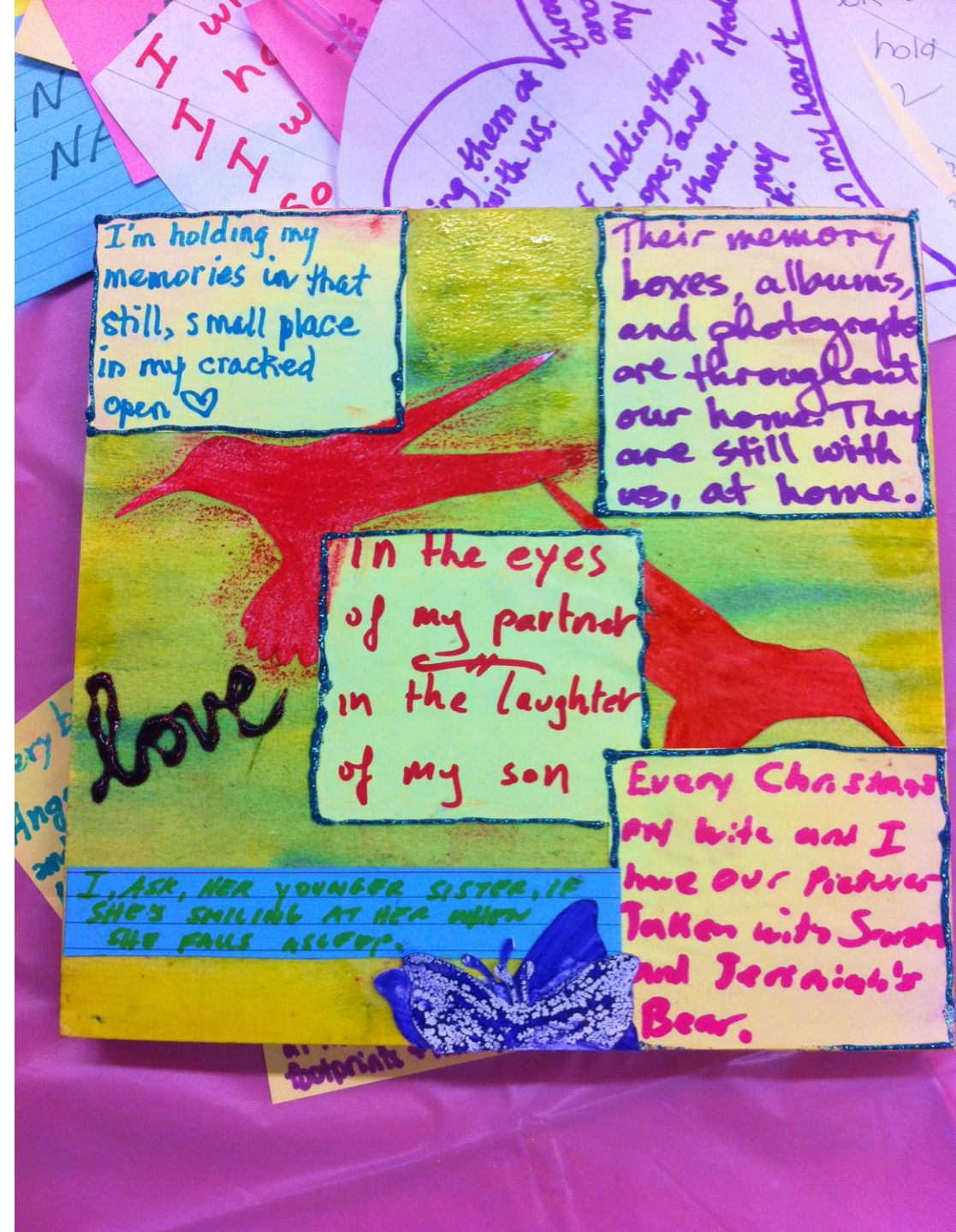


Continuing bonds: Records work as grief work

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Grief work

Activities bereaved parents perform to help them

- process their experience of grief, to understand it, to try to integrate it and learn to live with it, and
- to remember their children: to find some way to connect with and *parent* their children.

This type of grief work can take many forms, including: visiting a cemetery; writing in a journal or on a blog; putting together a scrapbook; going through clothing and baby things; crafting; organizing and/or participating in a memorial walk or charity; writing poetry or a memoir; etc.

