5-1-2019

Domestic Deathcare: The Effect of Home Funerals on the Grieving Process

Eva Pitsch
Winona State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://openriver.winona.edu/counseloreducationcapstones

Domestic Deathcare: The Effect of Home Funerals on the Grieving Process

Eva Pitsch

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Spring 2019

Domestic Deathcare: The Effect of Home Funerals on the Grieving Process

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

_____

CAPSTONE PROJECT

_____

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Eva Pitsch

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: _____ _(signature)_ _____
                                                Name

Approval Date: _____5/8/2019_____

Abstract

In the United States, there is a growing movement towards home and alternative funeral

practices. Little is known about how this shift might impact the grief process. In order to

understand the contemporary home funeral movement, it is important to examine pivotal

moments in the history of funerals in America—like the Civil War, Industrial Revolution and the

popularization of the genteel code. Additionally, research on grief and funerals provides general

context and insight on the influence of funeral rituals on mourning. Though much of the

literature on conventional funerals and family's responses to loss apply to alternative deathcare,

there is also some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the unique qualities of home funerals give

families more time and space to heal.

Contents

Domestic Deathcare: The Effect of Home Funerals on the Grieving Process

Across all cultures, humans have displayed a great need to understand death. The ritual that is carried out after a person crosses over the threshold is part of this desire to understand, and an acknowledgment of the importance and mystery of the transition from a life to death. In the United States, the standard service involves embalming the body, and placing the ornate hardwood or metal casket in a cement vault in a vast grassy cemetery (Kelly, 2015). These customs differ greatly from the simple home funerals of early America (Olson, 2016). Many historical factors shaped the contemporary American funeral—forces which pushed the service and care of the dead out of the private sphere and into public spaces and into the hands of professionals (Harris, 2007). Members of the modern home funeral movement educate and empower families to make choices about deathcare—including the option of caring for the dead at home and holding a service in the dwelling of the deceased (Herring, 2019). Unfortunately, empirical research specifically on the topic of grief and home funerals is lacking (Kelly, 2015). Most of the evidence is anecdotal and gathered through interviews with families (Herring, 2019). The limited research on the impact of home funerals is overwhelmingly positive (Maxera, 2017).

Research questions

The purpose of this Capstone project is to investigate the impact of home funerals on grief within the family system. More generally, what is a funeral and why are rituals important for grieving families? What is grief and how does existing research inform the movement towards bringing deathcare back to the home? Examining these factors leads to the exploration of the background of home funerals and what families find therapeutic about these intimate home gatherings.

Historical perspectives on home funerals

Beard and Burger (2017) report that death rituals in early America were simple, brief, family affairs. Women (predominately) washed, dressed, and otherwise prepared the bodies for burial (Olson, 2016). According to Olson (2016), the care of the dead and dying was viewed as an extension of domestic duties. The history of funeral rituals is long and complex, for the purposes of framing the current home funeral movement it is important to understand a few key historical events and shifts in American society. Namely: The Civil War, advances in mortuary science, increased wealth resulting from the Industrial Revolution, and the genteel code (Beard & Burger, 2017). Another major change came in the 1960s and 70's following an investigation of the funeral industry that resulted in more stringent consumer protection rules (Kopp & Kemp, 2007; Kelly, 2015).

Throughout literature on home and alternative funerals, there is a deep preoccupation with the chemical preservation of the body (Kelly, 2015; Herring, 2019). Embalming is the process of replacing bodily fluids with a chemical solution that retards decomposition (Harris, 2007). The practice has remained a staple of the modern funeral industry in part because morticians have argued that corpses pose a public health risk, which is misleading and widely disproven (Kelly, 2015). Although the practice of embalming the corpse may seem trivial or so normalized as to seem unextraordinary, it is, in fact, the basis for the modern funeral industry as we know it. Scientific innovations and the need to transport soldiers slain in the Civil War led to the practice of embalming (Olson, 2016). As many as forty thousand Civil War soldiers were embalmed by newly trained civilian medical professionals—and sent back North from battlegrounds in the South (Kelly, 2015). Additionally, the body of Abraham Lincoln was

embalmed in 1865, then traveled by train from Washington D.C. to Illinois and was subsequently

viewed by thousands of people during the funeral service (Herring, 2019). Lincoln's funeral was

a factor in the rapid popularization of the practice of preserving the body with chemicals

(Herring, 2019). The event served to confirm that embalming was a viable option (Harris, 2007).

Around this time there was a growing fear that corpses posed a public health risk (Kelly, 2015).

Before the Civil War, embalming was considered a violation of the corpse and was negatively

associated with Pagan and Egyptian practices (Harris, 2017). However, the war was such a

cataclysmic blow that perhaps people were more willing to embrace the practice (Kelly, 2015).

The end result was the delegitimization of home deathcare:

> By commercializing, technifying, and regulating deathcare through law and
>
> licensure, undertakers drew deathcare out of the domestic sphere and reorganized
>
> it within the male-dominated, public-professional sphere. Morticians denigrated the
>
> knowledge and skills that had validated women's custody of the corpse prior to the
>
> professionalization of deathcare (Olson, 2016, p. 199).

Olson (2016) describes the point of the departure from the home funeral. The field of mortuary

science that is, today, fully established as a professional field was initiated by the technical

innovation of embalming because it was not possible to execute at home (Olson, 2016). Kelly

(2015) states that in addition to taking funerals out of the home sphere, embalmers'

professionalization of the service capitalizes on the grieving.

Meanwhile, the spread of the genteel code of conduct called for overt displays of wealth

that extended to the funeral rites that signaled family riches to the American public (Beard &

Burger, 2017). The influx of wealth from the boom of the Industrial Revolution inspired many to

mimic the elites of England, for example, copying the custom of buying elaborate caskets,

flowers, and headstones (Beard & Burger, 2017). The growing middle class, gentility, and capitalism combined forces and readily expanded on the simple funeral—churning out goods and services (Harris, 2007). Elaborate and lavish funerals became the standard to appear respectable and in good taste (Harris, 2007).

