

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of
Religion in Cooperation with the Post
Graduate Center for Mental Health**

Doctor of Ministry Project

Death As Final Growth

Submitted by Rev B Simpson 2009

Through the Eyes of a Hospice Chaplain:

Death as Final Growth

Rev. Barbara Simpson

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Thank you to Dame Cicely Saunders founded the first modern hospice in London in 1969

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You would know the secret of death. But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life." -- Kahlil Gibran

Chapter I. Background and Introduction to Topic

This paper describes a demonstration project concerning death with a group of elders who live in assisted living. Some of the people are terminally ill. It details the underlying issues and concerns that led to implementing this program of classes. It provides an analysis of insights from clinical and religious literature that has been used in running the groups. It also details the methodology and results of project activities.

Chapter I. defines the clients and their needs, and issues around death.

Chapter II. Describes the religious and clinical principles upon which the project was based.

Chapter III. Illustrates the Methodology.

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Chapter VI. Contains a facilitator component. This project is to be used to train other chaplains

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It is a fact that Energy cannot be created or destroyed.

Embracing Death as the Final Stage of Growth in Context of American Society

This chapter looks at specific needs of the elderly and the project's significance.

It examines the death process or *the change* in the context of an American society grounded in materialism that does not respect its elderly. It has been said that "Death" is a socially constructed idea. Fear of death is still the unacknowledged elephant in the room of our culture. The fears and attitudes people have towards it are not instinctive, but rather absorbed from educational and cultural vehicles such as our language, arts, and religion. Our popular culture -- movies, literature and even the daily news -- both trivializes death and makes it frightening, by depicting wholesale death in full color as if it is of no consequence, then personalizing it and showing death as the worst event that can happen. It is the considered the ultimate punishment for wrongdoing. Seldom is death shown as natural, as a normal life passage.

Every culture has its own coherent explanation of death. Each culture has a separate religious tradition and often within a family there are specific family traditions. Our conventional views of death bring to mind many thoughts, but they rarely include the prospect of growth. It is the promise of death more than any force in life that can move a human being to growth. By growth I mean becoming all that is

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truly you and at the same time becoming more human. Death is the final stage of growth in this life. There are countless belief systems surrounding death and there are spiritual practices from different wisdom traditions which express the idea that there is no total death -- only the body dies. For example, the self, the soul or the spirit is eternal and lives on.

Perhaps death reminds us that our time is limited and that we'd better accomplish our purpose here on earth sooner rather than later. Individuals who have been fortunate enough to share in the death of someone and understand the meaning seem better able to live and grow because of the experience. Death can be very hard to face, and we might be tempted to avoid focusing on it. If one has the courage to deal with it and accept it as a valuable part of life, there will be growth for the dying individual and for those who are part of the process.

Death is often a taboo subject in families and in communities. The denial of death is partially responsible for people living empty purposeless lives. We see this denial in our lack of concern for the environment: the trees, the plants, the flowers, the waters, the birds, the winds the insects, all humanity and all life on earth and the planet itself. When you live as if you will live forever, it becomes easy to postpone the things

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you know that you must do. Even our language tends to deny the reality of death by using terms such as "passed away" and "bought the farm" instead of the word "died." Note the difference between the above terms and "Left the body," which implies a continuation in another form and a more spiritual approach to death.

As a whole, American culture reveres youth and conceals illness, aging and death. Americans tend to cope with loss by withdrawing and denying death's reality, while giving a loved one's body away to a cold funeral chapel. Death and dying well can be approached in a healthy way. Understanding that people differ in how they think about death and dying, and respecting those differences, can promote a peaceful death and a healthy manner of dying.

Eventually, all phenomena pass away. Ram Dass in his book *Fierce Grace* emphasizes the importance of releasing the past, forgetting the future, and approaching present change with curiosity rather than dread. Always keep in mind that the real journey, the inner one, cannot be captured in words. Regardless of your perspective, it's not the dying that's so hard; what is hard is living until you die, whether your death is imminent or a long way off.

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There is general agreement between Hinduism and Buddhism that no human life can be filled with a sense of meaning unless it is lived in full acceptance of the fact of death. He who tries to ignore death by deluding himself into believing that he, his relatives, his possessions will endure forever, robs himself of the purposeful life which can only come to him who unflinchingly accepts death as an integral part of life. To meet death, not only as an event at the end of life but as an ever present ingredient in the life-process itself.

Leading to Death we Move through Stages of Grief

Because of the issues described above, the grief process itself becomes muddled and layered in denial. Below are the five stages of grief as outlined by Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross leading to death.

1. Denial (shock, when we realize the diagnosis is terminal)
2. Anger (expressing emotion)
3. Bargaining

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4. Preparatory depression
5. Acceptance (increased self-awareness and contact with others).

Some people became stuck at one stage and seem to remain there until death; some people began to move on after a period of time. Still other people seemed to move through the five stages relatively smoothly with very little intervention on part of the staff.

In Denial

I wanted to gain some understanding of the denial process and the terminally ill patients' resistance to moving through to acceptance. Through observation, I realized that people who deny less after first learning their conditions are terminal are better able to move through all the stages. These people are open to discussing how they feel and are

willing to reveal their hearts in depth with significant others and friends. They have an easier time moving through each stage. Denial involves the attitude, "I am going to get better" in spite of all information to the contrary. The *desire* to recover may be present

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even with acceptance. The patient must find meaning in his new life situation, that is in the pain, helplessness, separations and losses. The question that seems to persist is, "what value am I now?" The patient will find help in his own way, a.) religious faith, b.) spouse family member, c.) Oneself, in thinking through the problem intellectually; and the physician who is honest and straightforward. The time when counseling is most effective and most needed is shortly after when the patient has become aware that he has an incurable disease or that death is a possibility.

The death does not have to be the death of the physical body. I personally went through those stages described by Kübler-Ross when I left my husband. It was the loss of a dream, I talked a lot to a therapist, cried a lot and attended a grief group at church.

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Re-Commitment to Life and Project Relevance

The process of dying is a process of re-commitment to life. That means expressing the feelings using the voice. St. John's Gospel in the New Testament is the very basic proof that sound is the basis of humanity's existence. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Sound, as a therapeutic force in our lives, is not to be taken as just any audible vibration as some sounds are upsetting, either physically or psychologically. Because they are out of sync with our set of frequencies whenever possible we should live in a sound vibration in tune with our nature and develop a taste for sound environment that supports our health and happiness. Many sound healers call this "sacred sound" — that which is holy and gives is wholeness. I had one patient who illustrated that very well. She had been a singer for her whole life, and she poured out her inconsolable grief in a recital which included very sad songs. It was very moving for all of us. This allowed the audience access to their own locked up grief. At the end of the recital no one clapped for a full three minutes. This was a spontaneous meditation a quiet pulsation of energy that felt like pure love and deep serenity of spirit.

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Incidentally, the word “God” can be traced back to the word *Guth*, which in Old High Norse means literally “voice.” A dying patient with the willingness to enter verbally into the pain has an easier time. At the assisted living facility everyone is in the same boat, and communicating with another allows movement towards acceptance.

A Conscious Choice

It is a conscious choice on the part of each person to remain in separateness. We are reminded in the Old Testament about our inner dialogue. In the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 23, verse 7, we read “as a man thinketh, so he is.” We are given free choice in this journey. Every one of our thoughts has an energy that can be scientifically measured, an energy that will either strengthen or weaken the constitution. It may be a good idea to eliminate the thoughts that weaken. The verse below illustrates this very well.

“Why is everyone here so happy except me?” asked the student.

“Because they have learned to see goodness and beauty everywhere” said the master.

“Why don’t I see goodness and beauty everywhere?” asked the student.

“Because you cannot see outside of you what you fail to see inside,” replied the master.

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There is daily opportunity for residents in the assisted living facility to form new relationships and exchange views with others who are in a similar boat, but one has to make the effort. When the concept of **being separate** is eliminated from your thoughts, people begin to feel your connection to everything and everybody and reaching out becomes easy and natural.

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My Central Supposition

When people are able to embrace that fear in a supportive group, they are able to use that energy for living in the present.

“To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven a time to be born a time to die.” We contemplate the eternal flow of God’s grace. The rhythm of the universe flows through us: ironically, acknowledging our future death is a prerequisite for living a truly joyful life now. Hiding our fears from ourselves and others requires a large amount of energy.

An example from my life is, *keeping the closet door tightly shut takes using force and pushing against it to keep the things from falling out.*

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As a Hospice Chaplain

As a hospice chaplain for almost four years, I interact with patients' families from many different cultures and encourage them to express their feelings about death. My overall message and the center of this project is that our lives become more fulfilling when we feel free to think and talk honestly about death (or *the change*). I work with individuals and groups. The tools that are used are Prayer, Music Meditation, Life Review and Discussion. I believe that a part of the Pastoral Counselor's responsibility is to facilitate connections among isolated individuals and to support and encourage them to feel unity in the group so they feel free to express their fears.

Evaluation

My evaluation was based on the questionnaire at the conclusion of the series of classes, also based on my observation, which was written after each meeting. Each participant left the series of classes with a clear idea of how they wanted to create their funeral, and may have had less fear about discussing it with the family. They completed memory book and had an expanded awareness of their life.

