



PEARL COLLECTIVE

Community Voice

July 2020 | Issue 4

¿Quieres recibir el boletín en español? [regístrate para la versión en español](#)

PEARL COLLECTIVE EVENT CALENDAR

See what's happening [this month](#).

Coming Soon!

Originally formed after 2019's Une Bonne Mort seminar, A Sacred Passing's Grief and Arts committee is hosting an online storytelling event, *Grief Happens: Stories from the Living Room*.

Storytellers will share their grief experiences in many forms. We may not be able to gather in person, but we can still create space for grief within our own homes. Keep an eye out online -- and on the [Pearl Collective calendar](#) -- for more information to come.

Job Posting: Recompose

Services & Recomposition Manager



Exploring Death Through Nature

Words and photo by
Carrie Redway, Thedna Arts

[Epoch: a writing circle exploring death through nature and cycles](#), is a quarterly writing circle facilitated by Pearl Collective's Carrie Redway of Thedna Arts. Carrie started Epoch in 2019 after she saw the need to connect with death as a part of the cycle of natural life.

Originally intended as a space to gather in

Though often heart-wrenching, death can also be beautiful, its rituals meaningful, the disposition of the body gentle and natural.

Recompose is an ecological death care company based in Seattle, Washington. When we open in late 2020, Recompose will be the first organization in the world to offer natural organic reduction (also known as recomposition), in which human bodies are converted to soil. We are building the Recompose model to be an alternative to the existing funeral industry, offering an authentic, participatory experience for families and a natural return to the earth for the dead.

Read more about this job posting and responsibilities here:

<https://www.recompose.life/recomposition-manager-job-listing>

person and interact with tangible aspects of nature, literature, and art as prompts, Epoch in-person writing circles are on hiatus for the time-being. In-person events will resume once it is safe to gather during this time of pandemic. For now, please accept this writing prompt from a previous Epoch writing circle session.

For the prompt below, gather some flower petals from your yard, garden, or any outside area. These can be as simple as dandelions or wildflowers. You could also reflect on the petals in the photo above.

Prompt Instruction: Feel the flower petals before you. Look closely at how they grow out of the stem. Follow the petal's veins, and notice how the petals curve, how they differ from another, how they curl. Think about how the petals might dry out; how they might fall from the flower stems, or how their seeds will spread; how the petals would decompose differently if left with the grasses than if they dry out pressed into a book.

Writing prompt: "As the petals wither, so does my skin."

PEARL COLLECTIVE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: SUMMER DIEGEL



Q: Tell us about yourself, and your work.

Hi! I am Summer Diegel. I was raised by a big-but-somewhat-disconnected family, mostly in Helena, MT, which is the traditional land of the Salish Kootenai (Flathead) people. I have lived in traditional Coast Salish / Duwamish land, aka Seattle, WA, for about six years. I describe myself as a full-spectrum doula because I'm skilled in offering choice and support to my clients throughout transitional moments. I meet folks in the middle of these cascading conversations in topics like reproductive care, pleasure, sex, and death! My doula toolkit and interfaith education are deepened by experiences with harm reduction and domestic-violence prevention.

I am a white, working-poor, genderfluid human here to share trauma-informed support with topics including

relationship skill-building, pleasure-based sexual wellness, and end-of-life care.

I value transformative justice and abolitionist frameworks of accountability, and I welcome collaboration, feedback, and building relationships.

Currently I am the assistant director on the Board of Directors for A Sacred Passing: Death Midwifery (ASP), Co-Chair of the Access & Equity Committee for the National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA), and of course a member of Pearl Collective PNW. Folks who want to meet, collaborate, or work together can also find my Instagram @thesunflowercycle or schedule a one-on-one or small group session with me.

Q: How did you get interested in death care?

Death didn't really come up as an interest for me; I developed harm-reduction and home health-care skills as a very young person experiencing poverty and violence. That is a story I share verbally in some spaces when I can care for my safety. For now, I will just share a little bit about my process.

