

ABOUT CSEE

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education supports the moral and spiritual development of young people through offering resources and educational opportunities to elementary, middle, and secondary schools. See more about our work at www.csee.org

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GROWING THROUGH GRIEF

BY JULIE STEVENS AND DAVID STREIGHT

Just before school is out for the summer, a fifth grade boy, along with his grandparents, is killed in an automobile accident. His parents and his second-grade sister must suddenly deal with arranging three funerals.

Only three weeks into the school year, a sensitive, introverted fourteen-year-old freshman misses several classes over a week's time while her mother, who has battled ovarian cancer for two years, is hospitalized, slips in and out of consciousness, and then dies.

School resumes after spring vacation with the news that a loved and professionally respected coach was killed in an automobile accident as she was returning the previous day.

After breaking up with his first serious girlfriend, a popular, outgoing sixteen-year-old who excels in both athletics and academics dies of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, prompting speculation of suicide.

These stories are both tragic and familiar. Death and loss are unavoidable, and the resulting shock, pain, and grief will inevitably affect our classrooms and our larger school communities. As educators, we are in a unique and powerful position to respond to tragedies in the lives of our students, whether they affect a single student or the entire school.

Scott Poland, past president of the National Association of School Psychologists and head of the association's National Emergency Response Team, is unequivocal in his assessment of the educator's role in the aftermath of a tragedy: "I believe that most of the intervention after a death needs to be in the classroom and led by trained and empowered teachers." Moreover, our responses may instruct our students in the most fundamental and necessary lessons we human beings ever struggle to learn.

It is easy to imagine the valuable insights and resources classroom teachers can contribute. As caring, informed professionals who are likely, over time, to have established close relationships with the young people in our classrooms, we teachers can respond to special circumstances affecting a particular student or family. Not all of us are comfortable when those around us are grieving. But our status as human beings and community members requires that we increase our comfort levels and skills—to the extent that we possibly can—in this essential facet of living and working in the caring communities all our schools strive to be.

All educators can support students and colleagues in potentially significant ways. At the very least, we can understand that grief has no timetable, and that it comes in a variety of forms. The following factors significantly influence how a student (or a colleague) at school might cope with death and grief:

- the social support systems available (family, friends, school staff, community members)
- the nature of the death and how the student interprets it
- the status of "unfinished" business between the student and the deceased
- the emotional and developmental age of the student
- messages conveyed by the larger community or culture about death and loss.

Consider how our culture shapes our beliefs, attitudes, and responses about death and loss. Violent death is sensationalized or trivialized in a variety of media. We no longer live in an agrarian society where people are frequently exposed to the natural cycles of birth and death. In our world, people die in hospitals or nursing homes; families no longer routinely "lay out" the dead

HELPING STUDENTS IN TIMES OF GRIEF

BY DAVID STREIGHT

The number one factor in a school's quest to build character, moral growth, and ethical leadership—all those terms that feature so prominently in our mission statements—is school climate. Climate encompasses when things are going well, and how we handle life when it is not going well. This includes how we interact with students (and adults) who are in the midst of difficult personal or family situations, like grief. Grief can come from personal losses we might sometimes consider relatively minor, like the loss of a relationship, but it comes also in major forms like divorces, life-threatening illnesses, and deaths.

Tips for teachers, chaplains, and others:

1. Grief comes in many forms

Understand, for yourself, that grief comes in many forms and with many timetables. Its onset may be immediately after a tragic event, or delayed. Its manifestation may be mild, moderate, prolonged, or sporadic. Expect changes in behavior, but do not be surprised if there are none.

2. Help students in the class through information, and warmth

Many adults are uncomfortable with grief in those around us. Even more so, this is the case for students. Our talking to students about what a classmate might be going through can be both comforting and one of the most valuable life lessons we can teach. We can help a class via both the information we give (see below and resources elsewhere in this issue) and the warmth with which we engage the class in discussions around the issue. Students may understand that we, too, are uncomfortable with grief, if such is the case. The main thing is that we all do what we can to support those around us who are affected.

Help students in the class understand that there are many ways to experience and to show grief. Such information can help them both in the case of their classmate, and with others they may encounter in later life.