One may point to a cultural shift towards gentility in the mid-nineteenth century as the point at which money and funerals started going hand and hand (Harris, 2007). According to Kopp and Kemp (2007), a funeral is often the third most expensive purchase a person makes in their lifetime, exceeded only by a house and car. Jessica Mitford's withering critique of the funeral industry, *The American Way of Death,* brought America's attention to the financially excessive and environmentally damaging practices of the funeral industry (Kelly, 2015). *The American Way of Death* sparked a national discussion—some found the book insensitive and intentionally incendiary, while others thought the work uncovered hypocrisy and dishonesty (Kelly, 2015). Hoy (2013) notes that while some of Mitford's criticisms of the funeral industry were valid, perhaps the author missed the mark in dismissing the meaning behind the funeral practices and the wider cultural values they represent.

In the wake of the countrywide debate, there was a groundbreaking U.S. Senate hearing in 1964 that publicized complaints about financially exploitative practices within the funeral industry (Kopp & Kemp, 2007). In 1978 the Federal Trade Commission released the results of a five-year investigation, which resulted in recommendations to reduce the exploitation of bereaved patrons (Schwartz, Jolson, & Lee, 1986). Years later, in 1984, the Funeral Rule was enacted to protect the vulnerable consumer against misleading practices. Rules included provisions against representing embalming as legally required or necessary, mandating the purchase of any funeral good or service, and nondisclosure of pricing and fees (Kopp & Kemp,

2017). Schwartz et al. (1986) reported that the Funeral Rule did not result in a widespread

change in the spending patterns of the consumer. However, Kelly (2015) mentions that part of

the issue may be noncompliance. The recommendations of the Federal Trade Commission and

the Funeral Rule did serve to highlight the exploitative aspects of the funeral industry and the

many ways grieving families can be vulnerable to predatory practices (Schwartz et al., 1986).

Lynch (2004), a funeral director, reported general disillusionment with the funeral industry: "A

funeral is more than the sum of its parts. It has sacred, secular, spiritual, emotional, social, and

practical duties. A death in the family is not a retail event. It is an existential one" (p. 14).

According to Lynch (2004), although money must inevitably be involved, funerals should

transcend the retail world.

Grief

Castle and Phillips (2003) note that the word grief comes from the Latin word for

'burden,' implying that those who grieve carry a heavy weight of sorrow. Grief is used to refer to

the emotional response to losing a loved one (Castle & Phillips, 2003). Those who have lost

someone close often experience acute grief (Glickman, Shear, & Wall, 2016). Symptoms of

acute grief typically include intense sorrow, as well as traumatic and separation distress

(Glickman, Shear, & Wall, 2016).

Forrester (2008) states that often the way the death is handled, especially directly after

the event, can complicate or hinder the process of bereavement. The reality of death is stark, and

it is vital to have sufficient time to absorb and make sense of the event (Herring, 2019).

However, even with an extended period to take in the fact that a death has occurred, Anderson

(2009) notes that the assumption that closure in grief is necessary or possible is no longer

broadly held. While traditional models of grief emphasize letting go of the emotional bond

between the dead and the living, current research suggests that especially in the case of parents

who have lost a child, people never relinquish their bond with the departed (Forrester, 2008).

Glickman, Shear, and Wall (2016) instead support the idea of seeking to remove grief

complications and maladaptive coping mechanisms through counseling and treatment. Examples

of grief complications would be guilt, anxiety, despair, and so on (Glickman, Shear, & Wall,

2016).

  Morticians have historically argued that viewing the body during or before the funeral

service might offer mourners closure or at the least ease the grieving process (Anderson, 2009).

Forrester (2008) advocates for allowing parents to spend at least twenty-four hours with the body

of a deceased child. Certain children's hospice units in the UK offer airconditioned rooms where

the recently deceased can remain and afford time for parents to grieve. Overall Forrester (2008)

described this as a gentler option for families dealing with a devastating loss in a hospice facility.

Many describe the wrenching feeling when a mortuary service takes the body away hours or

even minutes after a passing (Kelly, 2015). In Western society, there is a sense that the body of

the newly dead is in some way sacred and worthy of care and honor (Kelly, 2015). Directly after

death, it is commonly understood that the deceased is in a transitional stage, journeying over the

threshold (Reeves, 2011).

  In the wake of loss, there are endless variations of sadness people can feel—and

confronting the reality of death as a family is a deeply difficult task (Anderson, 2009).

According to Anderson (2009), often the shape and intensity of grief changes based on

the depth of the relationship and whether the death was violent and sudden. Also,

families' grief depends on innumerable factors including patterns of interaction and

history of dealing with loss (Anderson, 2009). Further, a family is made up of individuals

that may be in different stages of grief and may be employing distinct coping strategies

and styles (Anderson, 2009). The key part that brings the separate units of the family

together is a shared acknowledgment of the loss (Anderson, 2009). Anderson (2009) lays

out a schema that a family can follow in order to grieve a loss together while respecting

each individual's journey. Steps include acknowledging the loss, building a common

memory, taking into account the loss in reconfiguring family patterns, restoring hope, and

looking towards the future.

Unfortunately, the future sometimes feels incomprehensible following a loss. Castle and

Phillips (2003) state that the period of time after the facilitated ritual of the funeral is difficult for

survivors. After the funeral is over, public displays of emotion are no longer socially condoned—

however, those who have lost a loved one sometimes feel the most powerful grief 3-24 months

after the loss (Castle & Phillips, 2003). Although grief counseling is an option, some find the

experience unsatisfactory (Castle & Phillips, 2003). Counselors can work with clients to plan and

carry out rituals like the empty chair Gestalt technique to work through unresolved grief

complications (Reeves, 2011). Rituals in the counseling context can provide a setting where the

death is recognized fully (Reeves, 2011). These rituals can involve the same core therapeutic

components of funerals: using symbols, engaging with a wider community, connecting with the

client's faith or sense of higher power, family, and personal history (Hoy, 2013).

Ritual and Funerals

Reeves (2011) defines a death related ritual as a ceremony (communal or individual),

involving the symbols of loss. Though there are a multitude of dissimilar ethnolinguistic groups

of people across the globe, certain aspects of death rituals stay constant. The corpse is considered

more than a carcass—it is due respect, care, and proper disposal. Additionally, humans have a

deep-seated need to understand death (Hoy, 2013). Hoy (2013) points out that the inescapability

of death is a thread that unites us all, therefore ceremonies hold universal appeal.

Those reeling from grief hold to the familiar patterns associated with the end of life. The

wake, memorial service, and funeral are the most common death-related liminal rituals (Reeves,

2011). According to Hoy (2013) "rituals exude vital importance to humans in the quest to make

sense of the mysteries surrounding death. As long as people have grouped themselves together,

ceremonies have navigated them through the uncertain terrain that accompanies death" (p.1).

