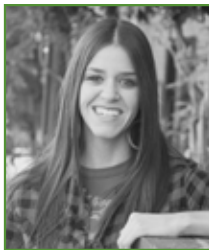




# Responding to those surviving the unchosen loss of love

by Lauren Jones



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## Abstract

This paper describes how a community worker informed by narrative practice formed a participatory community group in response to those within the community highly influenced by thoughts of self-harm following the loss of love. This paper highlights the privileging of community members' uncommon knowledge in finding a way forward. The community's devalued and subjugated knowledge is used to co-create an artful expression of ways group members are taking care following the loss of love, to externalised regret via a playful metaphor, to acknowledge anxiety in a co-produced document, to co-author a list of 'growing group rules', and to recreate a powerful 50th birthday ritual for a group member. Ethical ways of working are explored to guide community practice. The paper posits that a reclamation of faith in uncommon knowledge might be made all the more possible when devalued knowledge is privileged within a participatory community.

**Key words:** *loss, grief, narrative, externalise, community, uncommon knowledge*

## An inevitable invitation

A seed was planted that took root and refused to disappear during a conversation with colleague, Phoebe Kellett. When asked what seemed to prompt the majority of calls, she received by those highly influenced by thoughts of ending their own life, she reported that many of the persons seeking services described the loss of a living person as a precipitating event. This conversation paralleled a transition into psychiatric nursing in which I began to witness many persons from a diverse array of backgrounds making attempts on their lives following the unchosen ending of a valued relationship. The conversation with Phoebe echoed in my mind as I completed intake assessment after intake assessment with people who had made attempts on their lives following the loss of a relationship they held dear.

Desperate to make a dent in an apparent need, I extended an invitation to the community at large offering the opportunity to 'co-research' the common condition of broken-heartedness. I was transparent in stating upfront that I 'was no expert on healing the broken heart'. I was only hoping for a few brave community members willing to delve into co-exploration, yet after six months our community group situated in the South Central United States has morphed to over 200 members, and our meetings currently capped at twelve participants continue to generate an expanding waitlist. The community undoubtedly was interested in finding better ways of surviving love lost. And I, a newfound community worker, was placing an exorbitant amount of faith in Adalberto Barreto's belief in the power of a community's 'participatory response' to suffering (Barreto, Grandesso, Denborough & White, 2010, pp. 33–34).

## An introduction to uncommon knowledge

In finding a way forward, I structured our initial meetings with the following Barreto quote in mind:

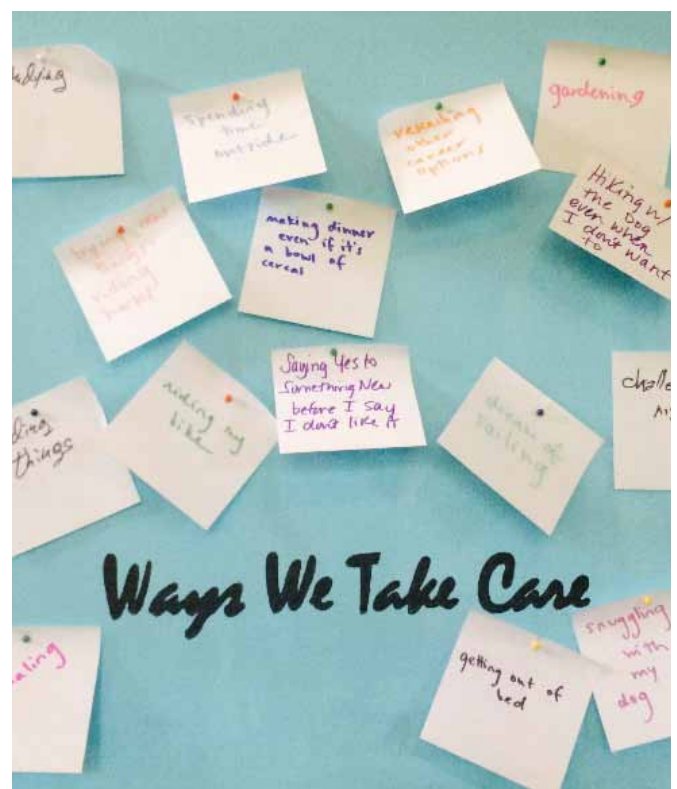
When people's local knowledge is devalued, this leads to an interiorisation of misery. In some ways, psychic misery becomes a problem of faith. When people no longer have a belief in themselves, or a faith in their own knowledge, this brings psychic misery. And this situation is only made worse if they seek assistance from people who only value academic knowledge and do not value local knowledge. One of the key tasks in responding to psychic misery is to enable people to believe in themselves (2010, p. 34).

