



PEARL COLLECTIVE

# Community Voice

August 2020 | Issue 5

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

## PEARL COLLECTIVE EVENT CALENDAR

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

## Building Cultural Competence in Health and Social Services

## THE CROSS-CULTURAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM

For resources, events, and programs in cultural competency, equity, and inclusion, click [here](#).

## The Dead Bird

*Words by Kristin Meyer*

Summer, 2019 -- My daughter finds a large dead bird on the shores of the Oregon coast. An astute observer, she walks up, squats next to the bird, and looks at every part of its body. At age five, she's just begun to understand the finality of death. She stands and, without a moment's hesitation, uses her walking stick to carve her name, followed by two hearts, in the sand under the bird's body, "so that it knows someone loved it on the day it died." This is not the first impromptu burial that she's held. Often there are flowers, shells, moss, whatever beautiful bits of nature catch her eye. There is no creature too small. I've observed her burying half a butterfly wing. The fact that my child knows how to care for the dead brings me solace. It also gives me pause -- do adults somehow unlearn this instinct?

Now six, my daughter is on the verge of grasping that death is universal and inevitable. All these creatures she adorns are practice, reminders that life will end for all of us. Practice lets us make space for questions: "You too, Mama? You'll die someday, too?" I answer without distress, "Yes, I will die, just like every other creature in this world, but there will be people who will continue to live and love you." Each



## DEATH RESOURCE CENTER

For trusted resources for deathcare and end-of-life education, click [here](#).

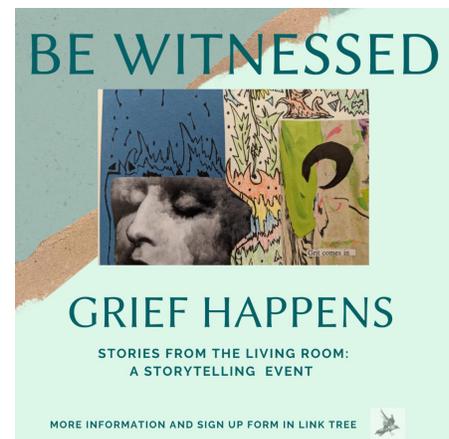
time we have this conversation, it reminds us both that life will end, and that we will be able to show up for each other when it does.

If you're looking for a way to explore death with the little ones in your life, Margaret Wise Brown wrote a tender story called "The Dead Bird" in 1938, and it was given new illustrations in 2016 by Caldecott Honor winner Christian Robinson. You can preview the story in a read-aloud [here](#).

## Call for Storytellers

*Grief Happens: Stories from the Living Room* is an online storytelling event curated to help normalize the sharing of our stories. Our minds and bodies experience and process grief in ways that are unique. Not only can it be transformative to talk about grief, but it can truly be life-saving.

If you have a story you'd like to share during the series premiere, please fill out the form [here](#).



## PEARL COLLECTIVE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: SAIKO SHIMA-KOLESAR



### **Q: Tell us about yourself, and your work.**

Hello, my name is Saiko, and I was born and raised in Japan. Life took me to the USA when I was 19, and I have lived in both NYC and Seattle in the last 30 years. I am a death doula, yoga teacher, strength and conditioning coach, gym/small business owner, wife, and mom of three children. I wear many hats.

My spiritual journey started at a very early age, with my father, who made me sit in silence every day before dinner. So sitting (meditation) has been something I've done for my entire life. Through yoga, fitness, and martial art training, I always loved sharing what I experience through practice, and I love connecting people with the arts through our body with breath. My joy is to witness people's transformation through the art we share, and I feel honored to be part of someone's path when they choose to train/practice with me. I am also a breast cancer survivor, and happily cancer-free for two years now.

### **Q: How did you get interested in death care?**

Growing up in Japan, death -- and rituals around death and the dead body -- have always been very intimate to me. I am used to taking a long process to say goodbye to people who are dying and already dead. However,

after I started living in the USA, [I learned that] this end-of-life process is very different from the Eastern culture I came from, and I always wondered why.

Then my dear friend and I lost parents (her mother, my father) around the same time, and she sent me information about death-doula training by A Sacred Passing. I was fascinated and curious about this occupation that I had never heard of, and I took the Level 1 training. I was feeling that this may be my life's work. Dying people simply deserve more attention and care. Then I got breast cancer and faced my own mortality for the first time in my life. After I got cured, I took another death-doula training by a different organization, followed by hospice volunteer training at two local hospitals, and now I am slowly expanding my world to dedicate my time and self to elderly or dying people.

**Q: What do you do in your spare time?**

Lift kettlebells and barbells (I am a kettlebell sport athlete and a coach, competing 5-6 times a year), Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (blue belt), cooking for family, spending as much time as possible with my 10-year-old daughter, Yoga and meditation.

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

It is funny you ask... they are all Japanese pop songs I used to listen to in the late 1980s and early '90s when I was young in Japan... so... secret. :) I just time-trip to the year when my grandmother died by listening to those songs.

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

- Any Pema Chodron's book to bring myself to center and invite peace
- Breathing exercises
- Any books about mindful living (John Kabat-Zinn, for example)
- *You Are the Placebo* by Joe Dispenza (great meditation resource)
- *It's OK That You're Not OK* by Megan Divine (for people grieving)
- *Modern Death* by Haider Warraich

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

I am very passionate about deathwork and my journey towards death care, but I LOVE being around the people who dedicate themselves to death care, who are all beautiful souls and kind-hearted. I am honored to cross paths with each and every one of you reading this newsletter, and to share our passion about this noble work.