Hoy (2013) implies that rituals are a natural outgrowth of grief and the need to make sense of

death. Also, he suggests that rituals exist because of social structures and the need to coexist and

find the way in shaky times. Generally, the ceremony is emotional, meaningful, and often

involves a spiritual element (Reeves, 2011). The funeral also serves the secondary function of

providing communal support (Castle & Phillips, 2003).

Reeves (2011) reports that therapeutic rituals have an abundance of benefits for people

experiencing grief. Although rituals intensify emotions, they "are a necessary part of grieving

because they provide an occasion and the language to encounter realities and truths about

ourselves that are so dangerous, so deep, so powerful we would seek to avoid them if left to

ourselves" (Anderson, 2009, p. 132). North American culture is particularly death-denying (Hoy,

2013). Indeed, Dilmaç (2016) theorizes that a contributing factor to the decline of funeral

practices may be the societal repression of death. Hoy (2013) notes that there is a paradox at the

center of funeral rituals—celebrants have a desire to stay connected to the deceased, but they are

simultaneously repulsed by decay and changes happening to the body. The desire to repress,

avoid, and flee are at odds with the desire to stay near to the loved one always (Hoy, 2013). Hoy

(2013) reports that funeral rituals are a way of coping with these two warring impulses.

Bosely and Cook (1993) conducted a study to pinpoint which aspects thirty-two participants found therapeutic about the funeral ritual. Five main themes emerged from the interviews: memory and storytelling as a way to accept loss, connection to faith, expression of sorrow, peer and family support, and connection to family traditions (Bosely & Cook, 1993). Bosely and Cook (1993) note that the funeral is a pivotal opportunity for the family to accept the death of a loved one and begin to rebuild. Bosely and Cook (1993) concluded that the funeral offers therapeutic intervention and healing.

Although the research of Bosely and Cook (1993) is vital in identifying the positive facets of the funeral, of course, there are factors that make funerals more difficult for some than others. Hayslip, Booher, Scoles, and Guarnaccia (2007) conducted a study that sought to identify what made coping with funerals challenging. Many of the results make intuitive sense— difficulty coping was correlated with dealing with the mechanics of a loved one's funeral, interpersonal conflicts, trust in the funeral industry, concerns about the cemetery, and complications with grief. Hayslip et al. (2007) report that one's own grief, anxiety about death, and experience dealing with and trusting the funeral director all play a role in satisfaction and ability to cope with the funeral. Of course, the context and circumstances of the death, as well as pre-existing emotional disturbance or predisposition to anxiety, can contribute to an individual's negative or positive experience (Hayslip et al., 2007). According to Hayslip et al. (2007), older adults and funeral celebrants that actively engaged in the funeral ritual generally have less overall difficulty coping.

Home Funerals

In the last twenty years, women have led a natural deathcare movement in the United States (Olson, 2016). Across the U.S., women, mostly non-professionals, have begun to offer

assistance and education to the relatives of the dead and dying who wish to care for their loved

ones in the home (Hagerty, 2014). These individuals call themselves death doulas, death

midwives, home funeral guides, or natural deathcare assistants (Olson, 2016). All the

aforementioned titles fall under the wider category of alternative funeral providers (Harris,

2007). Although still a relatively new set of ideas and traditions around death, alternative funeral

providers are mobilizing—offering trainings and forming organizations including the non-profit

National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) (Olson, 2016). The main mission of the NHFA is to

educate the public and advocate for the rights of families who wish to hold funerals in their

homes (Herring, 2019). The NHFA has 1,500 members and has been active for eight years

(Herring, 2019).

      The burgeoning natural death movement has social and political ties with the doulas and

midwives of the natural birth movement of the 1960s and '70s. Both grew out of a mistrust of the

medical establishment and both are dominated by White, middle-class women (Olson, 2016).

The home funeral movement is ideologically tied to the older 'green' or 'natural' burial

movement of the 1970s, as both seek to make funerals and interment less environmentally

damaging (Harris, 2007; Kelly, 2015). Most of the vocal individuals in the home funeral

movement come from the baby boomer generation (Herring, 2019). Green burial, natural

deathcare, and home birth all call for a return to traditional, female-dominated, earth-friendly

care of the body, newly birthed or deceased (Olson, 2016).

      Additionally, home and alternative funerals fall under a wider social and intellectual

movement of death positivity, which seeks to fundamentally reframe and normalize death in the

United States. (Leland & Yalkin, 2018). According to Hoy (2013), death is a deeply taboo topic

in North America—it is considered morbid and impolite to discuss. As an extension of that

cultural value, little time is afforded to grief in Western culture (Castle & Phillips, 2003). The

death positivity movement is an informal network of rebel mortician Youtubers, death doulas,

bloggers, etcetera, who express a healthy interest in educating the public about end of life issues

(Leland & Yalkin, 2018). Since 2011, Death Café events have provided a forum for people to

gather and talk about contemporary issues related to the rapidly changing landscape of death—

such as Facebook memorial accounts and the rise of cremation (Herring, 2019; Leland & Yalkin,

2018). Home funeral advocates share the core principle that education, positivity, and curiosity

about what lies beyond the end of life is normal and important.

In line with the philosophy of the movement, the modern home funeral is much like those

of the past—the family washes, dresses and cares for the departed at home (Hagerty, 2014). The

body is cared for with non-invasive preservation techniques (Herring, 2019). In lieu of chemical

embalming, the body is kept in a cool space and iced to slow decomposition (Herring, 2019). It is

important to also recognize the influence of the Islamic and Jewish burial practices in which

embalming is virtually outlawed and the body is traditionally interred in a minimal casket or

shroud (Herring, 2019). Similarly, home funeral advocates view embalming as an unnecessary,

invasive, and in some ways, violent procedure (Olson, 2016).

Typically, the duration of the home funeral is three days, during which the bereaved can

visit, grieve, and celebrate the life of the dead (Hagerty, 2014). Green and home funerals attempt

to 'green the threshold of death' by inviting funeral goers to participate in a shared experience of

ritual that incorporates art, nature, and symbols meaningful to the person that has passed away

(Herring, 2019). The body is buried in a bio-degradable casket—comprised of biomass material,

timber, or even cardboard (Harris, 2007). These concepts and practices can be understood as

comprising the fledgling North American home funeral or natural deathcare movement (Hagerty, 2014).