During our initial gathering, with only three attendees, I aimed activities at acknowledging, what Michael White referred to as 'uncommon knowledge' in hopes of restoring faith in community members' devalued and subjugated wisdom (White, 1997a, p. 28). During individual email exchanges prior to the first meeting, I learned that community members reported feeling 'stuck' and they believed that successful ways of working would result in a sense of forward movement which they termed 'becoming unstuck'. Equipped with narrative practice and encouraged by Barreto's wisdom, I wondered if agency might be increased and faith in uncommon knowledge restored via honouring devalued wisdom within a participatory community group.

I wanted to find a way to create connection between strangers while simultaneously reconnecting community members to their own uncommon knowledge. In an attempt to do both, I invited group members to co-create a piece of art detailing the ways they were taking care in difficult times. Aware of the collective problem of 'stuckness', I asked group members a question in order to evoke movement:

What acts of self-care are helping you to move through this loss?

I hoped that this activity would draw attention to the small ways in which group members were reclaiming their lives amidst love lost. We took care in acknowledging the acts of self-care, such as getting out of bed or eating a meal, that often go unrecognised. We boldly named these brave acts of resistance against the dictates of grief on a collaborative canvas.



The group agreed unanimously to post pictures of our masterpiece to the community's discussion forum for all to see. Due to narrative ways of working, group members not only experienced increased agency during our first co-exploration but were enabled to contribute to the lives of others in the community surviving love lost.

## *An unexpected ride*

While preparing for the second group meeting, I held near the idea that research is a 'co-production of knowledge' (Epston, 1999, p. 142). On a discussion board devoted to group members offerings of peer-to-peer support, I noticed a rich metaphorical description developing between two men that referenced the 1985 movie 'Back to the Future' in which Marty McFly travels through time in a modified DeLorean car in order to mend the past.

P1: I have gone back so many steps in my life that moving forward seems like too much. I try to keep busy but my mind keeps going back to what else could have been done? If I had a DeLorean, and could go back in time, I would fix it all.

P2: I have also been playing the DeLorean game.

This metaphor seemed to hold great possibility in developing a portrait of the problem of regret when grieving a lost relationship. Holding to the value that it is crucial to 'explore what is important to those who have come to consult us', I enquired into any interest in continuing the 'DeLorean' conversation as a group and received an enthusiastic reply (Dulwich Centre Publications, 2004, p. 2). As exotic as time travel, I explained we would be charting new territory that had not been explored before while documenting knowledge in the making. Together, joined in the problem of broken-heartedness, we would delve into co-research by externalising grief via the DeLorean metaphor and by mapping grief's effects.

We began the co-production of knowledge by answering the following questions-

Q1: What does a ride in the DeLorean try to convince you to believe?

Q2: What does a ride in the DeLorean try to convince you to believe *about yourself*?

This led to an abounding exposé of regret's voice such as 'Regret convinced me that I wasn't good enough' and 'Regret made me ask repeatedly: What is wrong with me that he couldn't be faithful?' After mapping the negative effects of

being taken for a ride down the road of regret, we mapped the benefits of accepting an invitation. One group member spoke of the benefit of traveling this road by saying, 'What I have done my best to do is assess what I would have done differently and take that lesson with me as I move forward. I extract the knowledge and insight.' Below I provide some snippets of our exploration in regard to the tactics and strategies of regret as well as our skills in resisting being taken for a ride:

Q1: What leaves us vulnerable to being taken for a ride down the road of regret?

P1: Anger.

P2: The engagement of my co-workers.

P3: The holidays.

Q2: What makes accepting a ride with Marty McFly easier to resist?

P4: Prayer.

P5: Talking to the man I know I want to be in the mirror.

P6: Taking a break from social media.

Honouring group members' uncommon knowledge and their unique values were themes that we steered into at the end of our conversation.

