



It takes a village to raise a child,
and a world to grieve one.

A zine about grieving together after
unspeakable loss.

A project responding collectively to Carla's grief

Organized by Frankie Hanman Siegersma and Tiffany Sostar

With responses from Auggie, Annie, Sonn, Linden B, J, and Stasha

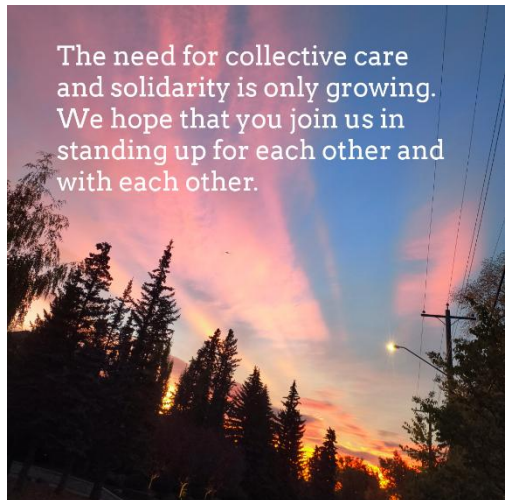
Welcome

The goal of this zine is to invite readers to think about how collective responses to grief can happen, and what these responses can make possible for the grieving person and for the people offering a response. There are many ways to respond collectively to grief, and this project maps out one possibility.

There will be a companion document to this zine, a paper written with mental health and community workers in mind, to support them in mobilising collective narrative responses to grief. But this zine is written for community members, because we believe that you do not need to have special skills or knowledge in order to be part of collective responses to grief and loss.

Right now is a time of escalating hostility and threat for queer, trans, neurodivergent, and disabled people. People like some of us in this project. And it is a time of rising hostility for refugees and immigrants, racialized people, poor, unhoused, and other people who are targeted by injustice and oppression that some of us in this project have been spared.

The need for collective care and solidarity, for mobilisation in response to contexts of injustice, for taking a stand together against injustice, is only growing. We hope that you feel invited to join us in standing up for each other and with each other.



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Who we are

Carla is a grieving parent in Australia who had been having narrative conversations with Frankie. Their courage and generosity in sharing their words made this project possible.

Frankie is a narrative practitioner in Australia who met Tiffany through the Dulwich Centre. Frankie has been involved in multiple collective and community responses to hardship, particularly in queer and trans community spaces.

Tiffany is a narrative practitioner in Canada who has a particular interest in collective narrative practice.

Annie, Auggie, Linden B, J, Sonn and Stasha are all Tiffany's friends. They have shared community space and collaborated on other projects, including a range of public art projects (such as the 100 Love Letters and Tender Year projects with Stasha), collective narrative projects, and writing projects.

Although some of us knew each other before this project started, others met during the collaboration.

All photos in this zine were taken by people in the project, and Tiffany formatted the content.

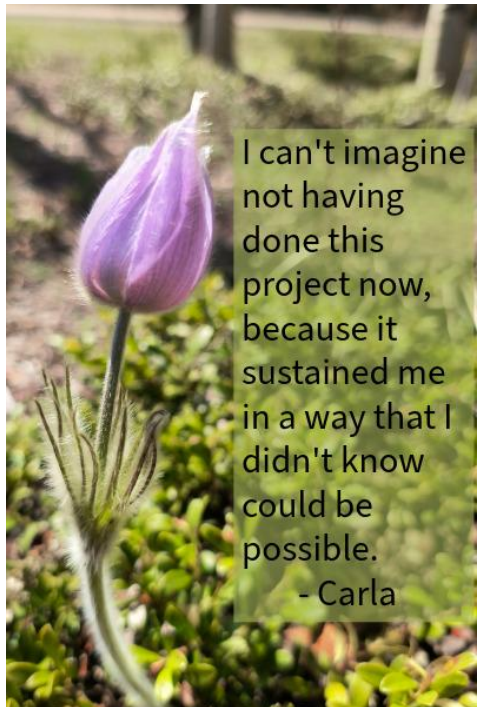
What we did together

In 2023, Frankie contacted Tiffany about the possibility of collaborating on a response to Carla's grief after their trans child ended her life.