3. Ask the grieving student what he or she wants classmates to know about the reason for his or her absence.

If the student is young and has missed school, plans for informing classmates can be worked out through a conversation involving the student, his or her parents, and the teacher. Many high school students may be able to make their own decisions. In some cases, students come back to school but are not yet ready to talk about why they were absent. Respect the student's wishes, but make sure he or she knows (and then check in at an appropriate time later) that you're there to help facilitate the conversation with classmates when the time comes.

4. Have classmates consider ways to reach out and support

Most students who come back to school after a personal or family tragedy want their teachers and classmates to walk that fine line between acting as if nothing has happened and going out of their way to be nice. The line is a difficult one to follow exactly, especially since we are all different. However, what might be a false step one way or another is not harmful if the step is made with sensitivity. The worst thing we can do in most cases is to ignore the student in an effort to give him or her "space."

5. Support the grieving student through flexibility

One effect of grief is loss of concentration. Homework—especially in the high-pressure world of many of our schools—is frequently affected: in quantity, in quality, in timeliness, or in any combination of the three. Wherever possible, make accommodations to ease the student's struggle between wanting to perform at school and needing to deal with an essential human experience. This may include accommodations in assignments and—in some situations—even the possibility of leaving class to visit an advisor, counselor, or school nurse during waves of emotion that make staying in the classroom difficult.

Grief does pass—at least its power diminishes—but this happens more or less effectively depending on the climate we establish. ✨

LETTERS TO DOUBTING THOMAS: A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

C. Stephen Layman

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006

BY RICHARD BARBIERI

I had the best intentions, if not the greatest enthusiasm. I would try to read one of today's ubiquitous anti-religious diatribes, and share my experience with the readers of *Connections*. But try as I might, I could not choose which screed seemed the least abusive, the most reasoned, and most worth engaging. And then I entered, of all places, the MIT Press bookstore.

On a display rack were two clusters of books, one under the heading "God's Critics," the other "God's Champions." Among the champions' volumes, one caught my attention: C. Stephen Layman's *Letters to Doubting Thomas*. Maybe it was the author's fortuitous name, or the epistolary promise (what reader of *Screwtape* or *Letters to Malcolm* would not hear an echo?).

What I found was a lucid, engaging, and serious exploration of the grounds for the theistic position in the debate with what Layman labels "naturalism." Layman speaks the same language and uses the same techniques that any modern philosopher would in tackling a debated question, but arrives at conclusions far different from those we tend to associate with contemporary secular thinkers.

Layman begins with a clarification: he is not talking about "proofs" for the existence of God, because "By a 'proof' I mean an argument with these two features: (1) its premises are acceptable to all rational people, and (2) its conclusion follows logically from its premises. Proofs in this sense are rare or non-existent in philosophy. *The defense of virtually any major philosophic position will involve controversial premises at some point, i.e. premises not acceptable to all rational people.*" (The italics are Layman's.)

Layman's case is set out by the philosopher Zachary in a series of letters to an old friend. It asks whether, given

such phenomena as testimony about religious experience, the existence of contingent beings, the apparent order of the universe, and the plausible presence in that universe of free will, arguments for a purely material origin are more or less plausible than those for a non-material creator, one possessing at least some of the attributes normally applied to God.

Using, and clearly defining, such concepts as argument-to-the-best-explanation and the principle of simplicity, Zachary shows why a convincing account of a completely material reality involves an extraordinary number of untestable hypotheses, such as the existence of multiple if not innumerable universes, or of a material power capable of generating all these while remaining undiscoverable by any currently conceivable method.

Among the most interesting sections is Layman's approach to the problem of theodicy, which doubting Thomas of course raises as a counter-argument. After stating with great clarity the argument from free will for a world with both God and evil in it, Zachary turns the tables and exposes numerous gaps in a materialist explanation for why sentient beings should ever have arisen with a capacity for either suffering or doing evil.

Layman is hard to quote, since he never strives for the aphoristic or analogic brilliance of a C. S. Lewis, but the experience of reading *Letters* left me with the same sense as does his great apologetics predecessor: the champions of God have just as much right to the banner of reason and clarity as do any of their opponents. ❖

Richard Barbieri, CSEE's veteran book reviewer, is Interim Head of School at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland.

in their parlors; a priority is placed on antiseptic, institutional treatment of all matters relating to the body. In general, we are surrounded by models of instant, generic emotion, rather than by the measured, ongoing, and uniquely personal progression typical of grieving a major loss.