We found that this externalising conversation led to the co-creation of certain knowledges about the problem, and ways of responding to it, that were of value to the heartbroken who feel driven by regret. Following our gathering, I summarised our findings in a spirited narrative letter which was emailed to the group:

*Hello Bravehearts!*

*First, thank you for introducing me to the idea of taking a ride down 'memory lane' in Marty McFly's DeLorean time machine (of regret)! This opened up so many possibilities for me, and I imagine your generosity in allowing me to share your uncommon knowledge will do the same for other people with whom I work.*

*When we mapped the effects of being taken for a joy ride in the DeLorean, we learned that the trip can leave us vulnerable to the idea that we 'aren't good enough'. Some of us are left asking questions such as 'What's wrong with me?' We discovered that the ride can conspire to keep us 'living in the past'. While we agreed that reflection after the loss of*

someone we love can be helpful as it enables us to 'learn our lessons', we found that engaging in repeated rides down memory lane after our 'gold has already been mined' can be an act in opposition to self-care and may even result in continual 'creation of regret'.

'Anger' left some of us more likely to take Marty McFly up on the offer of a punishing ride. For one of us, 'the engagement of a co-worker' left him in the midst of memories of his own proposal. One of us spoke of the pain of 'peripheral things lost' such as birthday celebration routines which left him vulnerable to riding with regret. We discovered that the holidays invite many of us to time travel.

Together we discovered a few ways of taking care that make it easier to take a raincheck on a ride with Marty McFly. For one of us 'prayer' works. Another stayed in the driver's seat by talking to 'the man I know I want to be' in the mirror. For some, 'work' provides a feeling of 'moving forward' and makes time travel toward regret less likely. Acts of 'reconnecting to self' such as 'knitting and reading' made the ride seem less appealing for one of us. For many of us, taking a break from social media lessened the temptation to take a ride. We learned that Facebook seems to conspire like crazy with McFly's DeLorean to take us for a trip down the long and winding road of repeated regret.

We talked about maintaining awareness in the weeks ahead of our desires to drive down memory lane and of an intentional gentleness with ourselves if we do swerve onto a particularly painful backroad. We talked about engaging in acts of self-care that make the desire to accept a ride fainter. Honouring our knowledge and our values seemed to be themes that we steered into at the end of our conversation. I was left wondering if the pain of these repeated bumpy trips might be speaking to something that we hold dear – could they be aspirations about our hopes for the possibilities of love calling to us, or something else? I'm excited to continue this collaborative conversation together. My sincerest thanks to you for our collective and united trip 'back to the future'.

Yours in taking the wheel towards true joy rides,  
Lauren

The Bravehearts have yet to hold a meeting in which the local knowledge of the DeLorean metaphor has not been referenced. With the introduction of the metaphor, there was a palpable movement from 'the sharing of individual experience into an experience of *communitas*' – no doubt a powerful initiation into 'respecting' emerging 'local knowledge' through the use of folk cultural metaphors in narrative practice (Baretto, Grandesso, Denborough & White, 2010, p. 38).

## A situating of self

One appreciation of narrative practice I hold especially dear is the honesty and bravery with which contemporaries and fellow practitioners speak of their particular paths to hard-won knowledge. A fundamental learning I carry forward into future practice is the importance of situating oneself repeatedly within one's context. I identify as a female, who was born into a family of three female siblings, and who enjoys close relationships with other females predominantly. I situate myself in regard to gender because I am embarrassed to report that initially, upon forming the participatory community, I made the foolish assumption that the group would be composed primarily of those who identify as female simply because the majority of my earliest experiences in loss of love have occurred with females with whom I have intimate friendships.

I am flummoxed to report that I erroneously made this assumption despite my work as a psychiatric nurse who witnessed many men highly influenced by attempts on their own lives following the loss of love. It was a strange space to stand as I am situated within the context of a female who has been both dominated and subjugated by masculine culture, yet embarrassingly I found myself making invalid assumptions about men, thus reproducing the very thinking I hoped to prevent. Despite being highly influenced by embarrassment about these assumptions, I decided to openly discuss my flawed thoughts with the group. This was due to a commitment to transparency coupled with a dedication to accountability. This conversation involved openly speaking to my being situated in women's culture – a culture I would 'never stand wholly outside' (McLean, 1995, p. 161). This confession was in no way apologetic of my womanhood, but was instead acknowledging of the unique knowledges to be shared by the men willing to join our group in co-exploration, as well as by those that might bravely live outside of binary gender labels. This situating of myself allowed me to appreciate the men's unique hard-won knowledges in regard to surviving lost love, which led to the co-production of the DeLorean metaphor, and subsequent enriching group discussions. Together, as a community, we remain committed to exploring and exposing assumptions, and I as a practitioner will forever remain indebted to the repeated situation of self.