Carla invited Frankie to share and invite responses to the speech she wrote for Rue's memorial. Tiffany shared this with a small group of trusted friends. They recorded a conversation with Stasha and the video was sent to Carla via Frankie. Annie, Auggie, Linden B, Sonn, and J joined Tiffany in a group zoom call to read the speech together and write a collective letter, which was sent to Carla via Frankie. Auggie wrote a poem for Carla. Carla responded to the letter with a letter, to the video with a video, and also wrote a poem with Frankie in response to the responses.

Carla, Auggie, Frankie and Tiffany had some conversations in the years following, staying in touch and reflecting on the work together. This zine includes abbreviated versions of each of these, along with reflections from the people involved.

Finally, Frankie, Carla, Tiffany, Sonn, Stasha, and J had a reflection conversation in 2026.



Steps for a collective witnessing of grief

- 1 - Create something that can be witnessed and responded to.
- 2 - Consider what kinds of responses will be most sustaining.
- 3 - Invite witnesses.
- 4 - Share and collect responses.
- 5 - Respond to the responses.



One of our hopes for documenting this collective witnessing of grief is to invite readers, both the grieving and those supporting them, to also engage in a collective witnessing. This brief outline offers some ideas for how to start.

These are not the only way to invite a collective witnessing, but these are the steps that were taken in this project.

Create something that can be witnessed and responded to.

This could be:

- ❖ a live conversation that witnesses are invited to observe and respond to
- ❖ a video of a conversation
- ❖ an audio note
- ❖ a written document like a speech or letter

This sharing can be co-created with a therapist or practitioner, or with a friend or other caring companion. In this project, Carla's memorial speech was shared.

Whatever it is that is shared for witnesses to respond to, it's important that this is done with care. Think about how the conversation, document, or other sharing might preserve the dignity of both the grieving person and the person who is no longer living, and how it might honour what is important to both.

*"I think maybe one of the challenges somebody might have in thinking about doing this [is that] **it can be scary to share those things.** It's scary and it's vulnerable, but the way I think of it, I'll be feeling this way no matter what, and so to hear some feedback can only help. And it is humbling to think that people see this task of connecting and responding to what I've shared... **It's a relief to know that people are able to, and even though it's so uncomfortable, are willing to see this as an opportunity, to see me as generous for sharing the worst story I could possibly share from my life.** It's profoundly empowering and humbling and keeps my fire burning."* Carla

Consider what kinds of responses will be most sustaining.

Narrative therapy has a practice called 'outsider witnessing' with four realms of response, and these can be a useful place to start. But you might also consider: What is it about the person who is grieving, the relationship, or the person who is no longer living that the grieving person most wants to have acknowledged?

In this project, we asked outsider witnessing questions (adapted from Michael White's *Maps of Narrative Practice*, 2007):

Identifying resonant expression

Which specific words or expressions caught your attention or captured your imagination? Which ones struck a chord for you?

Describing resonant images

What images did these specific words or expressions evoke? What did these words or expressions suggest to you about this person's purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams and commitments?

Personal resonance

What is it about your own life or experiences that accounts for why these words or expressions caught your attention or struck a chord for you?

Acknowledging transport

How have you been moved on account of being invited to read this piece of writing? Where has this experience taken you to, that you would not otherwise have arrived at, if you hadn't been invited to read this speech? In what way have you become other than who you were, or have you been able to imagine the future in a way that you couldn't previously, on account of witnessing these expressions, and on account of responding to these words in the way that you have?

And we also asked questions that were particularly important to Carla. These were:

- ❖ I really want feedback on the things which inspire hope, positivity and inspiration to keep going from any readers.
- ❖ What are the images that sustain hope?
- ❖ What are the images that suggest hopelessness?

Invite witnesses.

These witnesses could be members of the community who are known to the person who is grieving, or they could be people connected in other ways. Inviting witnesses is an important part of this process.

Some things to consider:

- ❖ Who might resonate in some way with what is being shared? This resonance may come from some shared aspect of experience, some shared values or hopes, or from some insider knowledge of the person who is grieving, the relationship, or the person who is no longer living.
- ❖ Who has ways of speaking or responding that might be particularly welcome or sustaining? This might mean considering people who are far enough from the grief that the process won't be too difficult for them (though sometimes having someone close to the experience can be meaningful!).

