totally present and to simply bear witness to someone’s pain without trying to take away their right and need to be in and express pain so that she/he can authentically heal. The art of companioning is deceptively easy and simple, but most find it challenging as it demands personal accountability of and tending to one’s own losses and grief, as well as being counter-intuitive, counter-intellectual and counter-western-cultural. Its approach includes a healthy balance of head and heart, while leaning more heavily on the heart (since grief is primarily heart-based).

Components of the Companion Training Program Include:
* In depth exploration of the companioning philosophy (applicable in serving all ages, cultures, ethnicities, and spiritual backgrounds)
* Basic understanding of grief and its significance
* Connecting spirituality and grief
* Basic understanding of healing in grief
* Surveying the necessity of being with difficult emotions and feelings
* Clarifying the necessity of purposeful and intentional healing
* Learning and practicing necessary companioning skills with particular emphasis on:
  1. real presence
  2. creating and holding safe spaces
  3. the art of curiosity thru an appreciation and integration of “beginners mind”
  4. developing listening and questioning skills
* Practical implications of using the companion model in various grief support modalities

Gatherings Will Include:
* Presentation, Instruction, Reinforcing & Educational Activities
* Small and Large Group Interaction
* Meditation and Griever Friendly Rituals
* Opportunities to Practice Skills
* Opportunities for Personal Integration

Program Requirements:
* Attendance at all five Saturday gatherings
* A space of 1.5 years since a significant loss is preferred
* Reading, intentional reflection, integration and other assignments prior to the first gathering and between gatherings

Participants Will Receive
* Four grief related books
* Plethora of practical handouts
* Certificate of completion
* Four (4) continuing education units (40 contact hours)

Registration and Application Process:
1. Complete and submit the registration form and the non-refundable deposit.
2. Once your registration is received you’ll be sent (via email) a biographical application form which is required to be completed and submitted for review by the training program team.
3. You will be notified regarding your acceptance into the program and mailed the initial first gathering assignment. **Registration deadline is Monday, December 31st, 2018.**