While no one can “fix” what has occurred, and while we may feel inadequate in the face of tragic loss, educators have a responsibility to intervene. The simple willingness to be silently present with a student as he or she grieves might result in the eventual understanding that even the most difficult of human experiences can be borne.

In *When Children Grieve*, authors John James and Russell Friedman list the following cultural myths or messages connected with grief: don't feel bad, replace the loss, grieve alone, be strong, keep busy, and expect that time will heal all wounds. Educators can help counter these confusing,

damaging messages in many ways:

- give honest, accurate answers to students' questions
- be authentic about responses and model appropriate ways to deal with powerful feelings and stress
- while respecting individual desires for privacy or solitude, provide opportunities for students to feel safe and cared for when they expose and explore a range of feelings
- allow for individual ebb and flow of energy, concentration, and motivation for school work and school activities
- help parents and other significant adults understand how the student's developmental level and individual preferences, strengths, and weaknesses in processing information will affect his or her understanding of death and response to grief.

In addition to James and Friedman's recommendations, we must add that it is essential that adults at school allow one another, and themselves, to grieve also. When a loss occurs, it is the adults at school who feel the need

to “be there” for students and the rest of the community. Far too often, we find ourselves affected by our own grieving at a later date, after the initial period of need has subsided. Far too often, also, we fail to give ourselves permission to let the waves of feelings we experience run their appropriate course, as they should.

No one wishes upon an individual student or the broader school community the experience of pain, confusion, and uncertainty that results from tragedy or significant loss. But we should all wish to respond as professionally, humanely, and effectively as we possibly can. The thoughtful, prepared educator can not only acknowledge and attend to the needs of students coping with immediate and challenging emotions, but also help these students consider the lessons distilled long after the precipitating event. Students will remember the teacher, coach, dean, or head of school who put aside business as usual to find ways to be supportive.

While no one can “fix” what has occurred, and while we may feel inadequate in the face of tragic loss, educators have a responsibility to intervene. The simple willingness to be silently present with a student as he or she grieves might result in the eventual understanding that even the most difficult of human experiences can be borne. In addition to memories of suffering and despair, the student will remember extraordinary caring and love, and will leave our classrooms and schools better prepared for whatever the future holds. ❄

CSEE Trustee Julie Stevens and Executive Director David Streight are former school psychologists and workshop presenters with professional experience in both public and private schools. They were colleagues at a school that lost seven students and two faculty members to a tragic accident.

SPRING CLEANING

The months of March and April usher in the yearly ritual of cleaning the house for spring. We sweep out all of the dust, clean the windows so that we might see more clearly, air out the house to let fresh breezes in. This was a ritual my parents observed far more religiously than I do. I cannot say I have ever done a thorough spring cleaning. I appreciate the romantic ideal and shy away from the tedious reality of the work. Spring cleaning takes on different connotations depending on where you make your home. In New Hampshire, spring cleaning is an opportunity to rejoice in the end of the long, cold winter.

When my wife and I began looking for a home in New Hampshire eight years ago, we were struck by how many houses fell into the stereotypical mold of “the old New Hampshire house.” If you have driven through any of the rural towns in New Hampshire, you know the houses I am referring to: old, usually early nineteenth century, homes which once consisted of one small building which was then added onto again and again and again. The early farmers who settled in New Hampshire had a hard life. The geography of “The Granite State” is not ideal for agriculture. Tilling the soil usually amounted to back-breaking work hauling out stones for the seemingly endless walls that would designate pastures and property lines throughout the state. Then there is the onslaught of winter when the old farmers would hunker down, feeding wood into stoves, last defense against the cold.

But many of those early farmers stayed despite the difficulty, and their one-room houses soon lacked sufficient space to accommodate the growing families. So those little houses began to expand, usually one room at a time, usually out and then maybe up: a bathroom was added on to replace the outhouse, a bedroom tacked on for the kids, a wood shed to lessen the burden of stepping out into the cold winter when the snow piled up against the doors, and then a pass-through to the barn which was added and grew up and out again with

loft and silo and hay. The old, classic New Hampshire house is a sprawling mix of Yankee architectural ingenuity, which serves a practical function. No blueprints, no fancy architects, just rooms tacked on with nails and barn boards and love.