Today home funerals are sometimes, at first mention, considered abnormal, potentially illegal, and macabre (Rush, 2013). Harris (2007) argues that the modern idea of the funeral has become so entrenched and routinized that many families do not question whether or not it is required. The idea of housing a dead body for any number of days is odd enough that many question its legality. Rush (2013), however, states that it is legal to care for the dead at home in all fifty states. In certain states, there are restrictions on the transportation of corpses and other technicalities (Herring, 2019). In order to hold the body for more than twenty-four hours, it is required by state law to place it in a leak-proof container or refrigerate the remains (Harris, 2007). Also, if the individual dies at home or outside of a hospital where the cause of death is determined by medical professionals, it is required for families to notify the proper authorities (Herring, 2019). Additionally, families have to delay cremation or burial for at least forty-eight hours to allow state medical examiners ample time to investigate the cause of death (Harris, 2007). Some home funeral advocates are versed in this area of the law in order to help families comply with regulations and confidently coordinate a home funeral (Herring, 2019). The ins and outs of body care, legalities, and keeping a corpse at home are certainly unknown territory for most families (Harris, 2007).

The question remains—how did we become so unfamiliar and consequently unnerved by the dead? As mentioned before, home funerals were at one time common practice (Rush, 2013). According to Kelly (2015), the Western world's fear of the dead has manifested in an increasing divide between the dead and the living over the last 150 years. Dead bodies are housed in morgues, and outside of increasingly unpopular viewings, are kept out of sight of the public

(Kelly, 2015). Anderson (2009) points out that more and more people are choosing to scatter ashes in lieu of erecting monuments to the dead, hence the public is relatively free of persistent symbolic reminders of the fleeting nature of life. Moreover, 70% of deaths occur in hospitals or other professionally attended facilities (Kelly, 2015). Unfamiliarity, death denial, psychological repression, and growing anxiety have all played roles in this separation of death from the living. The evidence of the palpable fear is evident in popular culture—look no further than zombies and vampires (Kelly, 2015). Hoy (2013) reports that corpses were also considered subjects of dread and a multitude of superstitions since antiquity. Kelly notes that it seems the collective cultural efforts to repress the realities of decay has in a sense made the idea of the corpse hostile, sinister, and terrifying. Harris (2007) notes that the natural deathcare movement is evidence that people are increasingly coming to terms with the eventuality of decay and that conventional funeral practices slow but do not halt that process.

It would seem that the separation of the dead and the living would make home funerals frightening and strange experiences, however limited research points to the opposite (Maxera, 2017). Although anecdotal and preliminary, Rush (2013) stated that many who attend home funerals explained the experience as transformative and significant. Indeed, the firsthand account of Dunn (2009) described the decision and experience of keeping the body of her father at home as a meaningful opportunity say goodbye and care for a cherished family member. Herring (2019) also describes moving experiences assisting families through home funerals, and notes "home funerals can help soften trauma and suffering at the end of life and can bring people back into a more intimate and living relationship with death itself" (p. 55). Home funerals are intimate because the care of the dead is not outsourced to a third party, and that care fosters deeper

knowledge of death. Although empirical research is lacking, Herring (2019) reports that the intimacy of home funerals has the potential to ease a family through loss and grief.

Much of the aforementioned research on grief and the constructive psychosocial components of funeral rituals also apply to home funerals, however, it is important to look at the aspects that are unique. Distinct elements include keeping the body at home and caring for one's own dead (Herring, 2019). Outside of anecdotal evidence, the effect of personal deathcare on grief is a gap in the current literature. However, there is research about society's relationship with the body in the funeral context. Schafer (2012) reported that while the idea exists that it is 'natural' and 'healthy' to stay close to the dead, the reality is that bodies can make the living feel anxious. Conflicted ideas about viewing the body have existed for a long time—for some, it is a last moment to spend with a loved one, but for funeral critics, the body may as well be cremated immediately so the family can organize a funeral at their leisure (Hoy, 2013). Care and time spent with the body also vary widely between religious traditions and cultural groups (Hoy, 2013).

Hoy (2013) argues that the corpse plays many roles in the funeral ritual, perhaps most importantly for the grieving process is as an "emotional connection point" as well as a "ritual object" (p. 110). Hoy (2013) points out that the sight of the body often intensifies emotions and brings out difficult feelings—it is more than an empty shell, it is a way for people to connect. The body is also at the center of funeral practices like the sprinkling of holy water, the draping of the flag, the wafting of incense smoke and so on (Hoy, 2013). Furthermore, Rush (2013) contends that

> seeing the small changes the body goes through helps one to understand in a
> visceral way that death has occurred, which in turn leads to acceptance and less

complicated grief. When people are directly involved and have control and

knowledge of the death care process, they move through the pain of loss in an

empowering way (p. 289).

Rush (2013) observes that while people may know intellectually that a person has died,

witnessing the transformation firsthand allows the reality to fully sink in. Forrester (2008) also

notes that most deaths occur in healthcare facilities and the lack of agency and empowerment in

the death process is often painful for families. Indeed, Rush (2013) notes that the knowledge

itself of the death care process gives power back to the family—which in addition to spending

time with the body may help families fully accept that a death has occurred. According to Oates

(2003), avoidance and denial are the first steps in the grief journey, followed by confrontation.

Rush's (2013) essential argument is that the presence, observation, and care of the body helps

people overcome that first step because the death is undeniable. While research on the effect of

home deathcare is limited, there is some research that indicates that it has a positive effect on the

grieving process.

Another emphasized element of the home funeral is the ability to personalize every

aspect of the funeral ritual. Personalized rituals are documented to have a positive psychosocial

impact (Reeves, 2011; Castle & Phillips, 2003). The home funeral movement is still in its

fledgling stages, but it is part of a larger shift in the last thirty years towards more personal,

creative, and individualistic funeral rituals (Schafer, 2012). There are infinite variations and

levels of involvement a family may choose in planning a home funeral—some enlist the help of a

funeral director or elect to care for the corpse at home but hold the funeral at a church (Herring,

2019; Dunn, 2009). Herring (2019) recounts a multitude of distinct home vigils, family-designed

rituals, spiritual sacred practices and ways to connect with nature. There is no formula, no

requirements or expectations. The family sometimes does the necessary paperwork and takes

care of the arrangements, or those duties can also be outsourced to professionals (Hagerty, 2014).