## A monumental learning

The group soon decided that they would like to discuss knowledges in 'handling communication with past partners', yet when the conversation convened, community members recurrently circled back around to a different topic: 'finding direction amidst identity gone missing'. It appeared that

community members were more interested in collectively discussing 'forging a new identity', as one group member put it, than of speaking of their lost relationships individually. Together, community members were reconnecting with common knowledge, speaking 'strong stories' into being, and giving voice to discarded dreams (Drahm-Butler, 2015, p. 26). I compiled the community's wise words on 'finding direction amidst identity gone missing' and read their rescued words aloud at the following meeting.

This experience led to an immense learning which taught me not only of the importance of staying open to a community's wisdom but of the significance of honouring their expanding and ever-evolving knowledges. It would have been all too easy to become overly invested in my efforts towards the group's original idea, thus privileging 'professional' assumptions about grieving those still living, while missing the group's exciting newfound direction. The community seemed to be saying, 'When we lose a love that remains living, the reclamation desired is a faith in our own uncommon knowledge'. The community's course adjust was an act of reclaiming their lives by way of swimming back to themselves. Rather than impose outdated ideas, it was my responsibility to unceasingly adapt to the community's evolving wisdom, paying tribute to their beautiful and 'inescapable human agency' (McLeod, 2011, p. 203).

## *An acknowledgement of anxiety*

Many community members spoke of challenges in their lives prior to the loss of love, but that this particularly potent grief ultimately overwhelmed their efforts to hold onto hope. It was my guess that by exposing the uninvited emotions that accompany loss, together we would begin to break down the intense isolation, feelings of loneliness, and sense of 'being different' that group members reported. By attending community meetings, group members were boldly refusing isolation's advances, and together we acknowledged this act. The group agreed that skills in self-care, particularly in 'overcoming anxiety', were undoubtedly summoned to make an initial appearance at a group meeting. Together we named this skill in survival 'a step towards connection'. In an effort to thwart any further attempts grief made at isolating community members, we decided to band together in extending an invitation to anxiety – and any other emotion that felt unbearable – to attend a meeting alongside us.

Together we wrote a letter that new members receive after RSVP'ing to attend a community meeting. This act was an effort in taking care by acknowledging and addressing the anxiety often accompanying new members to their first group.

*Hello Braveheart!*

*We are thrilled to see you will be joining our circle! We like to take a quick moment and let you know a bit about our group so that it may quiet any anxiety that attempts to thwart your plans to find strength in numbers.*

*Many past group members have reported feeling highly influenced by anxiety prior to arrival at their first group. For this reason, we band together to invite anxiety to accompany us to the meeting knowing that together we are stronger than the intentions anxiety has for our lives. The same holds true for any other emotion that might sabotage our strides and threaten to keep us stuck. We simply invite these emotions, one and all, into the room along with us while accepting one another as we are. Inviting anxiety to accompany us is one of our many skills in survival.*

*Should you have any questions prior to our meeting, please don't hesitate to write to us. The above sounded so very serious ... We do promise that laughter tends to populate our groups as well! We look very forward to knowing you.*

*Yours in taking gentle steps toward connection,  
Bravehearts Austin*

In the welcome letter, we deliberately speak of 'the not often spoken about' in hopes of 'loosening up the shame' that many of the group members reported initially feeling (Grieves, 1997, p. 79). We have since received feedback that the letter is effective in assisting new members to invite their anxiety to accompany them in order to attend a first meeting. This simple written acknowledgement concurrently opens space for anxiety, amplifies agency, and paves the way for meaningful contribution.

## *A growing agreement*

To further elaborate on the ethics that informed this practice, it is important to note that, prior to beginning each community meeting, our group unfailingly reads the following paragraph which we have named our 'growing ground rules':

We are a group that operates in the spirit of 'communitas' which is a Latin word that refers to 'an unstructured community in which all people are equal'. Our group also acts from a place of non-judgmental acceptance of others within our community. In this group, it is okay not to be 'okay'. We come to the meeting acknowledging that each member has their own unique hard-won knowledges to share, and that

when these knowledges are combined we co-create collective wisdom. We do not give advice to other group members but instead share our own knowledge by telling stories about our unique life experiences. We gladly accept persons who want to sit quietly without sharing as we believe that their very presence with us is a strong and brave act of resistance to the dictates often made by grief.