The analogy of the “Old New Hampshire house” might be appropriate for any school across the country. Schools take on the life and the character of their geographic setting. The character of the school is a reflection of its environment...nature and nurture affect its life. Each year, we participate in the rituals of spring cleaning: rolling our sleeves up, shaking out the dust, and turning our attention to the ways we might make our school sparkle.

As those concerned with the spiritual care of our schools, how do we nurture their life and spirit? How do we honor the diversity of religious and spiritual perspectives, celebrate the fabric of race, ethnicity, political affiliation, and sexual orientation that mark us as distinct and vibrant and alive? How do we balance the great heritage and traditions with the demands of the present age without succumbing to the slow movement of merely glacial change? How do we help the members of the community look to the future?

When my wife and I purchased our version of the old New Hampshire house (which began as a very modest one-room deer camp), we were lost at first in the rooms that had no clear rhyme or reason, but we learned to find our way; we did our part to add to the character

Everyone who passes through our schools is called to live in them, to help them grow, to expand them outward and upward and onward, one room at a time, until all are truly welcome. Roll up your sleeves; spring is here, these schools are big, old houses, and it is our task to keep them warm.

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When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for Administrators

The Dougy Center, 2000
CSEE member schools \$9, others \$12

Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers

The Dougy Center, 2003
CSEE member schools \$9, others \$12

What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

by Trevor Romain
Free Spirit Press, 1999
CSEE member schools \$7

This month CSEE highlights three booklets not published by us, but of such great utility that we asked permission to make them available to our schools. Two are from one of the best resources in North America for grieving children and families. The third—*What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?*—is a wonderful resource for younger children (grades 2-6) who have lost someone they care about.

When Death Impacts Your School is a quick reference (55 pages) that covers the before, during, and after of tragic situations. The “before” section, of course, encourages schools to set up crisis teams, to be prepared. Whether a team is established or not, however, the booklet recommends a variety of steps to take from the moment a school representative is informed that a death has occurred: what do we do about the schedule today? what about staffing for certain parts of the campus? how do we inform students? what can we expect of student behavior, and how do we handle it? Later sections include information that school personnel should be watching for, from depression to grief to risky behavior on the part of certain individuals. A further section makes suggestions for special considerations: what if the death was a suicide? a homicide? Both this booklet and the following one are worth having on one’s bookshelf, with the hope they will never be taken off because of need.

Helping the Grieving Student covers some of the same material as *When Death Impacts Your School*, although its purpose is much less one of getting through the early moments and later school days after a tragedy than it is one of helping teachers understand how grief affects students and how teachers can most effectively (and most comfortably) help reintegrate into the classroom a student who has experienced a tragic loss. The booklet explains grief and the grieving process, and suggests how to explain it to others in the classroom. It also offers effective ways to make the grieving process easier for all concerned. A number of classroom activities are included.

Trevor Romain’s illustrated booklet for younger children—*What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?*—has short passages for the child to read, each passage relating to one of those questions that elementary children so often ask either themselves or adults they trust: am I going to die, too? why am I hurting so much? is it okay to cry? what happens to the person’s body? The booklet might be especially useful for children who have difficulty verbalizing their pain to adults. ✨

of the place without destroying its integrity, and we learned to love that house into a home.

I think everyone who passes through our schools is called to do the same: to live in them, to help them grow, to expand them outward and upward and onward, one room at a time, until all are truly welcome. Take a look at the school house you live in, and roll up your sleeves; spring is here, these schools are big, old houses, and it is our task to keep them warm. ✨

The Rev. Michael E. C. Spencer, an Episcopal priest, is Dean of Chapel at St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire, where he also teaches Humanities and coaches crew. This column is adapted from an article by the author which first appeared in the St. Paul’s School Pelican, January 2008.

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See additional details, including holy days for the first part of March, at www.csee.org



FOUNDED IN 1898

March 21

Magha Puja (Buddhism)

Magha Puja Day commemorates the day that the Buddha preached to a group of 1,250 monks who gathered together in the Bamboo Grove; it was on this occasion that he announced the entirety of Buddhist principles. The gathering (on the first full moon day of the third month after the Buddha was enlightened) was considered magical, because all these monks convened without any prior notice that the event would take place. The word *puja* means “devotion”; *Magha* is the name of the third month in the calendar.