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Chapter II. Religious and Clinical Principles

This chapter focuses on the religious principles that moved me to develop and organize this program. The psychodynamic principles called upon in the analysis of this project experience are well summarized in the following passage:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise think on these things. *Philippians 4:8-9*

Religious Principles that Guide

As an ordained minister and chaplain, I was drawn into creating this project through loving what I do and longing to be of greater service. We are all created in the image of God. We are gifted, and we have a responsibility to use these gifts for the common good of humanity, building a kingdom of love and peace wherever we find ourselves. As humans, we have been given our meaning: to bring into the here and now the love of God. This call to service infuses meaning in every aspect of my living: my work, my public and private life. By grace, each of us is given the capacity to come into community with others, seeking to discern the path for ourselves and for the

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community. We are to discover, name and build on the values and gifts we have been given. I create on strength, individually and together, enrolling others in this effort resulting in fostering a supportive community.

The Mystical Component

Brother Wayne Teasdale has long been a role model and inspiration for me.

Below is a passage from *The Mystic Heart*.

We may or may not realize; it we may not even like it. But whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not, mystical experience is always there, inviting us on a journey of ultimate discovery. "We have been given the gift of life in this perplexing world to become who we ultimately are: creatures of boundless love, caring compassion, and wisdom. Existence is a summons to the eternal journey of the sage -- the sage we all are, if only we could see." Brother Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*.

Walking with a person processing his or her sorrow is an honor. A process of moving towards a blessing, an "acceptance" of our life: our recognition of our own

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being; and sensing that we are significant as a people, this realization depends on knowing we are accepted and loved by a power larger than ourselves.

Learning to live as a dying person is not unlike the relearning necessary after a divorce or separation from a partner.

Anger at God

Many times the dying patient or the family member feels great anger at God. As a chaplain I encourage patients to express this to shout at God, I let them know he can take it.

My patient's husband came into the facility looking rather pale. I greeted him. He looked downhearted. I asked him what the matter was. "Barbara, I am really upset, My wife has got this terminal diagnosis, it's like a replay, my first wife, we were married for 40 years, she died from the same illness. [he was tearful] Now 20 years later it's happening again.[he looked angry] Why me? I have to do it all again. I am so mad I could not go to church on Sunday, that's it." He looked really sad.

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"Tell God about the way you feel, your anger at him."

He looked at me, surprised. "Angry with God?! Who, me?! Never! I love God!!!"

"Anger towards God is a sign that you are trusting him, it will bring you towards a deeper, relationship." I said quietly. He paused and looked at me again, he was quiet. "All right, then I will talk to him; after all, he has been here for me for 85 years," he smiled in relief. "So it's really OK to be angry at God?"

"Yes, it is," I said gently, "he wants to hear about your pain, your anger."

In many faith circles, "anger" in itself is not considered sinful: "Be angry but sin not." (Psalm 4:4) Rather, what is considered sinful is the destructive consequence of anger: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." (Proverbs 15:1-2).

It feels good to be angry. How many times in your life did you swallow it and smile because it's not polite to show anger? When we got angry as children, we couldn't protect ourselves because we didn't have the physical, intellectual, and financial resources to compel others to respect our rights. Our anger was no use to us-- which is, again, the reason we learned to suppress it. Now that we're adults, our anger

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is supported by the full force of everything we know. Anger expressed at God can give us a lot of energy, and a different kind of energy and joy.

Healthy Anger

The American Psychological Association (APA) states that suppressing your anger can mean that "if it isn't allowed outward expression, your anger can turn inward-on yourself. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression." That kind of reaction can then create further mental and physical health problems.

In conclusion, contrary to popular belief, anger towards God can be a positive sign of the potential personal relationship in our lives -- a gateway towards greater trust.

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Chapter II.2. Psychodynamic Principles

In this observation of the elders at the assisted-living facility I will examine this experience from a psychodynamic point of view. I am conducting a number of pastoral classes intended as preparation for death. I see that one of the central themes is the ability of the patients to fit their present situation (terminal illness) into some meaningful life pattern. This is what Allport describes as a “unifying philosophy of life. This may or may not be religious, but in any event, has to be a frame of meaning and of responsibility into which life’s activities fit.” For example, “I come in alone, I love, have a family, and I go out alone” said Walter, one of my patients.

To assist in the holistic understanding, of working with the elders, I will give a brief discussion of the object-relations theory, which was developed in the UK by the British-based Austrian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960) and the English psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971).

Object relations is an approach to understanding human behavior, development, relationships and psychotherapy. Object relations theorists believe that we are relationship-seeking rather than pleasure-seeking as Freud suggested. We seek to be with others in community, in teams, in families, and I see that in my work. What I seek

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to support and develop is relationships among elders. Objects-relations theory focuses on the complex relationships of the self to the other. Within modern object-relations theory, objects can be people (mother, father, others) or things, such as transitional objects with which we form attachments. I see how important the birds, the dog, and the two cats who live in the facility are to the patients and their families..

These objects and the developing child's relationship with them are incorporated into a self, and become the building blocks of the self-system. I believe it is important to continue using the term **object** because we form relationships with things as well as people. In childhood, we form relationships with our stuffed animals, toys and pets (transitional objects). So the term **object** is more inclusive for our understanding of how humans form and preserve a sense of self, as well as relationships with others.

Object relationships are initially formed during early interactions with the primary caregivers. These early patterns often continue to exert a strong influence throughout life. When an individual relates to "objects," those objects are internalized in the psychic life of that person, such that images of those objects are formed. The objects are internalized and the images thus formed are integrated in one's self-structure, point of view and belief systems for the rest of life.

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This blueprint of a self-structure is formed early in life out of our relationships with the objects (significant others, and parts of significant others) around us. Once formed, the blueprint can be modified, but our basic tendency is to seek out others (friends, spouses) who will reaffirm these early self-object relationships. It is as if in early childhood we create a script for a drama and then spent the rest of our lives seeking out others to play the parts. This does not mean the script cannot be changed. "I have married my father three times," said Thelma laughing one day as we were talking about how we all repeat behavior over and over again.

However, the more traumatic our early self-object relations, the more rigid and resistant to change we become. For example, I have a patient who was adopted by a cold German family at six years old. It was traumatic, she had a difficult time adjusting to her apartment, and living alone, she craved the attention that she never got as a child (she even admitted that). Many object-relations theorists see psychological dysfunction as an expression of being stuck at a stage of development, unable to mature further. From this perspective, dysfunctional and symptomatic behaviors are really an immature attempt to resolve early traumas. However, these attempts typically fail since we use immature manipulations to get others who are engaged in similar manipulations to meet our unmet needs stemming from these early traumas.

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God Image

Since the group talks about beliefs and prays together, an examination of how we develop our God image was appropriate and worthwhile. Having “good enough” objects and “holding environments” is necessary for the forming and re-forming of one’s God-Image [Winnicott, D.W, 1951]. This means that the objects, including the environment, should feel safe and not be excessively intrusive, yet not completely detached from one whose God-Image is evolving. We form and re-form this image as we age. Our initial image of God is formed as children but changes as we change.

Forces of libido and aggression are not at the center of the studies done in object-relations theory, as it is the case in the Freudian style of psychoanalytic theory. Melanie Klein presented the central concern of the object-relations theory in these words: “There is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object relations are at the center of emotional life” [1952, p.53]. From birth to death, human beings are influenced by “the significant others” in their lives.

They are influenced by the “internalized significant other,” often one’s parents, teachers, peers, or communities like the assisted living residence. Often one can hear

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elders say "my mother said..." So one can see where the significant people in their lives are within. Their spiritual community also lies within this classification of "significant other." Once internalized, they become internal authority; according to Freud, this is a part of the developing superego. In summary, the term "object-relations" refers to the self-structure we internalize in early childhood, which functions as a blueprint for establishing and maintaining future relationships. Psychopathology is an expression of traumatic self-object internalizations from childhood acted out in our current relationships.

Sigmund Freud on Death

Since we are investigating and discussing death, I felt I should see what Freud said about death. At first Freud was dismissive of death concerns (thanatophobia). He believed that people who express fears of dying and death are—way deep down—actually afraid of something else, such as castration or abandonment. Humans could not really fear death because they had never had this experience and because finality and death are not computed by the unconscious. This view remained influential for many years after Freud himself started to take death more seriously. Freud was

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influential in the development of thinking about consciousness, but his theories are not helpful to a person who is dying.

It was grief that came foremost to Freud's attention. Not only had many died during World War I, but also many of Freud's family members and friends were suffering from depression, agitation, physical ailments, and suicidal thoughts and behavior. Later he realized that many people lived in grief for deaths not related to the war and that these losses might account for their various emotional and physical problems. Freud's grief-work theory suggested the importance of expressing grief and detaching emotionally from the deceased in order to recover full function.

Freud: Doomed as a Race

His most sweeping — and controversial — suggestion took the form of death-instinct theory, which postulated that all living creatures engage in an ongoing scrimmage between competing impulses for activity and survival on the one hand, and withdrawal and death on the other. This theory was associated with Freud's ever-intensifying fears that human destructive impulses would eventually destroy civilization. This attitude and theory has not helped the dying patient.