The group agreements are described as 'growing' because we have a commitment to continue to add to and edit them collectively, thus drawing on the group's uncommon knowledges while privileging the community's expertise. These 'growing ground rules' were co-authored and are read with an appreciation of the importance of a commitment to transparency in community work. Careful attention is paid to the repeated reading of this growing group agreement by community members with the purpose of not only decentering the community worker as expert but also in an effort to reconnect individuals to faith in their own individual and local knowledges.

## *A re-membering's emergence*

During a community meeting, first time attendee, Ryan, spoke to the community of suffering multiple losses that threatened to overwhelm him. He reported not only the end of his engagement but also of his best friend's successful attempt upon his own life. He described feeling 'stuck, alienated, and unable to connect' and spoke of a recent introduction to 'panic attacks'. He spoke of a workplace that offered little respect and paid a low wage which made the cost of seeking assistance out of reach. He accepted an invitation extended to engage in a narrative conversation outside of the community meeting at no cost. It was at this time that re-membering questions constructed earlier in the year, in what at the time felt like a failed attempt with the group, were put to good use.

During our private meeting, I learned that Ryan's friend Andy had held him up when it felt Ryan was 'shouldering the world'. It was a blow to lose Andy's support. I learned that Andy, a movie buff, supported Ryan's dream of being a museum curator by often teasing, 'I'm gonna get you a Jurassic Park Professor Grant Hat'. Later I learned that Drew, Andy's brother, chose an item of Andy's to give to Ryan following his brother's suicide. It was a worn out baseball cap that Ryan now kept in his car. In a response to Ryan's suffering, I acknowledged his uncommon knowledge by writing a letter that I enclosed inside a 'Jurassic Park Professor Grant hat'.

Ryan,

*Thank you for offering me such a warm introduction to Andy, a best friend who held you up while you were 'Superman' shouldering the world. It only makes sense that you would leave me appreciating Andy much like Andy left Charlie appreciating you. You reported that 'Just by the way he spoke of me, he created a friendship' between you and Charlie: a person you'd never met who lived thousands of miles away!*

*Andy supported your dream of being a museum curator by pronouncing, 'I'm gonna get you a Jurassic Park Professor Grant Hat'. He also encouraged your efforts at the gym. Andy was a good listener. He had a way of putting others first. 'You'd be in a room with him and all he would talk about is you'. He bragged about your 'heart of gold' to all of the girls you dated, openly appreciating the way you liked to do things for people to show them what they mean to you.*

*After experiencing multiple losses including Andy, you spoke of feeling 'stuck', 'alienated', and 'unable to connect'. I find myself wondering if you had any guesses as to what stuckness, alienation, and disconnection intends for your life.*

*I'm wondering if the story of a man that knew he 'needed to' reach out and found the strength to do so despite an initial painful experience of sharing, is going along with 'stuckness'. This same man somehow became 'unstuck' years ago by walking away from the weight that trapped him following the death of his mother. After the loss of Andy, when he feels he can't go on, he repeats to himself the words inscribed on his friend's memorial plaque that got him through the hardest times: 'Never give up'. This hero summoned the courage to speak at his best friend's funeral because 'Justin couldn't do it on his own'. By day he is a modern-day archaeologist, digging and discovering quotes that motivate, and at night he views inspirational videos. He bravely packed up his few remaining belongings after almost everything was taken from him, and he moved to a new city in an act of self-care. I wonder how it is that, despite accumulated losses, you continue to refuse to give up, holding onto a thread of hope, and somehow moving forward. What might your purpose be in doing this? It leaves me wondering if what you intend for your life is something very different than what stuckness, alienation, and disconnection would have for you.*

*It seems that your skills in treating relationships with respect stand in stark contrast to a life of disconnection. What was it that made Nick and Pat 'fight' to get you to Austin? What does it mean that Glenn is right behind you? What sort of purposes might Pat have in saying, 'If you need to go back to Albuquerque, I will drive you myself'? Our conversation reminded me of the importance of treating relationships with reverence, and I want to thank you for that sobering reminder.*

*You are skilled at carrying people's knowledges forward ... from your dad's belief that 'no matter what happens in your life, you can walk away', to Andy's favourite quote. I find myself wondering what it was that Drew recognised in you that made him gift his brother's precious hat to you? You now keep this twenty-something-year-old hat with you wherever you go. Did Drew believe in your ability to carry his brother forward or was it something else? Did those who unfairly laid on your shoulders the heaviness of 'being the only person who could have saved Andy because you were most certainly closest to him' also believe in your ability to carry him forward?*