For about eight years I have been working professionally in end-of-life care. I have offered care in skilled nursing facilities, assistive living communities, and independently in folks' homes. What I do has largely been in-person, physical, emotional, spiritual personal care co-created with people I care for, often things like grief support, comfort, respite care, etc.

This has shifted in the past two years. Lately, I've been doing a lot more community death work, including education, art, and advocacy, especially in the past six months as I've been working from home to practice social distancing.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

Outside of my death-related work, I use my time for many things! I am also a sex educator and theologian. I have been teaching sex ed to peers and adults for about a decade. I also participate in interfaith activist organizing and am currently working towards my Master's of Education in Advanced Teaching for K-12. A lot of my foundational skills in consent, negotiation, and communication come from my background as a sex educator, and these intimate conversational skills are vital to offering death care.

I have been fascinated by these topics my whole life. I grew up in a deeply spiritual home. My step-dad raised us with a white, patriarchal, gospel Christian understanding of God; my mother told me that there was magic in everything, and taught me to love; and my grandmother is a Crone. I value these traditions as sacred, and I have explored, recontextualized, broken down, blended, and adapted them for who I am today. I am a playful human. I sing often and make up new words to get my ideas across to others all the time. I have this cassette tape of baby me -- maybe three or four years old -- and I am singing of dolphins and God. Nothing specific, just repetition and melody. "Dolphins annnnnnd *god!* DOLPHINS! DOLPHINS! **DOLPHINS!** and **GOD!**" And it goes on like this for quite some time. When I think of myself back then, I mean... this kid hadn't even seen *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* yet. I am in my room making up little prayers to myself and recording these magical moments for adult me to just drink up. I have tons of journals from throughout my life, too. Even outside of my own practice, I enjoy exploring religion and learning from others about how their cultures of ritual, prayer, and celebration make meaning for them.

Sunflower Services will be hosting a webinar & group conversation series at the beginning of August, exploring critical interpretations of spiritual texts, anti-oppressive alternatives to systems of harm in doula care, and discussing how to build accountability into doula practices. I share some really honest stories of my pain, joy, process, and mistakes. I'm hoping it'll be a welcome offering, and folks who are interested can sign up for the Sunflower Services newsletter on my website to find out more details when they are released.

Q: Do you have a favorite artist that has helped you connect with grief or death work?

Yes! So many. Mia Mingus, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and adrienne maree brown. I am thankful for all of the femmes and trans folks in the Disability Justice Movement, which was created by Black, brown, queer, and trans members of the Disability Justice Collective founded in 2005. Gratitude especially to the creative dreamers in my own circles who come together in safe spaces to create small, intentional circles in the aftermath of serious harm and violence in our lives, including domestic violence and sexual assault.

My floral and botanical tattoos are a part of my artistic process of building safety and security in this body. Naming the gender-based violence and harm that has come to my enby, femme body -- and to continue to live within this body and heal is a spiritual act. So I guess I'm saying my favorite artists are myself, my lover, and other survivors who are just existing and creating our lives.

Q: Are there any books or favorite resources that shaped how you approach death care?

Oh goodness, there are! Let's see, I think some of the most foundational books I've read are:

- *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* by Harriet A. Washington
- *Octavia's Brood* edited by adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha
- *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities* by Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy

I know those don't sound like they are about death necessarily, but professional death-care skills are about more than what is "topical". I also love reading the work of fiction and science-fiction authors who are vital to activist movement building, like Octavia Butler, adrienne maree brown, and Ursula K. Le Guin.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I have witnessed both faith leaders and death professionals alike who do not know where to start regarding conversations about religion and death, whether the context is interfaith or secular. Death and interfaith community-building work is often heavily stigmatized, and it can be difficult to bring these conversations together organically.

The increased fear, rejection, and denial of death in our society uncovers a critical need to re-imagine our relationship to end-of-life care. I believe that interfaith collaboration can be key to exploring how to do that, especially in the context of systemic police and military violence resulting from U.S. imperialism and white supremacy. This is a culture that death professionals and theologians alike should be grappling over and co-creating strategies to change.