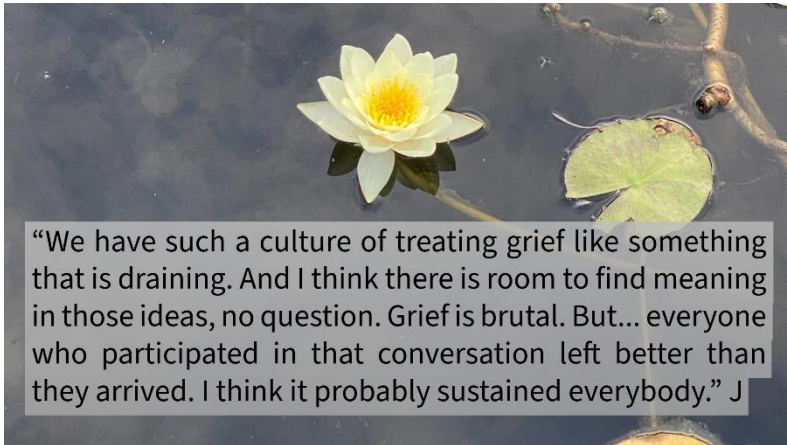
In our project, the people responding were in Tiffany's community and none of them knew Carla. Frankie knew Tiffany through narrative therapy contexts. Tiffany chose to invite people they were close to, who they knew to have rich and intentional ways of thinking about grief, activism, and hope.

It is helpful to let people know the timeline, what kind of support or structure is available (such as facilitating a group conversation or outsider witnessing interview for people who don't want to respond individually) and also what kinds of responses are welcome. Giving the invited witnesses some structure, including specific questions to respond to, can make it more possible for them to participate.

Collect responses.

Responses can be written, audio notes, videos, or can happen in a live conversation.

In our project, we sent one video of a one-on-one outsider witnessing interview, and a collective letter that was written after a group conversation. Auggie also sent a poem. Each of these were shared with Carla.



Respond to the responses.

This step can be significant for the person who is grieving and also for the people who have witnessed and responded to their grief.

Reaching out in grief

This is an abbreviated version of the speech that Carla wrote and shared at Rue's memorial.

Hello, **I am the proud mother of two trans children** and my pronouns are she/her, though I have never felt I fit into society's gender norms and consider myself gender-queer. Perhaps they/them will suit me one day. I am glad to have this understanding of myself and this option.

I'd like to invite you to take account of your surroundings right now, look around at each other and if possible, **make some kind of connection with someone important to you**. If you are a physical person, hug someone near and dear to you. However, I am neurodivergent and understand that for some of you, maybe just making brief eye contact, bumping shoulders or even just raising a finger towards each other may be more your style. It's all valid. Whatever helps you feel more grounded and in this space together is the right thing to do.

When my child who has now died was very upset and unable to talk about things, we had a deal, that we would give each other a 30 second silent hug. If we talked, and it was usually me who would, we had to start counting over. **What I wouldn't give for just 30 seconds more right now**. I have had many other hugs in the past month. From people shaking with grief and forlorn looks of disbelief on their faces. Many have said, there are no words. There just are no words for this pain. No words which could possibly describe this feeling or take away this pain. And yet here I am, tasked with putting words to this tragic occasion. So, I will do my best.

We are all somebody's child. Part of a biological &/or logical family. Let's invoke our ancestors/trancestors to hold and help us now in this painful moment. **Knowing you are doing this with me will help me get through this.**

It is a parent's worst nightmare to outlive their child. Here I am. Living that now. I am still somehow

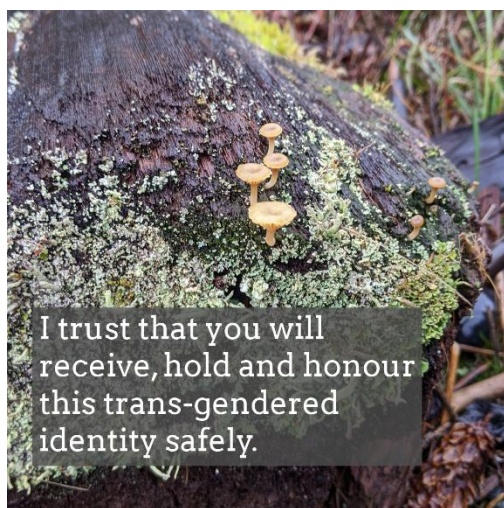
fairly upright, mostly cogent and eating (a bit), sleeping (with pharma assistance) and somehow marking day after day, nearly a month now, since I have lost my eldest child at the tender age of 18, nearly 19 as their birthday is next month. **I know that I am only able to be doing all of these things because of the community I have cultivated and am now really calling upon.** I am able to keep going forward in this lonely life, because of all of you here, mourning with me now here at this memorial and online.