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He strongly felt that unless this "deathist" orientation could be rechanneled by improved child-rearing and more effective societal patterns, we were doomed as a race. We have improved immensely as a culture in this regard. Freud changed slightly to the end of his life, and at the last he hoped that acts of love could counteract the destructive impulses. It was not long after his death in London on September 23, 1939, that Anna Freud organized an effective mission to save the children of that city from Nazi bombs and later rockets.

Carl G. Jung

In a hospital in Switzerland in 1944, the world-renowned psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, had a heart attack followed by a near-death experience. His vivid encounter with the light, plus the intensely meaningful insights that resulted from the experience, led Jung to conclude that his experience came from something real and eternal. Jung's experience is unique in that during his near-death moment, he saw the Earth from a vantage point of about a thousand miles above it, a view whose incredible accuracy was borne out two decades later by astronauts in space..

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Fragment of Carl C.G. Jung - The Soul and Death (in: The Meaning of Death)

I have often been asked what I believe about death, that unproblematical ending of individual existence. Death is known to us simply as the end. It is the period, often placed before the close of the sentence and followed only by memories of aftereffects in others. For the person concerned, however, the sand has run out of the glass; the rolling stone has come to rest. When death confronts us, life always seems like a downward flow or like a clock that has been wound up and whose eventual "running down" is taken for granted.

I agree with Jung on many levels. The most interesting thing is that most people focus on the future (what has not been). This eventually leads to fear of what also has not occurred -- death. What if death is the beginning and when we are born we are actually dying? If you believe in karmic laws, then life never ends. It is continuous and birth and death are the etheric names that we have applied to these journeys in life.

As humans, there is evolution (body to spirit) and involution (spirit to body). So when we are born, are we humans having spiritual experiences or spirits having human

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experiences? As Yogananda said, you have to have thousands of lifetimes in order to be born into a human experience.

So what is real and what is not? What is visible and what is not? Death is something that *we* have created, in my opinion. When the physical body starts to decline, welcome the experience as a tree dies. The physical body does die. But does soul or spirit lives, or do they continue into another body, into another lifetime? One will never KNOW for sure, and all we can really do is speculate. We can all have beliefs and that is what makes our own journeys special.

In order to be at peace it is necessary to feel a sense of history are that you a part of what has gone before you and apart of what is to come. Our ancestors are a part of us and we can call upon them for assistance and thanks, it is because of their life that we were born on this planet. Being thus surrounded we are not alone but one in a line that stretches back to the beginning of humankind and will continue through our great grandchildren.

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Chapter III. Method and Philosophy of the Sessions

Precious Moments (A Sacred Circle)

Most human being, regardless of their age, benefit from participating in a group with others who are dealing with issues similar to their own. The healing power of peer support and identification with others' problems has been well documented. For example, Yalom writes, "Group contact not only draws from the general ameliorative effects of positive expectations but also benefits from a source of hope that is unique."

Members are inspired and expectations raised by contact with those who have trod the same path and found the way back. " (Yalom 1995, P.5)

The addition of spiritual emphasis through prayer and discussion adds an entirely new dimension to group process. The groups I have been leading have included a great diversity of people. For example, I saw a Jewish Holocaust survivor reaching out to an Afro-American man who worked at Bloomingdale's as a security guard his whole life. "The group process, as well as the prayers, allowed these strangers to open up to one another." Yalom (1995)

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There are several factors that make groups successful. Five in particular are germane to this spiritual support group:

- **Fostering hope** -- *through listening, being encouraged by peers*
- **Universality** -- *we are all more similar than different*
- **Imparting information** -- *"this is the way I dealt with my daughter"*
- **Altruism** -- *if I can support you:"*
- **Catharsis** -- *"I feel like I had an emotional release as I was telling my story"*

Providing a space to talk, sing and pray on a weekly basis without requiring a sign-up ahead of time attracts people who would not usually join a group. I noticed individuals who are reluctant to share about themselves initially but who will participate when we sing familiar songs. Very rarely does a person remain detached or distant for the whole time.

Yalom describes the power of groups: "Many patients, because of their extreme social isolation, have a heightened sense of uniqueness. After they hear other people share concerns that are similar to their own, they report feeling more a part of the world, as being all in the same boat . . . Patients are enormously helpful to one another: they offer support, reassurance, suggestions, insight." (Yalom, 1995, p. 6, 12) The

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leader must facilitate and provide a format to talk together with peers as *the change* or the end of life on this planet approaches. The participants expressed their need to share in a group setting when they were polled at the beginning.

One of the women, Mary T., stated clearly, "I seem to be braver and, y' know, have more courage in our group; and something else, it helps me to think when I hear other people talk." .

Values that are encouraged

Introduction to the thinking behind these sessions

This curriculum had a distinctive approach. The topics were not designed to be *taught*, but rather to guide both participants and facilitator to *experience in this group setting*.

The discussions prompted an *internal* experience which could be identified and subsequently expressed. This provided the parameters for a voyage of inner discovery, unique to each participant. I want to underline that the kind of trust that is built up takes time and effort on the part of the facilitator; however, this is not an "eight-session formula." Music, singing and listening are always included to provide another channel for people to relate.

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Structure of Precious Moments Sessions. The name “Precious Moments” was given by the residents.

Facilitator and Music Therapist

- Discussion group: class met for ten weeks once a week for two hours.
- Check-in: 10 minutes to allow people a chance to talk together.
- Music: We sing a peace song in English and in Hebrew together
- Presentation: Reading or meditation for three to seven minutes
- Discussion/Sharing: one hour or more
- Harp Music and Singing in English and Hebrew
- Closing with a blessing

Precious Moments Topics were selected by the participants

The Six Values that I Encourage and Support during these Sessions

1. **Peace** is introduced as our natural state; i.e. that within all of us there is an innate core of calm and tranquility. The sessions use simple yet powerful ways to rediscover this inner peace. By practicing peacefulness, participants can access their positive qualities, which help to build self-respect and contentment.

2. **Positivity** is about having the choice and power to change the way we think.

As residents we can think critically or even negatively out of habit, whereas positive

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thoughts make people feel good. The sessions help participants recognize unhelpful patterns of thinking and change them to more positive ones by learning to observe their thoughts. The resulting positivity and optimism bring benefits to their life.

3. Compassion brings humanity to the community. It is the expression of our innate qualities of patience, generosity and kindness, yet there are often personal barriers to its expression – anger, anxiety, guilt and attachments. The sessions help participants acknowledge and view compassion as a value they can consciously express when interacting with others.

4. Co-operation is about working together successfully, as individuals and teams. The sessions help participants to gain an understanding of the thoughts, attitudes, feelings and behavior which enable successful co-operation.

5. Valuing the self requires that we recognize our own worth and, in doing so, can better acknowledge the intrinsic worth of others. Participants explore the question of “who am I?” in the context of how they look after themselves. This can help them to bring mutual respect and harmony into their relationships, to the benefit of themselves, their community and their family.

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6. Spirituality is a vital concept in furthering the ideals of holistic health and spiritual care. The sessions involve participants in clarifying concepts of healing, spirit and spirituality.

Questionnaires were given to both hospice patients and residents

- A preliminary questionnaire was given out to identify specific requests for topics from the patients/residents.
- A secondary questionnaire evaluates how the residents/patients felt positive as a result of the group sessions.
- I also used personal interviews and feedback from the student volunteers.

One of the Topics was funerals.

A Family-Directed Funeral

In talking to a family that recently did all the caring for the person at home, I found positive results. They commented, "It was intimate, like our relationship with Dad, and there was no need to coordinate the schedule with the requirements of a busy

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funeral home.” Another daughter said, “We spent time with him, we gave him gifts, my 3 year daughter gave him a Teddy.” “I liked that everyone could play a part”. Caring for your own dead is completely legal in forty-six states.

Children and Funerals

Young children don’t have to be shielded from death. They understand saying goodbye. This is one of the most intimate experiences in a family's life. With a home-based approach, this process is not on exhibit to strangers.

According to our family tradition in the working-class north of England, when a relative died the body was laid out in our home, because our parlor was the largest, for all family and guests to visit. It was a time for socializing, drinking tea and eating scones with jam and wearing a pretty dress to receive people.

A Natural Burial

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A modern natural burial is an environmentally sustainable alternative to existing funeral practices, in which the body is returned to the earth to decompose naturally and be recycled into new life. The body is prepared for burial without chemical preservatives and is buried in a simple shroud or biodegradable casket that might be made from locally harvested wood, wicker or even recycled paper. Alice was a patient at the assisted living facility. Her family and friends decorated a wooden casket with good-bye messages. Even the youngsters were involved and they enjoyed the pleasure of thinking of their Auntie Elsie. It was a final act of closure. Natural burial is a natural, beautiful expression of letting go, helping friends and family move from grief and darkness to celebration.

The Eternal Forest

I gave a talk about a friend of mine in Wales, Arabella Melville, who bought a forest; she named it the Eternal Forest. Her dream was to have a place to bury her parents, as they did not wish to be in a cemetery. They had spent a lot of time hiking and camping and wanted to be in the woods. The Eternal Forest is now a registered charity and is open for people to scatter ashes or be buried. When a person is buried there, the family

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gets a wooden birdhouse made from the trees in the forest, with their name on it, so they can come and feed the birds and remember their loved one.