Right now, I am working in collaboration with Interfaith Youth Core to develop a toolkit and curriculum for death professionals that discuss interfaith, mutual aid, and transformative justice frameworks of end-of-life care and dying. The curriculum will bring together socio-cultural understandings, social movements, and interreligious history about end-of-life and death care. My complete project will be released in collaboration with **A Sacred Passing** and **Interfaith Youth Core** in January, 2021.



SAYIN' IT LOUDER

A conversation about "A Good Death" in a racist society.

Alua Arthur of Going with Grace hosted an online panel discussion with five Black leaders in the death and dying space.

- Joél Simone Anthony
- Alica Forneret
- Naomi Edmondson
- Oceana Sawyer
- Lashanna Williams

> [Replay available here](#)

In Memoriam

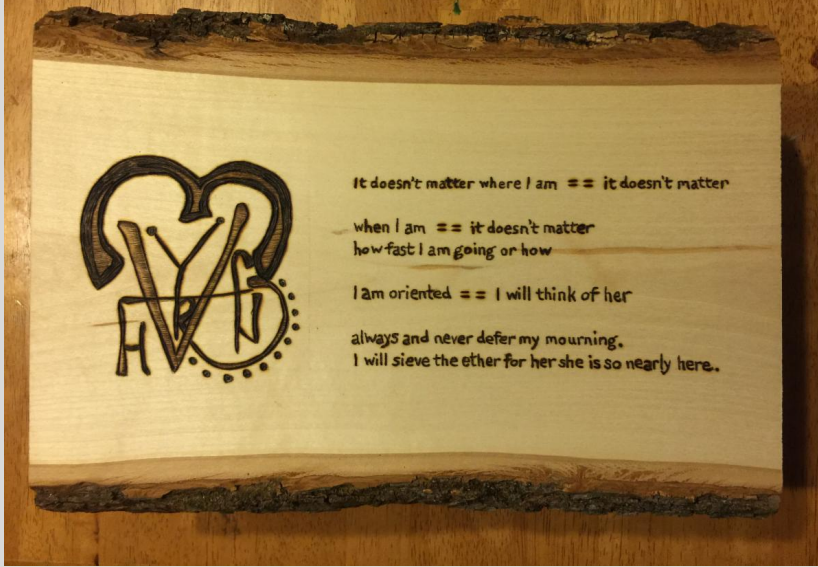
Michelyn Grace Walker-Woods

5/1/1957 - 11/13/2018

Text from Alice Fulton's "Doha Melt-Down Elegy"

*Sigil Design
Lashanna Williams*

Pyrography



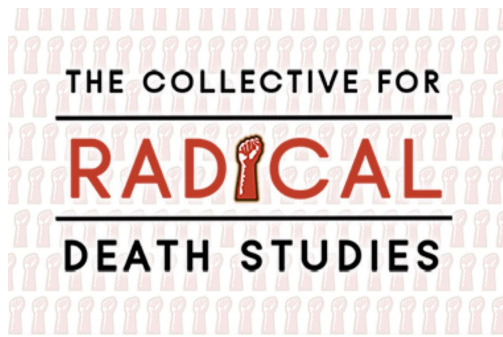
POETRY

A Eulogy to Life

by Kalisto Nanen

Has it ever occurred to you ... ?
That life
In all its essence
Is a privilege
The concept and duplicity
The facets that are composed in life
But what is life?
Life is the act of breathing
The moment we come into the world
Inhale
Exhale
The pumping of blood
The consumption and dispelling of food from our bodies
The bodies that our mothers held tight
I wonder if you pray
I wonder if you pray too that you'll wake up the next day
I wonder if you contemplate
I wonder if you contemplate death
Is your death peaceful?
Is it timely?
Are you surrounded by those who love you?
When we enter the world, death is always where we end up
At some point
I just hope it is not too soon
Because if we are allowed
If we are allowed
A chance
To understand death