One of the benefits of a home funeral is that it is tailored to the family of the deceased, and

ideally the wishes of the deceased (Herring, 2019). According to Rush (2013) "home visitation

encourages personal expression and community involvement. There is no need to attempt to

make a generic funeral home seem homelike" (p. 290). As mentioned before, both communal

support and individual expression can be therapeutic and ease the grieving process (Anderson,

2009; Castle & Phillips, 2003) Again, there is a lack of literature that directly addresses how

personalized funeral rituals at home influence grief, however, the existing research tentatively

points to a positive effect.

Discussion

In the words of Walt Whitman (1855) "All goes onward and outward, nothing

collapses/And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier" (p. 28). Reflected in

the literature about home and green funerals is Whitman's hopeful message that death is not

necessarily a bleak end, but rather a transition (Kelly 2015; Herring, 2019). Death can be greeted

with art and all the things the deceased held dear during their life—for example, rock music and

dancing (Herring, 2019). Without the rigid structure of a traditional funeral, families are at

liberty to infuse the funeral ritual with personalized meaning. Home funerals also allow families

to shed the costly goods and services provided by funeral homes—undoing the

consumer/provider relationship that was established with the professionalization of deathcare

(Olson, 2016). The fluidity and extended format of home funerals affords families precious time—rather than packing the experience into a two-hour service (S.N., personal communication, March 2, 2019) (see Appendix A for full interview). Many report that these factors ease the grieving process, however, empirical research is lacking.

On a micro level, ritual and home deathcare are anecdotally powerful for families dealing with loss, but it is also important to also understand why this shift is happening on a macro level—and why now? Like any long-standing institution, the funeral industry has accumulated traditions and trappings that may no longer serve a function for grieving families. Customs like embalming and ornate caskets originated from specific past events and for bygone reasons (Beard & Burger, 2005). According to C.E., many people are no longer religious and are seeking to find meaning in death rituals in alternative ways (personal communication, March 7, 2019) (for full interview see Appendix B). Hoy (2013) notes that our ceremonies around death reflect culture, and society has progressed in important ways since the popularization of certain funeral practices. Perhaps most importantly, S.N. stated that part of the reason home funerals are gaining popularity currently is because baby boomers will demand deathcare that reflects their values (personal communication, March 2, 2019). Furthermore, C.E. predicted that much like the home birth movement forced hospitals to transform to meet women's needs, the growing deathcare movement will put pressure on the funeral industry to provide more options to families, and encourage more ethical practices (personal communication, March 7, 2019)

The values of baby boomers are reflected in the movements they have fronted. For example, the 1970s green burial and home birth movements. Both are centered on reclaiming knowledge and caring for bodily processes in a more natural way (Olson, 2016). Those same ideas and beliefs are echoed in home deathcare (Kelly, 2015). Home burial is also part of a wider

movement that advocates death positivity (Leland & Yalkin, 2018). As S.T. notes, death and grief are part of the human experience, and on an individual and collective level we need to make space for that reality (See Appendix C for full interview) (Personal communication, March 10, 2019). Death positivity runs contrary to the culture of death denial and general lack of conversation surrounding end of life matters in the United States (Leland & Yalkin, 2018).

Even though a whole movement is dedicated to normalizing death, dead bodies are still unfamiliar and often feared—which leads people to question the legality and validity of home funerals (Kelly, 2015). S.N., a home funeral advocate, noted in an interview that often people have to overcome fear in order to care for a dead relative, but many discover the beauty in providing that care through the process (personal communication, March 2, 2019). C.E. provided the insight that while the idea of caring for the dead sounds strange in theory, the process itself feels more natural (personal communication, March 7, 2019). Instead of embalming, home deathcare is usually executed with natural techniques (Kelly, 2015). Hence, home deathcare does not change the features of a person as embalming does—the person looks like themselves, only dead (S.N. personal communication, March 2, 2019). S.N. theorized that spending time with the body without the change of appearance allows the reality of the death to sink in and dispel the possibility of denial (personal communication, March 2, 2019). Herring (2019) describes the uncertainty many have about housing a body in their home, which some assume is illegal. However, with certain provisions, it is legal in all fifty states for families to act as their own undertaker (Herring, 2019). Natural deathcare advocates are often versed in this area of the law and help families navigate the legal requirements and paperwork (Harris, 2007). Although there is some research on the topic of bodies in the funeral context and the impact on grief, specific research on home funerals is lacking.

Many who coordinate or have attended a home funeral report meaningful and moving experiences (Herring, 2019; Dunn, 2009; Harris, 2007). While this evidence is compelling, specific scholarly research on this topic is scarce. As noted by Anderson (2009), there are many factors that can influence the grieving process, therefore without more research on the topic, it is impossible to say conclusively whether home funerals ease the process of grieving. The sections on grief and funeral rituals covered research that could be extrapolated to home funerals, but it is important to look at the unique aspects. Namely, deathcare performed by the family, and the personalized nature of home funeral rituals. While limited and mostly anecdotal research exists on these topics, most indicated a positive effect on grief. S.N. also stated that in her experience coordinating home funerals, the experience was empowering and helped families grieve (personal communication, March 2, 2019). Both C.E. and C.T. pinpointed two healing elements of home funerals: the additional time allotted in the home funeral, and the empowerment families feel in the ability to make choices and care for the body of a loved one (personal communication, March 7, 2019) (personal communication, March 10, 2019). Future directions for research include collecting data and investigating the impact of home funerals on grief more directly.

Author's Note

I grew up in a community where home funerals were commonly held and accepted as a way to celebrate the life of a loved one. When I was a freshman in college, a student at my former high school, Arrow, died tragically in a car accident. The family chose to care for the body and hold a vigil at home. All the things Arrow was passionate in life were celebrated during the funeral ceremony and three-day vigil, including juggling, art, and singing. The experience of seeing friends go through the grieving process in this unique way as teenagers made me wonder

about the effect on the process of mourning. I know that the event had a profound impact on

many. Although it was many years ago, it was the first time I had to grapple with the loss of a

peer and the experience has stayed with me to this day. I was grateful to research this topic, and I

hope to delve further into this area in the future.