Green Burial: The woodland burial grounds will be nature reserves where the bereaved can experience the peace of the trees as they remember those they have lost. The graves are unobtrusive, but they will be marked by stones or wooden memorials so that friends and relatives can find the burial place.

Funeral: Some of the responses were as follows:

At first people were reluctant to talk about their thoughts. Someone said it felt forbidden to them. They wanted to speak quietly and just include the person next to them. Very slowly they began to open up and the group began to hum.

Fran S.F. has a worm composting bin where she recycles fruit peels and other kitchen scraps. She admitted she gives away worms as Christmas presents to other gardeners. She states that when she dies, "I want to be put in a plain wooden casket and buried without a vault to encourage decomposition. I don't want to be embalmed, because it involves chemicals going into the ground." "I got much closer to my sister

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after not seeing her for many years but we discovered how we both used to pick up [my brother's] socks from the floor so he would not get in trouble with Mom. We never knew we each did that. We laughed as we remembered his sloppiness." *Laura G.*

"Oh men, we do make them into babies," laughed *Kathleen O.*

"It's true the burial offers a space where you talk about stuff you would not usually talk about. It was at my Aunt's funeral that we realized how much she influenced us. She had separate projects with all us 3 children which affected our life choices. Aunt Ellen and I studied maps (I became a missionary), my sister Martha studied French with her (her husband is French), and Harold did writing with her (he became a journalist). She is sorely missed." *Rob S.*

"I just want my friends to tell stories about me and make jokes at my funeral. I want my funeral to be like my last party.... you know..... Is that crazy? I'd rather mine be happy than sad. To remember the funny and crazy things you did in your life time. They'll cry because they're going to miss you and care about you." *Walt Z.*

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"I want my ashes sprinkled out to sea. I was in the navy and that's where I want to end up. My brother Billy went that way. My sister could not stop talking about how lovely the flowers looked all over the sea. She took great photos. Also it does not cost much, I would rather my grandkids have the money." *Brendan D.*

"In my family we did an Irish wake for my brother. Someone has to be awake with the body for 24 hours after the death. We laid the body in the coffin while the family and friends sat around it drinking and talking. We are a drinking family. We all got very drunk

and sang songs into the early hours. It's actually a beautiful experience. We all support each other." *B. O'Malley*

Responses

"When Mom died, Dad was alone and it was during the funeral that the community of friends they had together began to interact with him as a widower. They

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began to invite him to Friday night dinners. The funeral helped to solidify this support and grow him into his new role." *Fran E.*

"I know no one likes to think about this, but my physical existence is going to end one day. I have been waiting putting some things on hold, like finishing my Master's; I ask myself, what am I waiting for?" *Walter W's Daughter*

"Last week I was reading one of my mother's books that she had written on botany. I have not felt interested in reading that since she died last year. I felt drawn to the trees. I could see and feel their strength. I saw their roots going deep into the ground. I mean I actually saw the tree roots physically reaching below the ground. I think it was my mother". *Toby N.*

Topic: Near-Death Experiences and Eternal Life

We began by talking about eternal life and someone brought up a near-death experience that her sister had, so we incorporated it.

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During a near-death experience (NDE), a person physically dies – sometimes during a surgery or a heart attack. Their heart stops beating, and they stop breathing. Several minutes or hours later, their heart starts pumping and they begin to breathe again. The people who have had these experiences tend to describe an out-of-body experience and the sense of being in the spirit world.

One of the universal aspects of the NDE is that those who have them know it was an afterlife experience. They know they saw God. They know it was a reality vastly greater than conscious reality. Doctors have been gathering data of patients who have reported these types of experiences for over 30 years. A number of scientists and doctors believed that perhaps these were just mere hallucinations. But many of the characteristics of the NDEs could not be explained by the idea that they were hallucinations. Dr. Raymond Moody reported that once out of the body, people have a number of common experiences. These include “moving through a void or dark tunnel toward a bright light; meeting with departed relatives and friends; having a feeling of great comfort and bliss; and, being surrounded by compassionate love and a feeling so beautiful that they longed to remain. When the people did return to the earthly realm after their NDE, they were affected by this feeling for the rest of their lives.”

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Near Death Experiences (NDE): Summary of a Reading

We read and discussed Margaret Tweddell from Britain who, as a child, had a near-death experience. She almost drowned at 10 years old. She tells about first being in a long tunnel; she then emerged into light, and was met by a beautiful loving being. She did not want to leave this energy, but she was gently told she had to go back. Since that time she developed clairvoyance so accurate that during World War II she was commissioned by the British Royal Air Force and she successfully traced missing RAF pilots. She is well known and respected for her accomplishments. She is a deeply religious person and involved in the church.

Responses

"My husband actually died on the operating table. He described floating above his body and watching them operate. He saw a long tunnel and a quiet loving being, gentle and soft. He consciously decided that he was not ready to leave." *Mary B.*

"As a Catholic child I was always taught that we are promised eternal life. My ideal death would be all my children gathered around me, not sad, but happy to be with me, saying goodbye, and just floating off to sleep. I don't want to be alone just at peace." *Ellie A.*

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"My brother died for about 8 minutes. He described going down a long tunnel, seeing our Mother and being surrounded by a beautiful loving light. Then she said he had to go back, as it was not his time. He wanted to stay there as he felt so accepted."

Bridie O.

Topic: Heaven and Hell

I talked about how our spirit is a fractal of God. This means our spirit is both a part of the whole and the whole itself. Like a drop of water from the ocean, we are part of the ocean. The very essence of the ocean is contained within us. We talked about questions like "where is heaven? Is it up in the sky somewhere?" Then we talked about how Jesus is recorded as saying that heaven is within us. (Luke 17:20-21).

Responses

"It might be more correct to say we are already in heaven, or hell, depending upon the condition of your heart or how much you love." *Thomas O.*

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On Heaven and Hell "One of my teachers, Sister Eunice, told us that we attain the highest level of heaven by having unconditional love for everyone. She said such love is truly and absolutely heaven." *Joan O.*

"I believe we create our own hell as well as heaven within us right here on earth and we bring it with us after death. " *Bill G.*

"I think we create hell by being away from God until we choose to return to God. Hell is a condition totally devoid of love. It is not a place." *Florence B.*

Topic: Visitors, Say the word "Cancer" around me

"When you visit, talk about the real life you are living. This helps me feel less like an untouchable and like I am still involved with the world of normalcy. One of the hardest things about being an invalid is the problem of conversation with my husband. If no-one talks to me about the life outside, I am left with only illness and TV to talk about with him, and this makes it hard. I feel like he is bored visiting me." *Lillian G.*

"Whenever my sister visits she never says the word cancer, it's like she feels she will catch it, she refers to my illness." *Therese M*

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Topic: Visitors, allow me to feel sad.

"One of the most difficult problems of serious illness is that everyone wants to encourage us the patients; but sometimes, having the luxury of a long cry with a good friend such a relief." She took a silent break. "It allows the tension to escape -- once the dam has broken. Sometimes, the greater part of cure is the release of fear". *Ina H.*

"After living a long time I discovered the beauty of sadness. To feel it fully and respect the legitimacy of its place in my life. That it would be totally unreasonable not to feel sad at times and so not to fight it but treat it like a friend who is passing through...I'm happy to say I have not had a lengthy sad for quite some time now." *Bridie O.*

"I had to put Maggie, our Siamese cat, to sleep last week. She had cancer. I didn't see it coming but instead thought she was just cold since the weather here was freezing. I miss her so much and keep seeing her sitting by the door in my apartment. My loving companion left." *Flo E.*

Topic: Forgiveness

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"Letting ourselves be forgiven is one of the most difficult things we will undertake and the most fruitful" Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

Forgiveness meditation: In this practice, we call forth situations where either we have committed wrongs or made mistakes, perhaps hurting others, perhaps hurting ourselves... or both. We also focus on situations where others have wronged us. The goal of this practice is to recognize that a wrong has been committed, to understand the ramifications and consequences that resulted. The idea being that every action is preceded by a thought... and every thought is preceded by some causal factor.

Discussion - Forgiveness

Question we addressed; what is interpersonal forgiveness and why is it so powerful?

How is it a gift to ourselves?

As we forgive, divine love is flowing out from us. As we pray for our enemies, we are loving divinely. The greatest rewards of prayer comes when we set aside time to pray

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for those who despitefully use us, pray for those who persecute us. Mathew 5:44. We learn to pray "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Some responses to the topic

"I am working with forgiveness towards my Mafioso brother. And I am surrendering the right to get even with him" Carmela said, then she smiled gently. "Eventually I may be able to allow a desire for his welfare, but I am not sure about reconciling. I feel freer, more in control and hey, that's powerful."