March 21

Good Friday (Christianity)

This is the most solemn day in the Christian year, as it recalls Jesus’ suffering and passion on the cross. Most think the title “Good” Friday refers to the salvation offered to humanity as a result of Jesus’ sacrificial death; others believe the etymology is from “God’s Friday.” Worship services often last three hours, commemorating the traditional time that Jesus suffered on the cross.

March 22

Holy Saturday (Christianity)

Holy Saturday is the day before Easter in the Christian calendar. In Roman Catholic churches, the altar is stripped completely bare in memory of the loss of Christ. It has always been a day of severity in Christianity. At midnight the 40 days of Lent come to a close with the midnight mass that celebrates Easter.

March 22

Holi (Hinduism)

This two-day holiday was originally a time to celebrate plentiful harvests and the fertility of the earth, but over time, and with links to Hindu mythology, it has changed into a festival that some liken to Carnival in countries like Spain and Portugal. The legend is that the king’s son, Prahlada, was a worshipper of the

Hindu god Vishnu. The king was displeased with his son’s devotion, and tried to kill him on a number of occasions. The son always escaped. The king ultimately convinced his sister, whose name was Holika, to sit in a huge bonfire with the boy, so that he could not escape. Prahlada was not burned at all, but Holika was toast. Today, huge bonfires are lit in public places to commemorate the event. On the second day, people tend to throw colored powder, and/or water, at one another, and activities are often rowdy. In contrast to most other Hindu holidays, Holi is almost exclusively a public festival. Some towns celebrate with dances and song, and clouds of pink, blue, and green powder fill the air.

March 23

Easter (Christianity)

This is the day in the Christian calendar that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus from the death he suffered on the cross. It is considered the highest celebration in the Christian church, and is usually marked by attendance at important religious ceremonies, with songs of praise and rejoicing. In many churches, it opens with the blessing of fire at midnight; the fire is symbolic of the light of Christ. Children often get new clothing for Easter. The eggs of Easter symbolize the new life that Christians feel they were given by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

March 25

Feast of the Annunciation (Christianity)

Formerly it was believed that God’s incarnation must have coincided with the creation of the world (which naturally was springtime), and so the feast of “God becoming man” was set to take place just as spring was

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beginning. This took place when the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she was going to bear a child, Jesus (thus his birth at Christmas, nine months later).

March 26

Khordad Sal (Zoroastrianism)

This is the anniversary of the birth of the prophet Zarathustra, celebrated the sixth day of the Farsi month Farvardin, with prayers offered in temples. Many ancient events in Iranian history are said to have happened on this day. It is celebrated by families coming together, but also presents an opportunity for Zoroastrians to review the way they are living their lives and think about how they can improve. New clothing is often seen on children, flowers and delicious food are found in homes.

April 14

Ramanavami (Hinduism)

This day celebrates the birth of the Hindu god Rama, who is best known through the great Hindu epic titled the *Ramayana*. In some parts of India, there is a nine-day festival leading up to the Ramanavami. Devout Hindu devotees of Rama commemorate the day with ablutions (ritual washing) in the morning, and then by chanting mantras from the oldest of the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas. Offerings of flowers and fruit are made to the god. A fast is kept during the day, and then broken with a celebration that night.

April 19 (sundown)

Pesach/Passover (Judaism)

Pesach is the Hebrew word for Passover; it commemorates the liberation from slavery of the Israelites in Egypt around 2000 B.C.E. It is frequently celebrated with the Seder meal, when families and friends gather together to celebrate. The first and last days of the celebration are often considered days when most kinds of work should not be done.

April 20

Palm Sunday (Orthodox Christianity)

Called Willow Sunday in some Slavic countries, Palm Sunday commemorates the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem and was greeted as the Messiah. It is a day of praise for Jesus as a Savior.

April 20 (sundown)

Ridvan (Baha'i)

In Arabic, the word *ridvan* means “good pleasure,” and it also refers to Paradise. It references specifically the name of a beautiful garden in Baghdad where the Baha'i founder, Baha'u'llah, was living. Ridvan commemorates Baha'u'llah's public announcement that he had been called to be a prophet. The full festival lasts twelve days; Baha'is tend to take holidays on the first, ninth, and last days of Ridvan.