Continuing bonds

“Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object.” (Freud, 1917)

“The resolution of grief involves a continuing bond that the survivor maintains with the deceased...a healthy, enduring bond” (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1996)

Grief work / Records Work

- What is the role of records and recordkeeping in grief work?
- How does recordkeeping – making, using, organizing, preserving records – provide a means of continuing bonds?
- How does recordkeeping function as a means of continuing the social presence of the deceased?
- Where and how do we see examples of records working in these ways?

Records

- Medical records
- Photographs
- Cards
- Letters
- Blogs
- Memorial notices
- Clothing
- Blankets
- Toys
- Jewelry
- Tattoos
- Ashes
- Trees
- Rituals



Records as proof of life and love

“I have a compulsion to save anything that proves C. really did exist, so I find my records validating. In all other areas of my life, I like to purge things regularly. I’m constantly getting rid of things, whether to the trash, recycling, or Goodwill...But with anything involving C., I consider it sacred, like an artifact.” - C.

“I have so little proof that he was here...” - A.

Tattoos



"Oh, my tattoos are my record. Because that's exactly what they are. I wanted to have a record that he was here. This kind of evidence. And it's a reason to talk about him. And for people to ask about him as well."

"I wanted something on me for J. and of J."

- G.

Records of the body

“I keep anything related to her physical body.” -C.

“There was this little hat which he had been wearing all week, which smelled like...It just got thrown away without us noticing. I wish, that’s one thing I wish we had still kept.” -G.



Records of the body

“I also wear this necklace, which has some of J’s, his finger and thumbprint. A jeweler came and made these little silver tear drop things. And I wear them on this necklace that I got for my wedding. And they just sit there together and it sort of jingles and jangles. I always find myself fiddling with it. They’re really tactile. And I probably shouldn’t touch them too much because they can wear away. But I can’t help it.” – G.

Recordkeeping as a way to parent

“I can't take care of him, but this is something that I can do all the time. I can be always taking photos.”

- A. on taking photographs of things that remind her of her son T.

“Record keeping offline (the keeping of paperwork, basically) felt like a kind of parenting—like saving report cards or birthday invitations, except in the only way I could do it for a child who would never have those things.”

- B.

Aspiration, living archives, stories

“When your baby dies as a baby, they don’t have a lot of material things, and you don’t have a lot of actual memories. And so you grasp on to anything that is associated with that baby.” – C.

“I think there's something about how...they’re [the records]...[a] sign of what we were hoping for. What we were dreaming for our baby. And part of it is just gone because P. isn't here. But then part of it just is... these dreams are still, they're somewhat, somehow, living in those things.” - T.

Aspiration, imagination, stories

“And I started a sketchbook, so I started drawing...I do have this idea in my head that I’m...that I’d like to draw some scenes that either happened in the hospital, or during my pregnancy. And also scenes that I wish had happened, like holding him, and all that kind of thing.” –A.

Aspiration, living archives, stories

“So what I’ve kept, what has come to have meaning, is mostly what meaning we’ve put in it afterwards. And what meaning we had, we were hoping to give to P. What we wanted to see him live. So it’s very...I care a lot about the things, but at the same time what’s very central to that is what’s not things. What we were hoping for, what we were imagining for the future, what we were thinking of teaching him. Like the connection to going out in nature. That was something we were hoping for. Something in which we projected ourselves and him. So then we’ve kept stuff that relates to this idea, and this...hope we had to travel, to explore. So it’s, yeah, that’s what I would hope that would stay...what we had hoped for him. What isn’t going to happen.” –T.

Continuing bonds, continuing social existence and recordkeeping

“It feels like...a life’s work, almost. Like it’s a...I read this book [...] This concept that no one’s really fully dead until everyone that remembers that person is also dead. And I thought that’s really, that’s quite nice, and so I want more people to know about J. And that keeps him alive, sort of semi-alive for longer, maybe.” –G.

The “sacred” quality of records & the responsibility of recordkeeping

“I would want them to know what it was and what it meant and to treat it with this sort of reverence almost. Whatever that means. I mean, up to, including, disposing of thoughtfully. If it's something that you don't want to keep, but if you're going to not keep it, then do it in a way that honours the people involved.”

- G.

“I never had any of her photographs printed – in part because I hate to imagine anyone looking at her who does not look at her with love.”

- B.

What does it mean to think of recordkeeping as an act of love?



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- For more see: Douglas, Alisauskas and Mordell. “Treat them with the reverence of archivists”: Records Work, Grief Work and Relationship Work in the Archives. *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019). Out very soon!