"A most important thing to keep in mind about forgiveness is that it is not necessarily about reconciliation. It *can* be about reconciliation if you desire that, but reconciliation is a two-person (or more) process and we can only control **what we do** and *not* what others will do". Pat C

"I identified with my external roles in life, my career and being wife and when my husband died suddenly and I got sick I lost everything that gave me a routine, my identity. It's only now that I am looking inside me. I was so angry at Robert for

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leaving me. I am in the process of forgiving him. That's why I attend this circle as the fellowship to support me" *Terry C*

Sadie, one of our regulars, sat quietly listening. She is a thoughtful person who is always ready to help the folks in wheelchairs. "I will never forgive my husband" There was silence, we waited. She looked at me as if asking for permission and then she took a breath. "He stabbed me twenty eight times, I had three young children. He went to jail for it, died in jail. I never want to see him again. Not even on the other side either."

Florence asked, "Sadie, I know you recently moved here from Florida. Was that your second husband who died?"

"Yes I met and married a wonderful man for 35 years. He just loved my kids gave us a nice home. Now he's gone. I feel so grateful for the time with him." Sadie smiled at the memory

Two people who have been attending my groups for 2 years survived the holocaust and are Polish Jews "I'm born and raised in Poland, was in the ghetto. I am the oldest of eight the only one to escape. They took us to the trains to take to the death camp. I was a young girl. Well, I jumped off the train and I survived under an

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assumed name. I was caught to work in Germany as a Polish girl. And I worked on a German farm, under a false name .I .pretended that I was Catholic and escaped until the end of the war. They were kind and loving to me, they knew." *Eva G.*

"I am so glad you are here with us" said Florence (the mother of the group)

"We were six children. I am the oldest. There lived by us a very Hasidic Rabbi, like the Pope. He blessed me when I was little. Father said, if somebody will survive that will be you, because you have the Rabbi's blessing. I went through concentration camp. I cannot forgive. I cannot forgive, lost the whole family. How I could have lived through this and everyone else died." *Henry G.*

"I can see that forgiveness is a gift for yourself, why would I carry the anger at my Father I am putting down the load." *Barb R*

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Topic: Completing a Precious Memory Book, A Limited Life Review

Note copy of book in materials section

"None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm." ~Henry David Thoreau

I designed the precious memory book with input from the residents

Some Goals for the Memory book

- Accomplish something to pass on to the great great children
- Celebrate and value their lives
- Express Self-and receive confirmation
- Experience being listened too and listening to others
- Discover new insights and understanding about self
- Know they will be remembered and that their parenting will continue
- Restore some sense of control
- Open communication in family

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Responses

"I have great memories. places I 'v traveled, I even have a photo of me on a camel in Egypt. Encouraging my great-grand children to travel is one of my goals. I want the family to see my memories, our traditions, recorded in a book and I want them to see what fun life is." *Josephine D.*

"I like the student Constantine he is so cute, and he is interested in my pictures"
Julia D.

"Oh I love doing this and it gives me something to talk about with the visitors" *Flo. M.*

"I thought this would be a pain but it is fun I have an excuse to remember" *Zita M.*

"I see my life differently, I have done a lot of things." *JosirD*

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Chapter IV. Measurement/Structure

The participants are men and women all over 80 years old and from two assisted living communities in Brooklyn, where I serve as chaplain. Their religious affiliations are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and many other faiths but they all have the same need to

The Tools

There are seven tools for learning, called 'spiritual tools'. They provide the means by which participants engage in inner exploration and apply their insights to a wide range of situations and problems. They are briefly described below:

Meditation in these sessions involves participants in being silent and using the time to learn about their mind and their thoughts.

By using positive and peaceful thoughts the participants can experience quietening the minds, moving towards the silent centre of their consciousness, and bringing calm.

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Listening is an essential skill, and the quality of *how* we listen can bring benefit not only to those being listened to, but to the listener themselves. Listening as a spiritual tool involves participants in deep listening and requires that the listener finds inner peacefulness, so that they can give their full attention, focusing on what the person is saying with an open heart and without judgment.

Reflection The spiritual approach to reflection involves participants in taking a detached view - looking at themselves from outside, so that they can examine their own emotional reactions. From a place of calm and peacefulness, it enables them to understand and release feelings of anger, anxiety and attachment, learn from mistakes and build on positive experiences.

Appreciation. As a spiritual skill, it looks at individuals and groups from the perspective of valuing what works best, drawing on existing skills and shared values to seek solutions, rather than focusing on the problem and apportioning blame.

Creativity encourages the discovery of new solutions. As a spiritual skill it emphasizes the premise that ideas come to us when we give ourselves silent space and

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drop our preconceptions. However, the experience of heightened creativity and its application to problem solving will be a positive learning outcome.

Playfulness through Music introduces the idea that it is legitimate to experience fun and laughter as part of the learning process. Being playful is being spontaneous and carefree, with a willingness to let go of barriers and overcome difficulties and sing. While participants may feel inhibited at first, the singing of songs they know is a moving experience, connecting people at a deeper level. Having a sense of 'lightness' in our manner encourages experimenting.

The seven tools are introduced and applied throughout the sessions and can become valuable resources.

The Sessions

I will share some aspects of the sessions, I want to underline that the kind of trust that is built up takes time and effort on the part of the facilitator, however, this is not an eight session formula. The role of Music is very important as it provides another channel for people to relate.

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I always include music and will include in this section some of what the research illuminates about the role of music

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Chapter IV Outcomes

This is a description of outcomes assessed according to what I specified. There were developments not anticipated in your original plan. In other words what worked and what did not work.

Final Discussion

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter". ~Mark Twain

Congruence

I undertook this demonstration project believing that it would make a difference in the lives of the residents at the Assisted Living Facility, who, for the most part, are in need of emotional and spiritual support. In my talks with the residents, and in their questionnaires, they outlined a deep need to connect with each other around the subject of death. The painful realities of loneliness at the end-of-life that have evolved for elderly people sometimes makes it hard to connect with each other. However, they feel much more confident with a supportive facilitator who urges them on. Many

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residents' lives are barren, they rarely have visitors, and when family members come to visit, they don't want to talk about end-of- life plans.

The hope of this project was to help to address the lack of empowerment around being able to talk about death with a group of peers. Hopefully, they are now in a stronger place in a period of acceptance, peace and closure.

I enjoyed the opportunity to review the relevant literature, to focus on a spiritual group and to write about this project. Doing so has helped me to solidify my conviction about the worth and essential elements of such a group. It was difficult to measure precisely the groups' impact on individual participants at each session. The Brooklyn College student interns' observations, as well as the testimony of many of the participants, revealed an exceptionally positive assessment. Given the success of this project, I am now in a position in my Agency to replicate the groups and to train the Chaplains in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and to significantly increase my activity in this area, as well as to advocate for other such groups.

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My intense focus on this kind of group reinforced my belief that this is an efficient means of helping the elderly to explore their spiritual needs for the end of life planning while providing them with emotional support. Examining several cases in detail helped me to clarify some key elements of the process. It also impressed upon me the impact that so many of the encounters had on the families of residents as well as on the staff.

From analyzing my experience in the Assisted Living Facility with these groups, I am now much better equipped both to deal with difficult and unexpected situations that inevitably will arise.

Our format evolved to a pattern which included discussing problems and dealing with painful issues early in the session and creating an uplifting focus towards the conclusion. We did not always go according to the plan and I learnt to go with it. However, at first I wanted to stick with the topic and was more rigid. The being fluid allowed the participants to transition from exploring personally difficult matters to feeling empathy concerning others' problems and greater awareness of the positive

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aspects of their lives. The use of music and meditation for a few minutes was another tool that I initiated in the middle which worked very well most of the time. The times when it did not work was when people fell asleep. I found that the meditation was not a good idea at the end of the session since people were tired and snoring happened. Personal Anecdotes from growing up in England served as a wonderful ice breaker that fostered a congenial feeling early on in the sessions.

Incongruence

When I originally conceptualized this project, I expected that the group process itself and the information that was disseminated through it, in the form of shared conversation, prayers and song, would have an enduring effect on the participants; my observations led me to believe that it had a temporary effect as one therapy among many others at least, at the onset. Later with time, this changed as the trust grew both within the group, and between the group and the Facilitator and Music therapist we had to meet a few times about organization of where the music fit in.

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Residents do not come to The Circle seeking psychological or spiritual support, but the vast majorities are in need of spiritual guidance due to the crisis in their health; more often than not, they experience a yearning for connection to others and to God. Sometimes, those who are the neediest are the least willing to participate in this very activity that could offer them solace. Their reluctance was demonstrated repeatedly when certain residents declined to join us, indicating that they did not feel up to it, or a prayer circle was not for them.

Yet those who were the most resistant often would work on the memory book with one of my interns in their own apartment. I saw a couple of the people who had worked on the memory book privately in their rooms who were proudly showing it to the Social Worker. They appeared to get some comfort some pleasure from sharing their finished books.

Most significant in administering the evaluation were the participants' disabilities and limitations. In addition, fluctuations in mood due to a participant's physical condition could change his or her response. Intense pain or a half-hour wait for a nurse's aide to assist a patient to the toilet could easily alter his or her state and cause any equanimity the resident obtained during the group to dissipate.

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Therefore, my most reliable sources of assessment were observation during and after the group, individual follow-up discussions with the residents, and later debriefing the Intern students, who spend several hours a day with the patients.