References

Anderson, H. (2009). Common Grief, Complex Grieving. *Pastoral Psychology, 59*(2), 127-136.

  doi:10.1007/s11089-009-0243-5

Beard, V. R., & Burger, W. C. (2015). Change and innovation in the funeral industry. *OMEGA –*

  Journal of Death and Dying, 75(1), 47-68. doi:10.1177/0030222815612605

Bosley, G. M., & Cook, A. S. (1994). Therapeutic Aspects of Funeral Ritual. *Journal of Family*

  Psychotherapy, 4(4), 69-83. doi:10.1300/j085v04n04_04

Castle, J., & Phillips, W. L. (2003). Grief rituals: Aspects that facilitate adjustment to

  bereavement. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 8*(1), 41-71. doi:10.1080/15325020305876

Dilmaç, J. A. (2016). The new forms of mourning: Loss and exhibition of the death on the

  internet. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 77*(3), 280-295.

  doi:10.1177/0030222816633240

Dunn, K. L. (2009). "He's in the garage"--taking time at the end of life. *The Medical Journal of*

  Australia, 191, 615.

Forrester L. (2008). Bereaved parents' experiences of the use of "cold bedrooms" following the

  death of their child. *International Journal of Palliative Nursing*, *14*(12), 578–585.

Glickman, K., Shear, M. K., & Wall, M. M. (2016). Mediators of outcome in complicated grief

  treatment. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 73*(7), 817-828. doi:10.1002/jclp.22384

Hagerty, A. (2014). Speak softly to the dead: the uses of enchantment in American home

  funerals. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 22(4), 428–442.

  doi:10.1111/1469-8676.12087

Hayslip, B., Booher, S. K., Scoles, M. T., & Guarnaccia, C. A. (2007). Assessing adults

difficulty in coping with funerals. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 55*(2), 93-115.

doi:10.2190/om.55.2.a

Harris, M. (2007). *Grave matters: A journey through the modern funeral industry to a natural way of burial*. New York: Scribner.

Herring, L. (2019). *Reimagining death: Stories and practical wisdom for home funerals and green burials*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Hoy, W. G. (2013). *Do funerals matter?: The purposes and practices of death rituals in global perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kelly, S. (2015). *Greening death: Reclaiming burial practices and restoring our tie to the earth*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kopp, S. W., & Kemp, E. (2007). Consumer Awareness of the Legal Obligations of Funeral Providers. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 41*(2), 326-340. doi:10.1111/j.1745-6 606.2007.00083.x

Leland, J., & Yalkin, D. (2018). The Positive Death Movement Comes to Life. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/nyregion/the-positive-death-movement-comes-to-life.html

Lynch, T. (2004). Funerals-R-Us: From Funeral Home to Mega-Industry. *Generations*, *28*(2), 11–14.

Maxera, L. (2017). *Home Funerals and Effects on the Grief Process* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Hawai`i Pacific University.

Oates, M. (2003). Understanding the Grief Process: A First Step to Helping Bereaved Clients. *TCA Journal*, *31*(1), 29–39.

Olson, P. R. (2016). Domesticating Deathcare: The Women of the U.S. Natural Deathcare

Movement. *Journal of Medical Humanities, 39*(2), 195-215. doi:10.1007/s10912-016-9424-2

Reeves, N. C. (2011). Death Acceptance Through Ritual. *Death Studies*, *35*(5), 408–419. doi:10.1080/07481187.2011.552056

Rush, M. (2013). The industry take-over of home birth and death. *The Journal of Clinical Ethics,24*(3), 289-290.

Schafer, C. (2012). Corpses, conflict and insignificance? A critical analysis of post-mortem practices. *Mortality, 17*(4), 305-321. doi:10.1080/13576275.2012.731724

Schwartz, M. L., Jolson, M. A., & Lee, R. H. (1986). The Marketing of Funeral Services: Past, Present, and Future. *Business Horizons*, *29*(2), 40.

Whitman, W. (1855). Song of Myself. In *Leaves of Grass* (pp. 22-78). New York, NY: Signet Classics.

Appendix A

Interview with Susan Nesbit, a Home Funeral Practitioner and Advocate

1) *What do you find to be the unique aspects of the home funeral?*

I can say that not having to rush around after a death, not having to deal with a strange/unfamiliar environment are both nice starters. The biggest difference is that people are allowed the chance to grieve when they are ready. It is hard to imagine that everyone can come into a 2-hour service and deal with the myriad feelings a death brings, but a home funeral allows people the gift of time. Other unique aspects include vigils, the comfort of friends and family around the clock (if desired), the use of rituals, and the idea that we are helping the dead person to cross over.

2) *Do you think home funerals help families grieve the loss of a loved one?*

I do. I think the mere gift of not rushing offers people time to slow down and accept what is happening. There is something empowering about keeping a corpse at home too. Just as we care for our loved ones while they are living, we continue that care into the afterlife, not relinquishing control to a stranger.

3) *How would you say home funerals fit into the wider movement towards death positivity?*

I think that the idea of having a dead body in the home sounds super weird and scary to a lot of people, but once they experience a home funeral, most the people I know of seem to be relieved and moved by the simplicity and beauty of it all. It helps to normalize death because there is a corpse in the living room!

4) *Morticians and others have advocated spending and time and viewing the body and remains are often at the center of funeral rituals. What function do you think the body plays in home funerals?*

I would say that they play the same role, but at home funerals the body does not really look so weird. Embalming changes the features of a person, but at a home funeral, the person looks like they did in life, but dead. There is no denying that death has occurred and subconsciously or not, that helps.

5) *Dead bodies are sometimes viewed as threatening or frightening in American culture. How do families cope with caring for the dead at home? Do some have to overcome their initial instincts when it comes to caring for the dead?*

Absolutely! It feels scary and potentially uncomfortable to care for a dead relative, but I have seen families that never imagined being able to deal with such a scenario, completely change their opinion and come to see the beauty of caring for their loved one. For some, the realization of the beauty comes in doing the work.

6) *Please share any notable or powerful moments/experiences related to grief and home funerals*

I was helping a family that absolutely did not want to have their relative to have a home funeral. They were opposed to all of it, but the patient really wanted to be cared for at home and then have a home funeral. A compromise was made, and the family ended up holding a vigil in the nursing home where the person died, and after they washed the body, their feelings began to change. They held a vigil, followed by a celebration of life, and they were so grateful to be involved in her care after she died. The fear and "yuck factor" disappeared and they felt nothing but appreciation for the opportunity to care for their daughter/sister.