*I enclose this Professor Grant hat to sit beside Andy's cap in your car. May it serve as a reminder of the importance of 'moving as a unit' and holding Andy near in the days ahead. May it also be a reminder of what Andy wants for your life:*

*'He would want me to follow what I want. As long as you are happy at the end of the day ... If you can get up in the morning with a smile on your face ... You can't ever give up.'*

*You went on to say:*

*'He believed in me and what I could be. He trusted me to make the right choice.'*

*You see Andy everywhere. You reported, 'I'm not really ever alone. I'm not a religious person but I see things'. No doubt this ability would not surprise Andy. And it wasn't the first time you employed this skill of the senses ... years earlier you stood in the parking lot and smelled your mother's perfume. You speak of being propelled forward by the 'dream of becoming the man Andy knew I could be'. Might you bring Andy along for the ride, continuing to move 'as a unit', hats beside one another in your backseat, refusing to let go in a testament to your devotion? Moving forward together, never giving up.*

*Yours with deep respect and admiration,  
Lauren*

Two hats, seen by the world as mundane, were a fervent metaphor for moving forward. Much like White's recognition that Rupert the bear might assist Sophia in re-membering Bill, a simple hat served as a physical reminder that supplemented survival (White, 1997b, pp. 26–38). Only a week after this conversation, Ryan mentioned while attending group meeting that he had completed several job applications as he deserved to work for a manager and company that respected their employees. When I enquired after the meeting, Ryan reported that this change was prompted by Andy making such a 'powerful' appearance at his workplace that he knew Andy

was 'right next to me'. He soon wrote to me the following words in an email, 'With every message and every meeting, I am moving forward'. This left me wondering, if a tangible acknowledgement of a person's uncommon knowledge from an individual can be so potent, what might it mean to honour devalued knowledge amid community?

## *A 50th Birthday repeat*

During a recent meeting, Wyatt shared that his 50th birthday, which followed on the heels of an unwanted separation from his wife, had been a horribly lonely day lacking any acknowledgement of his half century of living. I immediately mused that we might have to re-do Wyatt's birthday, and the group eagerly agreed. Following the meeting, I reached out to Wyatt to see if he was interested in a second chance celebration. After he expressed enthusiasm, in an effort to honour uncommon knowledge, I asked if he was willing to write to me about a meaningful birthday memory. He replied that he remembered his early birthdays in which his mother would ask him to pick a colour and would then theme his birthday around his chosen colour. I replied, 'Pick a colour for the big day!' Wyatt selected green as it was a colour 'never chosen in childhood'.

Group members banded together to produce a colourful 50th birthday re-do: one baking cupcakes, another securing decorations, and all agreeing to don green on the set date. We kept humour close during the discussion by intermittently peppering the conversation with rounds of a silly party game called 'Crappy Birthday'. We used the celebration as an opportunity to 'name the invisible lists we carry in our heads' about what holidays 'should' be (Hutton, 2008, p. 6). We also spoke of the judgements we are tempted into making about ourselves when holidays do not live up to the 'invisible list'. We compared our list of self-condemnations to Jane Hutton's signs that one is 'failing' to measure up to normality and found mirrored feelings in shame, guilt, self-hatred, and inadequacy (2008, p. 5). We deconstructed normality, exposing its ever-changing nature while also exploring the exciting idea that at any time we can rebel against society's dictates and instead obtain a sense of self-worth based on morality rather than normality (2008, p. 5). I posed the following questions to the group:

- Are there things you value now, or that you think are precious, because of your surviving lost love?
- When you think of the life you aspire to these days, what would you call it?
- How might you hold these values and dreams of how life could be near in the holidays ahead?

We boldly named our preferred ways of being by writing them in vibrant colours on our festive party hats. The group began to notice that 'beyond any notion of conformity or normality, each of us stood for certain values' (Denborough, 2014, p. 163).

As the party ended, Wyatt opened to say that the colourful birthday party celebrations had stopped at age seven when his parents divorced as it was too painful for his mother to continue. He spoke of being deeply moved by the colourful resumption forty-three years after the parties had ended. Later the same evening I received the following email:

Thank you for today. It was very special. It is amazing to me to find such kind people. I had lost faith in people thinking there were more jerks than not. Again thank you for such kindness. This group is a true blessing.