Also, discrepancies existed regarding individuals' responses to questions and evaluation, as well as their appearance and what they expressed during and after the sessions. With some elderly, appearance is often deceiving: as we age, our facial expressions are not as readable. Thus someone might appear to be despondent, but express feeling in a great mood. Furthermore, many people are polite and have conformed to social expectations throughout their lives and may have felt compelled to express what they believed was socially acceptable.

What did not work in the structure of the sessions?

- Most of the time during the meditation even when I moved it around, more than one third went to sleep. My thoughts about what happened is that they are very tense and when I allowed them to dispel their tension by deep relaxation they fell asleep
- The readings were sometimes too long and I felt I would be cheating them if I did not give them the whole thing

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- The room is quite noisy and the aides all talk loudly so I had to continually ask them to please be quiet as I could not hear the people talk. They just were not used to talking lower
 - Often people had to go to the bathroom and everyone had to move as the space was limited, next time I was sure to leave a space for wheelchairs to go out.
 - Made sure to have big type as people have difficulty reading
 - Learned to have tissues and water available

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Chapter VI The Role of the Facilitator

The sessions themselves are best presented with 'lightness'. Exercises should not be rushed, but conducted at an easy pace. How the facilitator comes across - how comfortable you seem with yourself - will provide an example for participants on which to model them. For this reason, it is more important that you have an awareness of your own spirituality and practice than it is for you to be an experienced teacher or minister.

Good practice

- Some good practice principles when facilitating groups include:
- Keep the group to the theme/task.
- Stay neutral, be non-judgmental.
- Do not play expert. Your role is to facilitate learning and sharing.
- Ensure that everyone is heard. Each person has a point of view and a contribution to make. Ensure that one person speaks at a time without interruption. Avoid personal agendas.
- Encourage sharing and deep exploration of the subject.

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- Be positive, be flexible; be creative and imaginative in creating solutions.
 - Be aware of group energy, observe group process and 'go with the flow' (within an overall session structure).
 - Start and finish on time.

In addition, as facilitator it will be important for you to take into consideration the participants' motivation and behavior during the session. Have they had any experience of spiritual practice before? The answers to these questions will help you to decide how best to plan and facilitate the session program and assess the likely responses to it.

Participant experience

Each session provides an opportunity for a group of people to meet to explore a topic where the emphasis is on learning through participation. They will themselves gain a deeper understanding of what they want. In facilitating this process, it is worth remembering what makes a successful learning experience, in terms of participant experience .

Some features include:

- Participants feel empowered, motivated and assume responsibility for what they say and do.

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- They show respect and want to co-operate.
 - The output from a group working well together is often greater than the sum of all the individual contributions.

A Safe Environment

A trusting environment is important, as many of the interactions touch deep, personal beliefs and issues. Some participants will be experienced in personal development approaches, whereas others may find some of the activities personally challenging. You will need to anticipate unexpected, emotional responses to some of the exercises and be able to offer follow-on support. It is essential to acknowledge that as we touch deeper aspects of ourselves, so we will reveal the 'dark' side as well as the light. This exposing of vulnerability is part of our personal healing.

General Preparation

Plan the program for the session, taking account of the time you have available. Make sure that you have all the equipment and materials suggested for the session hand out. Photocopy any materials, together with copies of the background paper to give participants at the end, not at the beginning.

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Most sessions may require the use of the following:

- flipchart paper and pens
- paper and pens, colored pens or colored pencils
- Blue Tack, pins or other means of attaching finished work to walls or display boards
- CD player/tape recorder and relaxation music tapes.

Practical

Attend to practical preparations. Ensure that the temperature of the room is comfortable and arrange seating in a way which encourages discussion and sharing (a circle or horseshoe). Note the location of toilets and refreshment areas and arrange for water and tissues to be available.

Personal preparation for the Facilitator

It is a good idea to prepare yourself 'inside' as well as 'outside', so that you are able to communicate the values and qualities being explored during the session. You may want to visualize the session with positive outcomes, as well as drawing on your own inner qualities that you will need to guide people through it.

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Setting the Tone

Setting the tone refers to the way in which the session is conducted and the responsibility which everyone has for its success. It can be helped by preparing the physical environment removing clutter, arranging the chairs in a way which encourages participation and by background reading and research.

More importantly, you need to prepare yourself mentally, so that you are a good example of what you presenting. Participants may not remember what you say, but they will remember how you said it and the impression they had of you. Your 'quality of being', expressed in your body language, enthusiasm and attitude, will have a greater impact than the words you speak, and will help people to get a sense of what the session is truly about.

Remember that you are 'modeling' the values which underpin this experience. If you are talking about peace, you need to be peaceful; if you are talking about positivity, you need to be positive. In general, most healthcare professionals are in a

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hurry to finish one job and get onto the next, so set an example of being in the moment by giving sufficient time for exploration and reflection.

Success

'What things we can all do to make this successful'. Some examples might be confidentiality, listening, tolerance, support, co-operation, honesty, participation, respect, commitment, enthusiasm. Each group will select their own key words and issues, but some, if not raised, need to be drawn to the group's attention, such as confidentiality and respect. Self-responsibility for one's own actions is another key issue, as is how to support those who find it difficult to express themselves in a group.

Feedback

After each exercise, the experience is usually shared briefly either in pairs or small groups and then, if appropriate, within the larger-group. A suggested timing for the feedback part of the exercise is the facilitator's guidance.

Sometimes, questions are provided to help participants process their experience. Keep any questioning open-ended, rather than channeling participants to a specific conclusion. Open questions will allow them to explore the ideas at different levels of complexity and in a way which is most meaningful to them.

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You may wish to adjust the form of feedback depending on the spiritual tool utilized in the exercise. The tools of meditation, visualization and reflection are calming and centering, whereas the tools of listening, creativity and fun are more active and engaging. The feedback session could aim to maintain the quality of energy generated, or begin to shift it. For example, you can stir up energy through 'thought-showering', asking for quick responses in the form of ideas, thoughts and suggestions which can be put on a flipchart. Alternatively, you can slow things down by pausing for inner reflection.

Some groups may not be used to sharing, particularly if they have not met each other before, or work in the same organization but are not in the habit of communicating. In these cases, using a worksheet for eliciting feedback might be helpful.

Not everyone will want to speak in the main group, but encourage the quieter ones to speak, however briefly. Recording feedback on flipcharts is a useful way of engaging the group in working together and will help in summing up at the end of the session. It will also provide valuable reference for action planning, ensuring that good ideas are not lost and that participants' action plans can draw on all the learning from the session.

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Facilitator evaluation

Finally, you as facilitator should undertake your own evaluation of 'how it was for you'.

You may want to note down how well you think the session went in terms of achievement of aims, content, process etc. It is also useful to record any issues which came up, both on a

practical level, e.g. timing difficulties, to problems and reactions which particular exercises might have prompted and which you had not anticipated. You may also want to reflect on your own learning and ways in which you could make use of this in running future sessions, and in your wider personal and work life.

Closure

Each session program should allow for 3 to 5 minutes at the end for closure.

Give some thought to how the session could end. A brief concluding ritual, particularly one in keeping with the theme of the session, can bring the session to a close in a way which gives everyone a feeling of completion. It can also affirm the spiritual experience of the day, and help people to learn to say goodbye.

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A simple, meaningful ritual can encapsulate the experience of sharing and learning together at a deep level, and can promote the idea of ongoing learning and support.

The type of closure you plan will depend on the session, your own experience, and the participants. Some general closure activities include the following:

Ask participants to take a moment's silence to reflect on what the group has done to improve their understanding of, and skills in, the theme of the session, or what they are looking forward to doing to ensure that these are used in their lives

Play some music while people are leaving the room, or ask participants to sing a song that they all choose

Ask people to walk by a candle on their way out of the room and express their silent.

Thanks for the gift they have given themselves in this session. There may be elements of a particular session which you want to emphasize in your closure.

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Additional Materials

The Living/Dying Project is a not-for profit, 501(3)(c) organization offering free services to our clients. The Project offers free services for the dying and was founded in 1977 by Stephen Levine in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

WWWW. The eternal Forest.org the UK website - for green burials

The AH Breath Relaxation Exercise (note I have used this to help the person relax into passing I have also done it with the whole family around the bed.)

AHA breath This is a deep relaxation technique that one person does for another person (i.e. the caregiver for the patient). If the patient has a cardiac or other condition that could possibly make sudden relaxation dangerous, don't do this exercise.

The AHA breath Exercise:

The person being relaxed is called the receiver and the person doing the exercise is called the giver.

The receiver is arranged so that his or her breathing is visible (chest/ abdomen) to the giver. The giver describes to the receiver what they are going to do –

"this is a relaxation exercise your only job is to shut your eyes and listen to the AH sounds I'm going to make."

Giver: quiet your own mind. Tell the receiver to relax their body (with a soft

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voice mention each body part that the receiver should relax). When you are ready, watch the breathing of the receiver. Begin to softly say AH with each out breath of the receiver. The exercise is this simple. The giver should continue the exercise for at least 20 minutes and up to an hour. The giver does not touch the receiver during the exercise.

The AH is the sound of the open heart and of letting go. Don't be concerned if the receiver has an emotional release. More likely than often the receiver will go into a deep relaxation (their breathing may slow down dramatically). If the breathing slows the AH doesn't have to last as long as the out breath. Once you do this exercise for the full 20-60 minutes than you can use it for shorter periods if the person is getting anxious. Do a few AH breaths for short periods to ease temporary anxiety.