7) *What is the first thing you would tell someone who is unfamiliar with home funerals?*

Try to keep an open mind! It is not for everybody, but the people who experience it tend to be moved in a way they could never have expected.

8) *Why do you suppose that women lead this movement?*

Probably because death is like birth. We are helping people labor into the next phase.

9)*Why do you think this movement is gaining momentum in this particular cultural moment?*

Because the baby boomers are going to demand it. They have been involved in demanding

green options in their lifetime, and death is not green. They want better options. Besides, we

must change the way we deal with death!

10) *What role do personalized rituals have in the grieving process?*

That is up for debate, but many people would argue that ritual is essential with rites of

passage, and death is a Rite of Passage, so rituals seem appropriate.

11) *Any closing thoughts?*

I have seen firsthand the benefits of home funerals. I have watched families take time to

process their grief, in the comfort of their own homes. However, I know this is not for

everyone and yet I hope to see it normalized as the years go on.

Appendix B

Interview with Charlene Elderkin, a Home Funeral Educator

1) *How do you like to define your role in Threshold Care Circle (TCC) and the role of the*
    group in the community?

We like to be clear that we are educators, we help people know what their choices are.

Sometimes it can get confusing because we live in a small town often when there is a home

funeral someone from TCC will be there helping out but that is because they have a

relationship with the family, it's about the family being empowered to make choices, not

TCC doing it for them.

1) *What term do you use to refer to the work you do?*

We have to be careful about what we call ourselves […] Home funeral guide could be

something but really, we like to sit with the term educator. We want to empower families and

give them choices. There are people that live in more populated areas that use a more hands-

on approach and that is as a paid professional […] If you do anything other than education,

you are operating as a funeral director without a license. That's why we clarify, if a family

invites to be present, we can be helpful as friends but really, we want families to be

empowered to participate on whatever level they feel comfortable with […]

2) *What do you find to be the unique aspects of home funerals as opposed to conventional*
    funerals?

The family directed part of it. In a conventional funeral you turn things over to a

professional—a better term is family-directed funeral. A big aspect of it is care of the body at

home, but when we talk about home funerals it can mean a wide variety of things—it can

mean spending a few hours with the body at the nursing home before it's whisked away […]

It's mostly about families making choices that they did not know they could make, and that

manifests in ways that are as unique as the individuals are.

3) *Do you think home funerals help families grieve the loss of a loved one?*

I would suspect that it does, especially when the loss is sudden. If someone is in hospice care

and they've been hanging on at the end you might feel relief, but of course, it's still a

meaningful thing to do. In terms of the impact on grieving, in the case of an unexpected

death, you just haven't had time to get used to the idea that they are gone.

Another thing is that in a conventional funeral there isn't much for the families and the wider

community to do, other than bringing food and grieving people don't eat much. So, the fact

that people rally and assist in home funerals speaks to Midwesterners' need to do something.

We want to feel like we're doing something with our bodies. During home funerals, people

can help clean the house, or dress the body, or change the ice. Really if you're having a

family-directed funeral or caring for the body at home there are so many more tasks that need

to be done. As we move our bodies through this process, it also helps move the grief. Of

course, if the death is sudden, those closest might not be able to do anything with their

bodies, but really, it's a whole community that grieves. So, I think it's most impactful when

the death is sudden and being able to do something with our bodies helps us to move the

emotions that are swirling in our bodies.

4) *Morticians and others have advocated spending time and viewing the body and physical*

remains are often at the center of funeral rituals. What function do you think the body plays

in home funerals?

Now, this is different than traditional funerals because you have the body with you for a longer time. As opposed to a conventional funeral where it's an embalmed body and you only see it for a couple of hours. So, it really is a central component…What I've heard over and over is that there is a point during time spent with the body when you realize that that person is no longer there. Sometime during the second going into the third day. Otherwise, the body is whisked away, and you see it briefly at the funeral home and it can all feel very unreal. Very interesting things happen when the body is not embalmed—a kind of relaxing. Rigor mortis sets after twenty-four hours, and then it lets go, and the mouth might relax into a smile, all the tension goes out of the face. There's a whole process that the body goes through that we no longer know because of embalming. Spending time with an un-embalmed body is really significant and people can spend as much time as they want and have the conversation they want. People can connect with the fact that the deceased really isn't there anymore. That facilitates grief—people understand that the spirit that animated this body is no longer present.

5) *Dead bodies are sometimes viewed as threatening or frightening in American culture. How do families cope with caring for the dead at home? Do some have to overcome their initial instincts when it comes to caring for the dead?*

Most people that hold home funerals know that they want to do that for a long time, so maybe there is initial resistance but not really. I remember one time a particular family was anticipating the death of a family member and they were not interested in caring for the body. This woman ended up dying in the nursing home and her sister happened to be there when a friend came to wash the body. In that moment she decided that that wasn't such a weird thing after all and participated. People have fears, but I think if we let people know that they have

choices and leave that door open for people often they will walk through it. It sounds weird

because we don't have a framework, we haven't seen people do it. When someone you love

has died it doesn't feel weird anymore, it feels like an extension of your love. Of course, you

can't convince people to try it if they are really uncomfortable but if other people are [caring

for the body], they will often choose to help. You know, I was with my mom when she died,

she died in a hospice and after I laid next to her bed for a few hours. She died in the early

morning and I had been there all night. It was early in the morning and I was going to go pick

up my kids, but it was too early, so I laid down and slept next to her body for a few hours. I

remember thinking that this should feel weird, but it didn't feel weird. Then I brought my

kids so they could say goodbye to their grandma. I guess that's the long way of saying we

think it will feel strange but it's just an extension of your love for the person.

6) *If you can, please share any notable or powerful moments/experiences related to grief and*
   home funerals

Yes, in 2010 or 2011 there was a newborn baby that was born at home and died a few hours

later. They were very private people and they weren't sure they wanted to have a home funeral.