April 24

Vesak (Buddhism)

Also referred to as Visakha Puja, Vesak commemorates the month in which the Buddha reached his enlightenment. It is also the month in which he was born, and the month in which he died. Vesak is probably the most important festival in Buddhism. It is celebrated with a combination of meditation and low-level celebrations, with food and perhaps small gifts given, to allow the Buddha's followers the opportunity to practice generosity. In countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand, temples are often decorated with lanterns, to symbolize the Buddha's enlightenment.

April 25

Holy Friday (Orthodox Christianity)

The Friday before Easter is a major day for all Christians. On the afternoon of Holy Friday, Orthodox Christians observe Great Vespers. The service includes two dramatic, symbolic actions: the carrying of an icon to symbolize the un-nailing of Jesus and the laying of cloth to symbolize the burial of Jesus.

April 27

Easter/Pascha (Orthodox Christianity)

Easter is the central holy day in the Christian calendar, as it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, signifying the conquest of life over death. The Orthodox Church follows the Julian dating system for Easter, which places it five weeks later than the Gregorian calendar this year. ✨

2008-09 CHARACTER EDUCATION AWARDS TO TOTAL \$100,000

CSEE's incentive awards for character education will continue into the 2008-09 school year at an even greater level. A total of \$100,000 will be granted to schools to begin, or to fine-tune, a school-wide program to develop character. In all, six awards will be given, ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000.

CSEE and the Weekley Family Foundation sponsoring the awards hope that the growth of this initiative will encourage an even larger number of schools to engage in the process of designing and implementing top-quality programs.

To qualify, schools must plan character education initiatives based on research-based best practices. Award criteria also include a parent component, meaning that parents must be involved in the process in some meaningful way or ways.

CSEE Executive Director David Streight recently reiterated that the purpose of these awards is to stimulate a "tsunami for character education" throughout North America. "Because of their size and structure, independent schools are in a perfect position to create 'models of the possible' for schools everywhere," he said. "The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education hopes that every independent school will use this impetus—whether they decide to apply for an award or not—to make as intentional as possible their work to develop ethical leaders for tomorrow's world."

Schools that applied for the 2008 awards (to be announced in the May issue of *Connections*), but that are not winners, are encouraged to re-apply in the coming year. Application materials will be available in mid-spring, but criteria will be similar to this year's awards. Information on the components of high-quality programs may be found on the CSEE Web site. ✨

IN THE WEB RESOURCES FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

For this month's Web recommendations, we refer to the wealth of resources available from our colleagues at PBS. The first two are especially good resources for younger students who want information regarding questions relating to death.

Dealing with Death: Funerals and Memorials (information for lower or middle elementary grades)
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/article8.html>

This rich resource offers articles, reproducible journal pages, video clips, discussion guides, suggested books and Web sites, possible activities for groups and individuals, and much more.

Dealing with Death: Accepting the Facts (information for lower or middle elementary grades)
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/article2.html>

Here the facts are sensitively explored—death is universal, permanent, irreversible—and ways of coping with those facts are clearly explained (e.g., ask adults to be honest, stay involved, try not to think "magically"). Links are provided to discussions about funerals and memorials, the death of pets, and more.

Teen Hospice
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week625/cover.html>

This is a touching account, less about grief than about how students can reach out to make others' lives better. Teens spend time at a local hospice, and learn valuable life lessons at the same time—an admirable service learning project! ✨

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Teaching Ethics and Social Justice

In addition to examining case studies and considering ways to enable students to confront the moral and political questions they will face as adults, especially in the world of work, participants will leave this conference with a number of techniques to make social and moral issues come alive for students

With Roger Gottlieb, Ph.D.
March 29-30, 2008
Concord, New Hampshire

Spiritual Development in Children and Adolescents

A two-day conference with a focus on engaging with a work of art for spiritual growth, led by a national expert in the field at a museum with one of the nation's great collections of religious art

With John Grim, Ph.D., and Sarah Pike, Ph.D.
April 25-27, 2008
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Community Service/Service Learning

"When Disaster Strikes: Your Call to Service"