A deeper purpose of the AHA breath is training for the deeper letting go into death itself. As death is approaching it can be done to ease the transition out of the body.

Forgiveness Meditation Practice – complete

In this practice, we call forth situations where either we have committed wrongs or made mistakes, perhaps hurting others, perhaps hurting ourselves... or both, and we also focus on situations where others have wronged us. The goal of this practice is to recognize that a wrong has been committed, to understand the ramifications and consequences that resulted, and to try to follow the chain of dependent origination back to the point where the first delusional or wrongful

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thoughts may have occurred, in an attempt to recognize such similar thoughts in the future (the idea being that every action is preceded by a thought... and every thought is preceded by some causal factor).

Once we have investigated the circumstances surrounding the event, we call forth the wrongdoer (whoever they happen to be) and forgive that person. By opening our heart, and opening the fist of anger and resentment, we give our spirit room to breathe, room to grow, and room to live.... and we do so by setting aside the burden of blame, remorse, hatred, anger, and all of the afflictive emotions that are associated with such burdens.

I find that it working with this is quite difficult to forgive one's self for whatever wrongs have been done. Particularly when those actions have resulted in harm to others... harm being mental anguish, sadness, disappointment, or pain.

What we begin to understand intellectually, if not viscerally, is that we all make mistakes. We all cause problems. We all fail to abide by the rules. We all let ourselves, and others, down at some point. Everyone does this. This is what it is to be human.

I also realize that without mistakes, we would find it very difficult, if not impossible to learn, grow, and mature. It is through stress, pain, and difficulty that we forge our spirits.

Forgiveness practice isn't so much about forgiving in the sense of acquitting or letting ourselves 'off the hook' as it is about facing up to what has happened, accepting it for whatever it is accepting the responsibility for whatever our culpability

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in the situation happened to be, and then finding a way to move forward. Like so many things then, forgiveness is all about learning to let go. Forgiveness is about letting go of all hope for a better past.

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Additional Materials continued

Story: Granddad is Dead (A True Story set in North of England) Author B.A Simpson *Except: Death as a heartfelt story from the point of view of a seven year old*

"He's going soon, he was talking to Mildred and Alice yesterday, they went 12 years ago now. It's his time and they came to comfort him" My Mum said to Mrs. Hancock next door. I was listening quietly.

"Yes the same happened to my sister it seems they all are allowed to comfort the living and prepare for the change into the next phase" Mrs. Hancock replied

The change happened quietly in his sleep. The house was quiet.

"No you can't go in there, they are working on Granddad" said Mum

"I want to see, Granddad likes it when I'm there with him" I said

"Barbara you can go to see Granddad after they are dressing him"

"He does not like people to fuss with him" I protested

Something about Mums mood that told me to go to play with your dolls

It was Saturday, our house had a sweet thick smell I turned my nose up. "Ugg"

"It's the embalming fluid" said Mum, "they use it to preserve Granddads body" I thought of the word Preserves on the label of Robertson's Blackberry jam. Two serious

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looking men with dark suits came out of the room with my Dad they were talking in whispers.

They all walked down the hallway to the kitchen. I sat high on the stairs I looked through the rails. I put Jenifer gently down with her head on a pillow beside me, she was sleeping. I could see Auntie Elsie and Auntie Ida and others who were coming and going through the front door. They were talking in quiet voices. Jennifer, my big doll the one with real hair was ill, like Granddad she could not walk, I held her hand. "Be careful Jenifer I will help you" I hugged her. When the grown up's left the area I slipped into the parlor see Granddad. He was lying in a beautiful wooden box it was high up so I stood on my tip toes "You alright Granddad?" I whispered. "Yes, this suit is a bit tight around the knees but ah that's Sunday best for you" I giggled I looked at him all in white satin "it's like when you dressed up for my 7th birthday last year, remember, you were a jester, you did some juggling, but you dropped a ball"

.....continued

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Favorite Poem

Beannacht (Blessing) John O'Donohue (1956–2008),

On the day when the weight deadens
on your shoulders and you stumble,
may the clay dance to balance you.

And when your eyes freeze behind
the grey window and the ghost of loss
gets in to you, may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green, and azure blue
come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays in the currach of thought
and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours. And so may a slow wind work these words of love
around you, an invisible cloak to mind your life. —

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Copies of Questionnaires

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
in Cooperation with the Post Graduate Center for
Mental Health**

Doctor of Ministry Project

Precious Moments Copy of Life Review Document

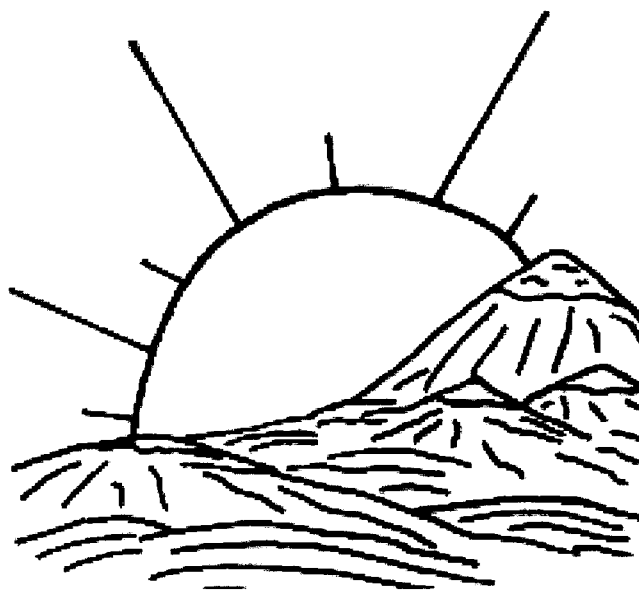
Submitted by Rev B Simpson

Questionnaire and Results

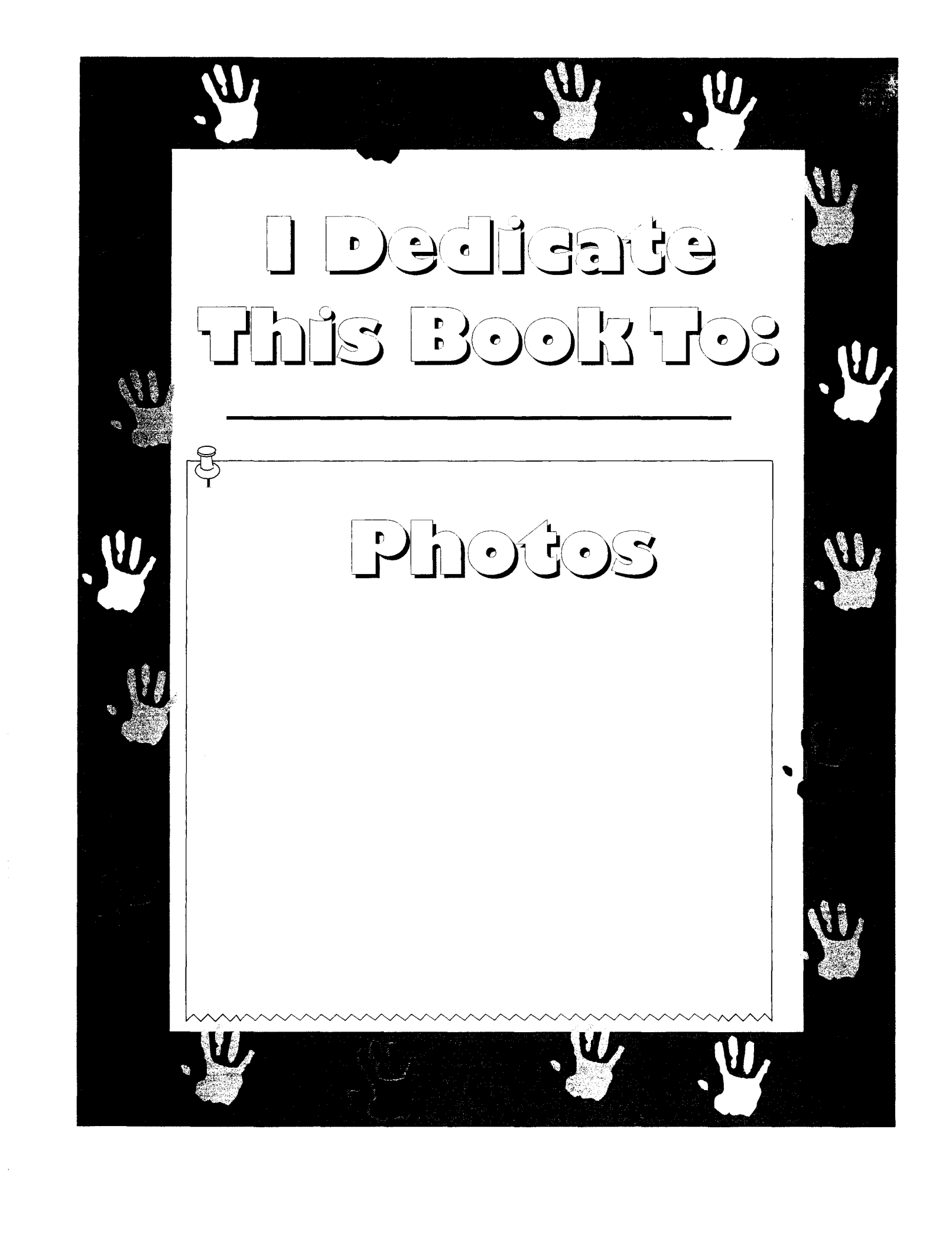
Questions After taking the course of classes