It can
Be
Another
Life



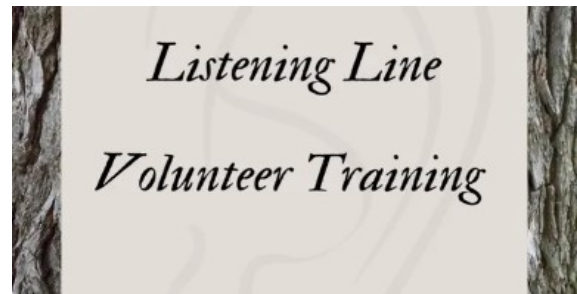
The Radical Death Studies Canon centers scholarship that calls attention to the whiteness and Eurocentricism that undergirds the field of Death Studies by examining the systemic and colonial structures that impact death and dying the world over: racism, sexism, heteronormativity, capitalism, imperialism, classism, xenophobia. The scholarship at the link below goes beyond death awareness to include studies on how people of different cultures and backgrounds acknowledge deathways and participate in death work that is by and of their own cultural understandings.

www.radicaldeathstudies.com/death-canon-2/

The listening line is a place for folk to call and talk where they will be met with a non-medical, trained human who will hold space, or witness the words of the caller.

Learn more about the line and how to volunteer [Here](#).

<https://asacredpassing.org/listening-line>



ARTWORK

"No Justice... No Pride".
Drawing by Kalisto Nanen

The artwork below reads: "There is a light ... that can not go out. No Justice ... No Pride."

Try It: Art in Grief Work

*Words and photo by
Carrie Redway, Thedna Arts*

Have you ever wanted to use art in your personal grief work but feel intimidated to try something artistic? Found poetry might be a good place to start.

Found poetry is the process of creating new poems using words and phrases from various sources or texts, such as newspaper articles, essays, ads, and more. Like a collage, words are rearranged or re-framed from these texts to create new meaning, or a *found poem*.

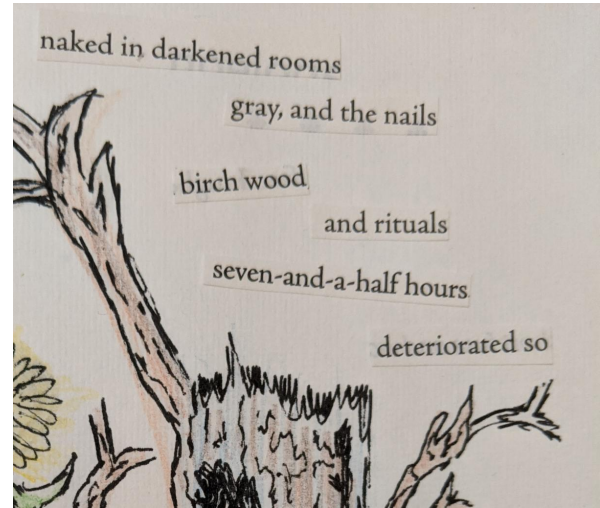
The simple act of cutting out words and phrases in magazines and old books has helped me during this pandemic time. I will keep them in a jar or envelope for future use. This is a small, tangible way to do something with your hands when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Later, I will go back to these cut-out words and rearrange them to create a found poem. You can write or paste the words onto a blank journal page, or use with other artwork, or type

them alone in a Word document.

Try it! And feel free to submit your work to Pearl Collective for showcase in our next newsletter: pearlcollective2018@gmail.com.

I created the image below during A Sacred Passing's June [Death Cafe and Community Art](#), using text from *The Book of Bizarre Truths* and three different articles: "Tracing the First Tattoo," "The Extremely Wild Blue Yonder of Howard Hughes," and "Tall Tales About Napoleon."



SUBMIT TO THE PEARL COLLECTIVE NEWSLETTER!

We are looking for your art, poetry, short articles and stories (250 word max), photos, etc. on death related topics.

Email submissions to pearlcollective2018@gmail.com

Pearl Collective | [Website](#)
A Sacred Passing | [Website](#)