An up-close look at community recovery efforts and ideas to organize community-service programs, in schools everywhere, to be prepared for such events

With Mary Pashley and Ann Saylor
April 4-5, 2008
New Orleans, Louisiana

Moral Development and the Ethics of Care

The second of our 2007-08 offerings in "Working with the Best," with one of North America's best-known writers on school climate, for school administrators, teachers, and other staff, all grades

With Nel Noddings, Ph.D.
April 18-19, 2008
Lawrenceville, New Jersey

Developing Student Leadership: A Symposium of Successful Programs

Help your school make a difference in leadership formation for students. Leadership directors from three schools present and discuss models for developing student leaders

May 2-4, 2008
Culver, Indiana

2008 Institute on Teaching the World's Religions

University and secondary school colleagues from around the country. This year's special focus will be on teaching Hinduism (the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*) and Judaism

July 7-12, 2008
Washington, D.C.

Summer Ethics Institute for Adults

Five relaxed and engaging days with school administrators, trustees, and faculty discussing pieces of literature and examining case studies of ethical issues from independent schools

With the Rev. Dan Heischman
July 19-24, 2008
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Greening the Curriculum

Environmental activists and curriculum leaders from 40 schools will convene with recognized experts to make important curricular recommendations for schools. If we are convinced that we should take action to protect the environment, we must make improvements in our schools' curricula.

February 20-22, 2009
Miami, Florida ❁

ON TRAGEDY AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

I was a teacher in the spring of 1986, at a time when all our sophomores, in groups of a dozen or so, made a summit attempt—and occasionally even a summit ascent—on Oregon’s tallest peak. From our perspective, the attempt and how students faced it was of greater consequence than reaching the summit, despite the fact that the exhaustion and occasional frustration of the former would be overridden by the exhilaration of the latter.

Snow-covered peaks are dangerous. Weather is more intense and more variable than in flatter terrain just a few miles away. As it happened, what was planned to be just a walk around the ski lift for one of those 1986 climbs (the forecast was far from promising) ended with four days of heart-rending ups, downs, the biggest down of all.

When the sun set that evening, the group had not returned. Bad weather had become a storm with winds and snow of an intensity that blinded rescue teams and grounded a search helicopter the next morning. One gust took a snowplow windshield with it.

A duo from the group—one of the guides and a senior assistant—walked to safety the next day with the reassuring and hope-raising news that all were well but holed up in a cave they were forced to dig when things turned ugly. Howling winds and poor visibility continued.

Death took five of my students over the next three days, along with two colleagues—a neighbor and a close friend. One of those colleagues had worked with me on a team the previous spring to put together one of the first crisis-intervention plans in an independent school in the United States. Crisis plans do not prevent accidents, but they do help schools deal with the results of accidents, especially when such events affect the entire community.

Two other students who died were not students of mine, but both had siblings in my daughter’s class.

When my wife called my son’s public school to tell them he would be missing the next day (with the rarely used excuse “He has a lot of funerals he has to go to”) the principal hand-delivered homework assignments. This was, indeed, an event involving the entire community, which in our case included not just the school and its hundreds of families, but the entire city and surrounding area. *The New York Times* gave it a wider audience, which also engendered incredible messages and forms of support.

For worse and for better, the loss of loved ones can teach valuable lessons. We wish such losses on no one, but most people I know—while happy to part with the pain, if possible—would be reluctant to part with the life learning that pain engendered.

Our lives, our schools, cannot avoid tragedies that bring the loss of loved ones, but we can work to create communities where processing tragic events leads to stronger individuals. Those individuals grow when they are supported by a community that both cares and knows how to show its care.

Planning, in terms of having created a crisis plan (and revisiting it to keep it updated!), can help ensure that important steps are not missed while we are wrapped in urgency and confusion. The life lessons that difficult situations teach us are learned more effectively—or they are frustrated and aggravated—by the presence or absence of a plan that outlines details or individuals we would not want to forget. But life lessons come best when good plans are in the hands of people who have established a school climate that is strong, warm, and supportive in all ways.

I got reminded that spring—once again but strongly—of the preciousness of life, the preciousness of relationships. But the biggest life lesson I learned that spring entailed the value of community and my responsibility to help communities grow. My community was a strong one. But it is stronger now. ✨

David Streight