It has been said that **it takes a village to raise a child and to grieve one.** This is very real. This is why community, and the actions of individuals in it, matters.

I became pregnant with my child (my first!) whilst living in overseas for 2 years. It was timed in such a way that my child was born in this wonderful new country and automatically became a citizen there. I was the healthiest and strongest I had been in my



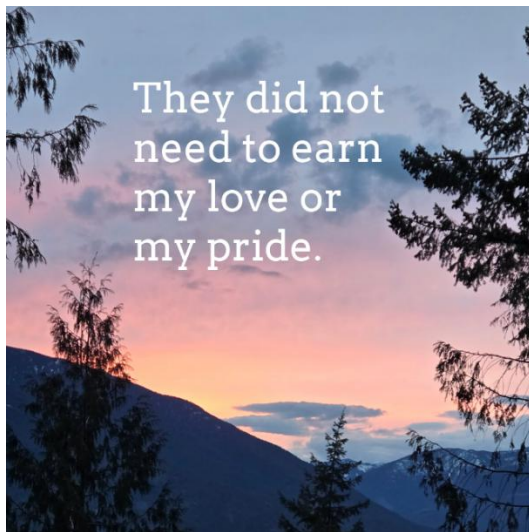
adult life and had access to top-notch midwifery and pre-natal care. I even received maternity leave after their birth. **I left my last monthly maternity leave payment in a bank account with my child's name on it** ... thinking that one day they would travel there on their own and be able to collect some extra cash for their independent travels. They had triple citizenship with this new country added to my birthplace and country of residence ... but I always used to say they would probably marry the girl (or boy, or NB) next door ...



My child was a Trans Woman who felt she could not come out to her community... My child used she/her pronouns with new friends, but many of their longer-term friends had no idea, even if you saw them regularly. I have reflected long and hard about how I may be posthumously outing my

child to the community now, but **I trust that you will receive, hold and honour this trans-gendered identity safely.** It was so hard for them to come out to you all until they felt they were 'passing' as female. Their own standards were higher than those of us around them ... I have mostly used they/them for my child because they felt they did not 'deserve' she/her yet. Although I tried to help them know that their pronouns were completely up to them, I said I would wait until they told me to use she/her. I am trying to shift towards she/her now. I go back and forth, but not to he/him. I ask you to do the same. ...

I always told my child as they were struggling with their mental health that they never had to DO anything to keep my love and support. They just had to BE themselves, or spend their time working on understanding their identity. **They did not need to earn my love or my pride.** It was and always will be there. ... I accept that my sincere expression of love and future grief was not enough to keep them from choosing this path for themselves. I mean, I have to accept it, even though I do not want to, because that is the only way I will heal and move forward.