They had to do an autopsy on the baby because they weren't sure why he died, and when the

baby was brought back home, the parents were exhausted. A few members of TCC held the baby

and kept vigil through the night so the parents could rest. Ultimately the parents chose to open up

their home because the community had not met their son. When I went to their home there was a

line around the block of people who wanted to pay their respects to the family. As I entered the

house, I realized that this service was the anniversary of the birth and death day of my firstborn

daughter. So of course, my relationship with death is very much influenced by the fact that at

twenty years old my firstborn daughter was born and died the same day. And this happened to

be her birth and death day.   And then, as I'm waiting, the parents were going to take a break and the friends who were helping had the baby, and we were going to change the ice packs. Because I am part of TCC, she said, "Come with me." One of the things I say is "You get the backstage pass to people's most intimate moments. You're willing to show up for death." So we went upstairs and she unwrapped the blanket and I saw the baby and we put the ice packs on. He looked very perfect. Blue fingernails were all you could see, otherwise, he looked like a healthy baby. We went downstairs and there was a line in the room that extended into the next room, but the parents weren't quite ready yet and A. said, "Do you want to hold him?" So I got to hold this baby, and I'm standing there and thinking about these interconnecting circles. There's my baby, on this very day, like the 35th anniversary, and then here's this couple, having a home funeral because I started this group. It was circles within circles, a very profound moment for me personally, that all the threads of my life seemed to connect in this moment.

I got to hold my baby right after she was born, but then her lungs started to fail, and she was on monitors and sent to another hospital and I didn't see her again until the funeral home. It had been a long time, and I didn't feel I had any more healing to grieving to do, but in that moment, there was some greater and deeper healing that came to me that I didn't even know I needed. That was my 35 years ago experience that was my connection with this family. and it was a very deep experience both for the family and for me.

7) *What is the first thing you would tell someone who is unfamiliar with home funerals?*

Our group teaches people to care for their own dead, with or without a funeral director. It is the traditional way of caring for the dead for most of our existence as a species. You start talking about that, and you see what comes up.

8) *Why do you suppose that women lead this movement?*

Culturally, we are the caregivers, at least in most traditions I'm aware of and even in America, before funeral directors became something professional, it was women who cared for the dead. As with many things that women do, when men take over and it becomes professionalized, like cooking… I mean, who are the chefs? and who does most of the cooking? Who are the big name chefs, or designers… any of that stuff. Somebody wrote a paper about this, about the role of women as caregivers, as the ones who held the knowledge, for the community, of how we care for the body. In the Jewish tradition, men care for men's bodies, and women care for women's bodies.

9) *Why do you think this movement is gaining momentum in this particular cultural moment?*

A lot of people said that us baby boomers brought home birth into being because hospitals were not treating us well. I think there's been a disconnect with traditional religious rituals. People are less religious than they used to be and find conventional funerals not meaningful, so they're looking for other ways to have a meaningful experience. So, I think that, the same way baby boomers changed the way we give birth, are now changing the way we deal with death.

The home birth movement has helped raise awareness of the expected standards in birth. Hospitals would not have changed without the pressure from the home birth movement, which brought many issues to light. […] Because some people are opting out now, funeral homes might go through the same process and become more willing to adapt to the families' wills.

It's the families' right in most States to bring the body home; but a lot of institutions didn't know that when we were starting out, and they would not allow it in some cases. But as the whole death care movement has gained awareness, funeral homes are going to offer better options and be willing to explore hybrid solutions, that wouldn't have happened before there was a knowledge that we could do it for ourselves.

10) *What role do personalized rituals have in the grieving process?*

I think sometimes we lose sight of how important this is. A lot of people refuse to have a funeral, forgetting that people who are left behind need something. After a sudden loss in my own family, in which there was no access to a service or presence of the body, we improvised a gathering, with a slideshow and some music at a community center. It wasn't a big event, but it really brought to me that we need a place to gather and share our feelings, to say goodbye.

Obviously, having a home funeral doesn't have to be exclusive; there's a certain structure to the way that we do funerals, and doing one at home doesn't exclude having a memorial afterward, for example.

What's really interesting to me is to see what people choose to do when they're given more choices than the usual. Specific traditions can spring up in different communities, like people gathering to sing around the house when the body is being carried to the funeral car. Some things can be very individualized, but at the same time communities can develop their own rituals.

Appendix C

Interview with Susan Townsely, a Social Worker and Therapist

1) *Do you think home or green funerals help families grieve the loss of a loved one?*

Absolutely. It offers a chance for everyone to absorb the reality of the loss and to be with

friends and family in the comfort and security of their own home.

2) *What are some patterns or things that you notice come up often in counseling related to*

the death of a loved one?

The grief comes in waves. First you feel like you are walking around in a bubble of grief and

the rest of the world is carrying on around you, but you can't feel a direct part of it. Then a

deep sadness comes and needs time and space. And eventually you are able to turn into the

routines and rhythms of life again.

3) *Do you think counseling is beneficial for people who are grieving?*

I do, I think it helps to have a space and time to process what is happening and get some

help knowing what a normal grieving process looks like and strategies for tending to the

grief as it comes up.

4) *What aspects of funerals do you believe to be therapeutic?*

Being surrounded by people who share in your grief and can offer love and support.

5) *What are some counseling techniques or practices that you use to facilitate healing?*

Mindfulness, learning to be comfortable with sadness…resisting the grief makes it

bigger.

6) *Do you ever use rituals in your sessions?*

I help people think about what would be meaningful to them and how they can execute

rituals at home.

7) *What, if anything, do you think is therapeutic about rituals?*

Rituals can help you feel closer to the person who has passed and also help you bring closure to

the loss.

8) *Please share any thoughts you might have about the relationship between grieving and*

funerals

I think a funeral allows for a lot of love and support from others and also allows for closure.

9) *From your experiences working with people, why do you suppose the home and*

alternative deathcare movement is gaining momentum in this particular cultural moment?

When you lose someone, you love you feel you have no control. The traditional funeral process

continues that feeling. The home funeral puts the loved ones back in charge, making all of the

choices and taking it all more slowly.

10) *Anderson (2009) theorizes that families move through stages in the wake of loss,*

including acknowledgement of the death and moving towards gaining hope for the future.

Do you think the stage model is realistic and accurate?

I do. I often refer to Elizabeth Kubler Ross's stages of grief which helps people to put their grief

inside of a process and bring more understanding.

11) *Any closing thoughts or insights on grief?*

Grief and suffering are a part of our human existence. It is in many ways part of what I

talk about with every client. Learning to live with it, make space for it and understand it

is something we all share is important to everyone's process.