- What surprised you about your life as you were reviewing.
- How did you feel about your significant life memories
- What did you discover about yourself as you talked about death
- Whom did you share your funeral ideas ?
- Comment on the session on Eternal life
- Favorite piece we read
- Favorite discussion
- Suggestions

Precious Moments



By

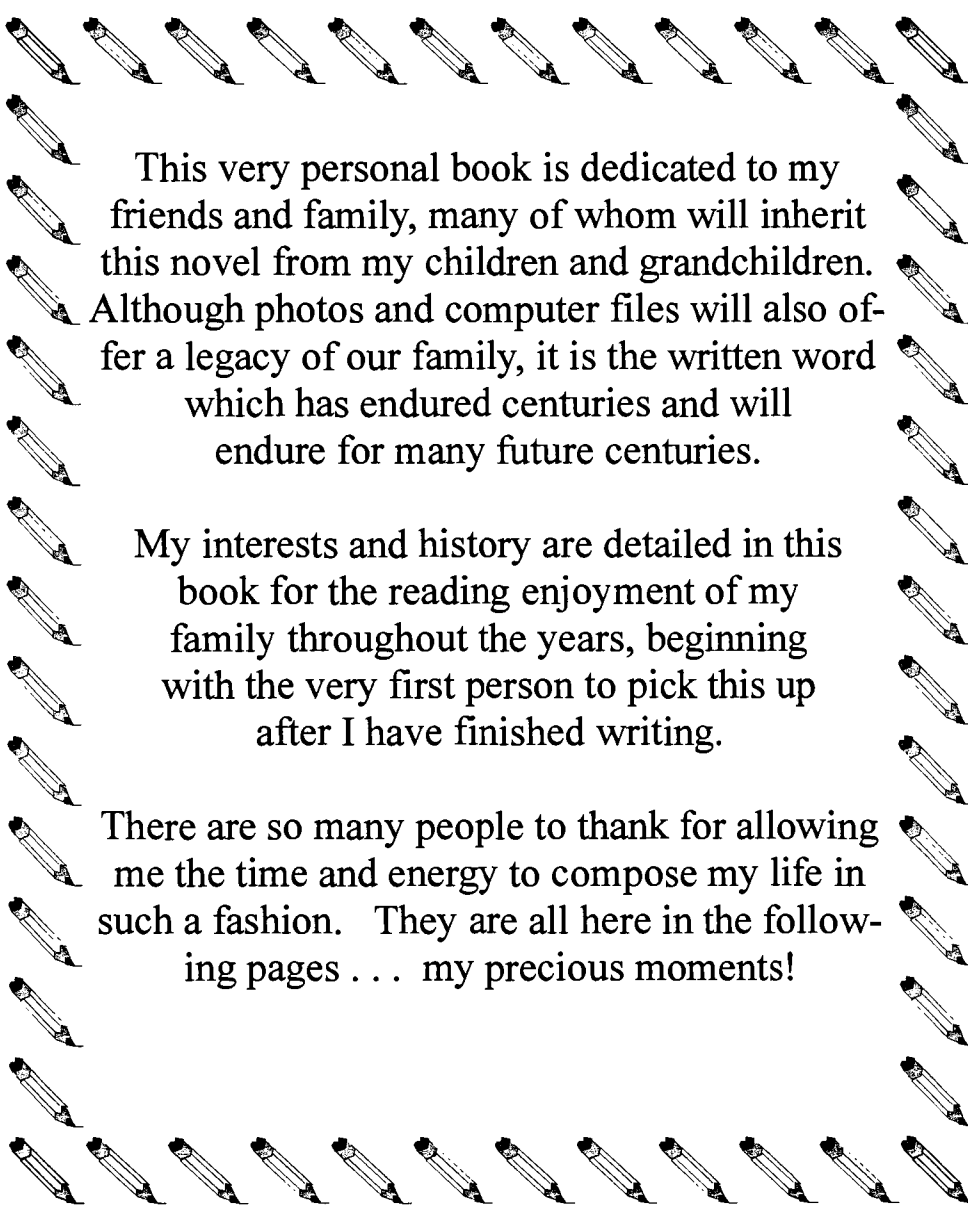


**I Dedicate
This Book To:**



Photos

Foreward



This very personal book is dedicated to my friends and family, many of whom will inherit this novel from my children and grandchildren. Although photos and computer files will also offer a legacy of our family, it is the written word which has endured centuries and will endure for many future centuries.

My interests and history are detailed in this book for the reading enjoyment of my family throughout the years, beginning with the very first person to pick this up after I have finished writing.

There are so many people to thank for allowing me the time and energy to compose my life in such a fashion. They are all here in the following pages . . . my precious moments!

My full name is _____,

for those of you wondering just whose autobiography you
are reading!



And as to why you picked it up to
read . . . well, this is my story.

There are myriad details and facts presented for you to put
in context, but my “diary pages” following the detail will
be most interesting reading.

I was named after _____.

I was born on _____

in _____.

My mother’s name is _____

and her maiden name was

_____.



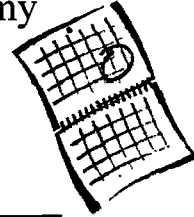
My father's name is _____.

My mother was born in _____.

and my father was born in _____.

My mother was born in the year _____ and my

father was born in the year _____.



My siblings are named _____.

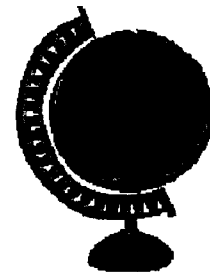
Their birthdays are _____.

My mother's parents are named _____ and

_____.

My mother's parents came from the country of

_____.



My father's parents are named _____ and

_____.

My father's parents came from the country of

_____.

ABOUT Me

I recall my childhood with the following adjectives:

_____, _____,
_____, _____.

I grew up in _____.

As a child I liked to do many things with my family. Some
of the things that we did were _____

_____.



I had _____ pets when I was growing up.

Let me describe them to you. _____

_____.

My first address that I can remember was _____

_____. My favorite room in the house was

the _____ room. I used to play

many games when I was home..... My favorite games

were _____.

When I started school I went to _____

_____. After elementary school I went to

_____. I then went to

_____ High School. I went to

_____ College.

My favorite teachers in school were _____

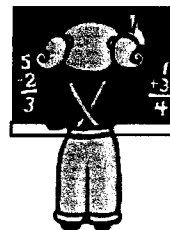
_____. My favorite subjects

were _____.

The extra curricular activities and sports that I did

were _____.

_____.





My best friends in school were _____

_____.

After school I liked to do many things. Some of the
things I did were _____
_____.

My favorite books as a child were

“ _____ ”

“ _____ ”

And _____.



My favorite movies were “ _____ ” and

“ _____ ”. The names of my favorite

actors were _____,

and _____.



When I was growing up I had many plans for my adult years. I would like to share some of them with you:



The person who most greatly influenced my life was _____.

Here is why: _____

Getting Married

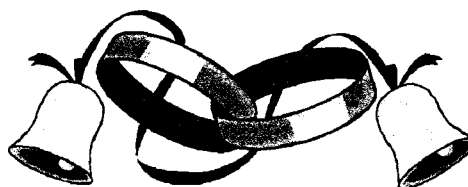
I met my spouse named _____ at

_____.

At the time we met, I was

working or attending

_____.



and they were working/attending _____.

For our first date we went to _____.

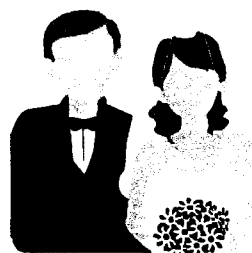
The thing I remember most about our first date was _____.

_____.

We decided to get married after we were going out for

_____ months.

We got married on _____.



The wedding was held at _____

in _____.

Wedding Party



My favorite memories of my wedding are:



My Children

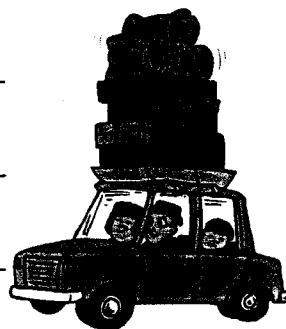
I have _____ children. Their names are _____



My Children

When they were children we did many memorable things together. Some of the things we did were _____

_____.



My children were named after _____
_____.

When they were older my children married _____
_____.

I have _____ grandchildren. Their names are

_____.



As a family we have had many wonderful times together!

Diary Pages

OK, you've met the family, the friends . . . now is the time to get to the many adjectives and emotions in my life. My diary pages may begin as far back as I could remember as a child, or they may begin at no specific moment in time.

Suffice it to say that from the time I began writing down my precious moments, this book took a different meaning for me. Because my writing allowed you to understand all of my precious moments in my life.





Diary Pages