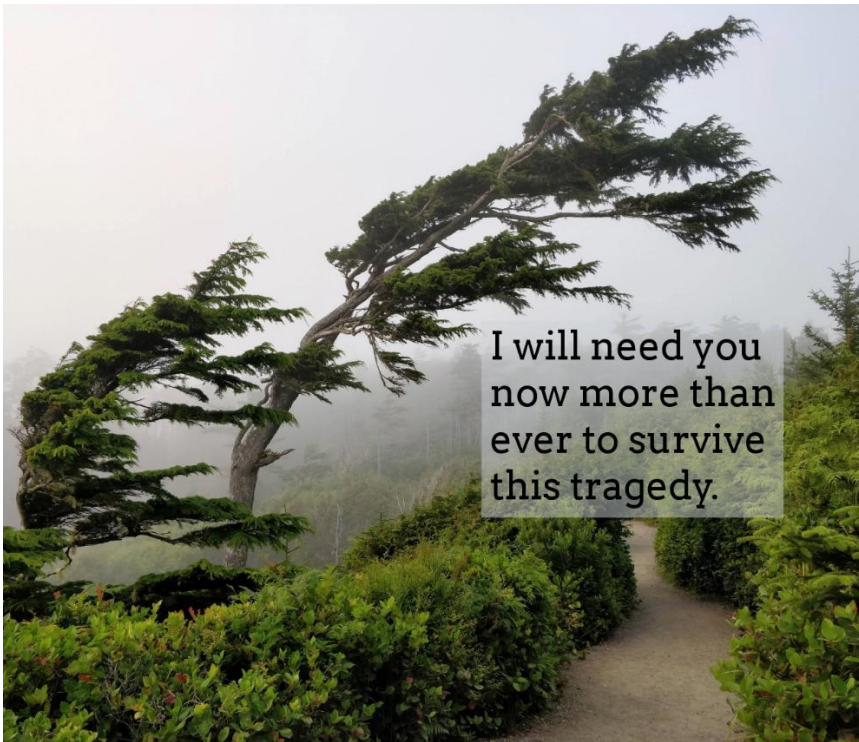


It is such a shock to have my child gone from my life, we spent a lot of time together, especially over the past year. It will take a lot of time for me to really accommodate this loss. I have heard the same from many of you. I hope that you will all stay in touch with me and check in, especially all of their friends who are now young adults. Please think of me as Auntie (though you don't have to call me that!). You are all now part of my logical family. **I will need you now more than ever to survive this tragedy.**

So are you still holding each other? Good, do me a favour, as we go forward from today, **let's all think about how we can all hold everyone in our midst, especially the most vulnerable.** The risk of depression, isolation and bullying is real. The risks really are higher for people with Autism, ADHD and who identify as transgender. This isn't just something people make-up to get special treatment.

Our neurodiverse and transgender communities all too easily fall through the gaps in a system that will not budge for individual needs. ...

I will continue to advocate and work for change in our community in ways that help adapt the systems and institutions that let my child, our family and our community down. It has been and will continue to be my life's work. **Please join me in this, my community.**



I will need you
now more than
ever to survive
this tragedy.

Solidarity across continents and contexts

Dear...

I'm sharing with you now the speech C wrote for her child at their memorial service. Every time I re-read it, tears visit me... tears of sorrow, tears of wanting change, tears of amazement at Carla inviting us to be part of this with her and her family. It feels very important that Carla's words can travel across to you and your beloveds/kin/community.

This was delivered to her community that came together to mourn and hold her kid's legacy close. In asking C specifically what she wanted people to respond to, she said this:

I really want feedback on the things which inspire hope, positivity and inspiration to keep going from any readers. I'm interested to hear from people, what are the images that sustain hope? What are the images that suggest hopelessness?

Please let me know if there is any other information you need to respond. We are welcoming various kinds of responses... if writing doesn't feel like it fits, another creative response would be appreciated :)

With care and solidarity,

Frankie

Dear friends,

I am sending this to some of my favourite people, because you are all people that I trust and love, and you all have really rich and intentional ways of thinking about grief, activism, hope, and how we can continue to be in the world when the world can be incredibly hard and unkind.

One of my colleagues in Australia has invited me to respond to a community member that they are working with. I'm extending that invitation here (with permission). There is no expectation that you will want to or have capacity to participate. There is no specific timeline on this. The response does not have to be in writing, so voice memos or videos or some other response is equally welcome.

I know that some of you are going through particularly hard times right now for a variety of reasons, so there is no pressure or expectation attached to this. You are the people that I gather around my heart when I'm doing tender work, so I wanted to invite you into this with me, too. And even if you can't join in this, I am thankful for you being in my life.

This response is for the parent of a young trans person who has died. This parent is looking for responses to the speech she wrote for her child's memorial.

There are many ways we could do this - we could each respond on our own, in writing or in a video message or in art or whatever way best fits, or we could have a group conversation and send a collective response, or a combination of both.

Much love,

Tiffany

I would love to make a video if we can meet online? How heartbreaking.

Hi friend, I'd be interested in supporting this <3

Hello my friend, can you please send me the invite, because then if can make it to join, I will. I would like to.

I would love to be involved in this. If I can participate in a collective discussion, I'd love to, and if the timing doesn't work I'll plan to send an individual response as an alternate way of engaging. Just let me know the plan.