## Exploring Death in Nature: Writing Prompt

*Words and picture by Carrie Redway, Thedna Arts*

*This section is a continuation of writing prompts from [Epoch: a writing circle exploring death through nature and cycles](#).*

**Prompt Instruction:** Reflect on the picture above of sand and rocks held within a shell. Think about how all of these elements might have gathered together in the shell, organically by the water currents, and about the shell as a space-holder for story. Think about the rocks and the sand granules -- their individual journeys and stories to find place in the shell. How they might transform and change as water and waves push them around and out of the shell. How we might gather in community to grieve, and to witness each other's different stories.

**Writing prompt:** "The shell holds a universe."

*Epoch 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 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 these writing prompts from previous Epoch writing circle sessions, and submit your work to the Pearl Collective newsletter!*



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# POETRY

Words by Jennifer Kropack

A petal withers

And so does my skin.

I prefer to laugh at the nature of aging. Of course, I cry at times, too.

The beauty of this flower, the moment, this life.

I bring myself to full presence ... for the time I still have.

A work friend's husband died this past week while she was out grocery shopping.

Another friend is fighting invasive breast cancer, subject to COVID testing in order to gain treatment.

Another family has COVID-19. Yes, it's bad, yet not too bad for them to be hospitalized ...

We worry because of the uncertainty.

My prayer altar overflows with so many names! Names of those in the news, murdered.

Many hearts break over the lost lives of black women and black men.

Names of those who have died from COVID ... too many to write individually, so I pray in bundles of thousands. COVID war zones with refrigerator trucks overflowing. The callout – “help us, please.”

I find beauty and hope in a single flower, watching it: bud, bloom, wither, then die.

Sigh, smile in delight, take a deep breath in, exhale slowly.

I have learned to sit with the grief and sadness. Witness to let go. And to go on.

Remember – just show up like the flower and feed the world your own beauty and kindness.

Listen more.

Sit in silence more.

Flowers have petals of kindness until they are no more.

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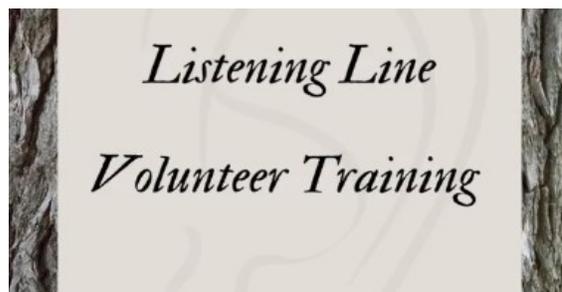
*Sub-threads in these times: Stories of police murdering black men and women, hearing about violence daily, and Homeland Security detaining free people in our neighbor state. What is happening in America? Can we change faster, please? The absence of child abuse reports – knowing it probably has increased during this stressful time, as Novel Corona rages... more heartbreak. COVID, luckily is keeping us from returning to what was... the World needs something better, humans do too. Do enough of us know this? I sometimes wonder how to keep center, positive and hopeful? ... as we sit pregnant, holding the liminal space to make a new tapestry from the unraveling of threads that no longer serve. How do we re-stitch together and make a better world and planet?*

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

Next Training: August 29th AND September 5th  
[1st steps for registration here](#)

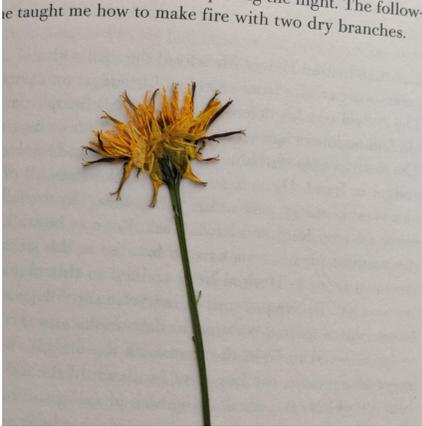


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## Try It: Art in Grief Work

Words and photos by Carrie Redway, Thedna Arts

Dandelions hold a special place in my heart. Growing up in the



Midwest, I loved running through yards and long fields with these little yellow orbs dotting the path in front of me. A dandelion can be a gardener's pest, as it is considered a weed. However, it is also honored for its good qualities: its medicinal properties and nutritious value.

I appreciate the life-and-death example that dandelions show us. We can see the yellow petals bloom, and then turn to a fuzzy gray ball. Its seeds fly away with the breeze, or scatter when brushed against a dog's tail.

I like to take a few dandelion blooms while they are still fresh, and press them into books, or into paint. I might use the pressed flowers later in collage art, or make small bookmarks and note

cards. This is another simple way to make art accessible in grief work. The act of picking the dandelions and drying them is a tangible activity. While I do this, I spend time meditating on a person I love who died. As I work with my hands to press or paint with the dandelions, I try to recall memories of that person. I have a fond childhood memory of making a dandelion and clover crown for my uncle, who died 19 years ago this past July. I like to associate his presence in my life with dandelions.

Try it! And submit your work to our next newsletter:[pearlcollective2018@gmail.com](mailto:pearlcollective2018@gmail.com).



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