When writing of relationships and ethics, Jill Freedman & Gene Combs quote actress Maureen O'Hara as saying:

Far from despair, the idea that each of us recreated reality with each encounter fills me with wondrous hope, empowerment, and community connection. If there is no absolute truth 'out there' to create pristine 'expert systems' that can somehow solve our problems mathematically ... if we accept that when we enter into dialogue we *both* change; if it is true that we *co-create* reality, which in turn creates us – then we are called to a new kind of community. If I can only ever be part of that creation, I must act humbly. (1996, p. 264).

A participatory community's celebration of both Wyatt's existence and his uncommon knowledge of preferred ways of celebrating had assisted in awakening within him a sleeping 'faith in people'. Together we were concurrently reinvigorating ritual, honouring uncommon knowledge, and co-creating community connection.

## An appraisal of ethics

The late actress Maureen O'Hara is also widely quoted as saying, 'In the beginning, it was all black and white'. Raised in a medical model that touted a one-size-fits-all approach to ethics, narrative practitioner, Tileah Drahm-Butler was instrumental in my welcoming of the grey. She assisted me in a re-exploration of ethical practice by encouraging me not to divorce my practice from my personal experiences. As a nurse, I watched co-workers hide thoughtful acts of care that celebrated the uncommon knowledge of persons they were working with, and I too was guilty. Upon learning of the

questions that guided White and Epston's ways of working ethically with persons, I rewrote them so that they might guide my practice within my context (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 268–269). The italicised questions below are entirely my own additions.

1. How does this practice 'see' community members?
2. How does this practice ask you to behave with group members?
3. How does this practice ask community members to behave with you?
4. *How does this practice ask community members to behave with one another?*
5. How does this practice have group members 'treating' and 'seeing' themselves?
6. *How does this practice have community members 'treating' and 'seeing' each other?*
7. How are community members 're-authored' by this practice?
8. Does this practice invite group members to see themselves as the experts on themselves?
9. Does this practice give group members a sense of community and collaboration?
10. Does this practice challenge normative discourses?
11. Does this practice require me to enter into the world of expert knowledge possessed by the community?
12. Does this practice's idea of 'professionalism' allow for genuinity and transparency with the community?

Guided by my embellished version of White and Epston's ethical ways of working, I have happily waived goodbye to the top-down rules of my yesteryear and am freed to focus largely on the community and the actual effects of practice in their lives.

## A summation

It is important to note that the developments and new directions described, such as 'forward movement', have been identified as preferred by the community group. As devalued and subjugated uncommon knowledges were richly described, group members were experiencing 'a sense of once again being at home with themselves' after a time of this 'sense of being knowledged and skilled in matters of living' had gone missing (White, 1997b, p. 39). In giving preference to community members' individual and local knowledges and



by organising creative and collective acknowledgements of uncommon knowledge, persons were 'stepping into a more robust, joined, and abled sense of themselves' (White, 2003, p. 39). Our co-exploration of losing a living love led to the understanding that the reintroduction most desired within our community was a reclamation of faith in uncommon knowledge. An initial hypothesis that Western society lacked practices to adequately honour loss of love gave way to the idea that we do not have sufficient ways of honouring the wisdom of the left behind. Through a movie metaphor, an archaeologist hat, and a green birthday bash, 'spaces of hope' were found in unexpected and ordinary places (Hedtke, 2014, pp. 1–2).

Barreto spoke a sentence that has haunted me since reading it:

'While professionals are trained to respond to disease and to pathology, to respond to suffering is a task beyond professionals. To respond to suffering and prevent suffering involves responding to the soul' (Barreto, Grandesso, Denborough, & White, 2010, p. 35).

To respond to suffering involves an acknowledgement of a person or community's uncommon knowledge. Privileging devalued and subjugated wisdom is an all-too-uncommon practice of 'professionals'. Co-research suggests that an individual's reclamation of faith in uncommon knowledge might be made all the more possible when devalued knowledge is privileged within a participatory community. As one Braveheart community member wrote following a meeting:

'We all had different streams drop us in the same body of water. We may want different things for the future, but we gotta learn different ways of swimming from each other in order to get there. Thanks everyone who showed and shared. We keep each other from drowning.'

When this acknowledging of uncommon knowledge is practiced within a participatory community, together we not only stay afloat, but begin to freestyle.

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