A video response from Stasha

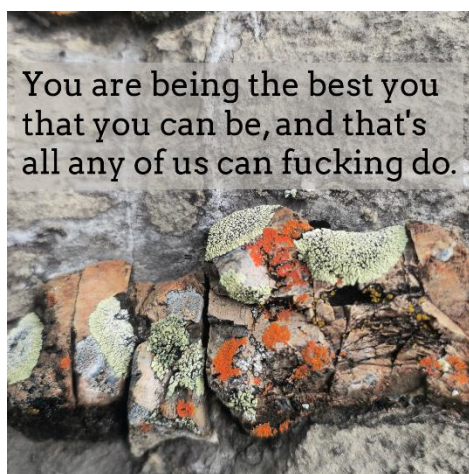
This is an edited transcript of the video response.

Tiffany: The reason I wanted to invite you to be part of this is because you are one of the people that I always have with me in my heart, particularly for how fierce your love is for people who are suffering.

Stasha: I try to accept these invites because **I think it is a sacred thing that we can do for each other**. Hope is a verb, right. Just asking other human beings to witness your pain is one of the things that we need, you know? It's important.

Tiffany: What were your first thoughts when you read that speech?

Stasha: I thought about that child's life before their death. And what stood out for me, one part that made me smile, was about how 'you don't have to do anything to get my love and support'. Just, **you exist and you deserve my love and support**. It showed the power of acceptance and love.



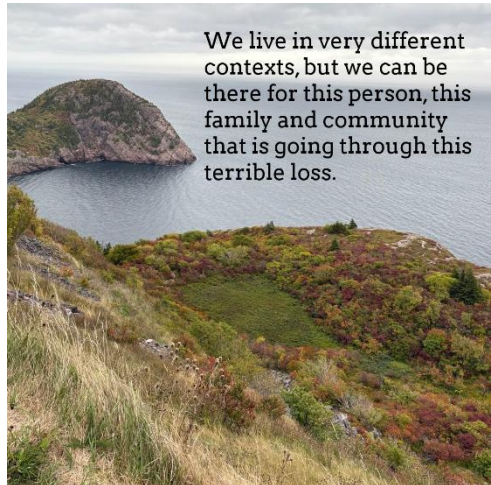
And it made me think about, who does that parent get that from? Because usually when a parent has that intentionality, it means that they know the vital importance of that. **You are being the best you that you can be, and that's all any of us can fucking do**. So that stood out to me. That's very

wise and I think that's a real strength, like that's a strong light that's there if the parent can also apply that to themselves about surviving this loss.

Tiffany: Were there particular images that stood out to you from the speech?

Stasha: I went and looked up the speech from the mother of Heather Heyer, who was killed by a Nazi at a protest. I watched it again because I remembered that it was shocking how much hope was in that speech after her child had just died in that terrible way. She kind of frames this moment as basically **let this radicalize you towards caring instead of apathy.**

I think that relationships are all we have. And I see that in both of these mothers, that they understand that we are connected, we are all connected, and we live in very different contexts, but we can empathize, we can be there for this person, this family and community that is going through this terrible loss. **That's way more powerful than oppressive kinds of power, you know?**



Someone on another continent can reflect back to you the hope that they see you reflecting out into the world. Making that speech is hope. You still being alive is hope. Often the people asking for hope are the hope, right? And to me, **hope is not comfortable and it's totally messy because you are hanging your neck out there, you've got your heart flapping in the wind, and**

that's real life, you know, that's being a human. When our hearts are out there flapping around are the most sacred, important and fucking terrible times. So what stands out for me is the humanness of that. And it's not that it's the same as other things, but it's that we are connected and that is very hopeful.

When the parent's talking about, you know, here's how I'm trying to eat, here's how I'm trying to sleep... **you're doing it**, you're doing it. It doesn't feel like hope, but you are planning, you're putting one foot in front of the other, and sometimes you just like lay on the floor or stop with the terribleness of it all, but then you're trying to eat and you're trying to sleep.



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Even the hope of knowing you're not alone, like it hadn't even been that long since this enormous loss of life, [knowing] that you can ask. You don't even know what better will look like, but you're going, you're trying to sleep, you're trying to get there. Like, no, I

deserve better than this. And my kid deserved better than this. And we can make the world better than this. There's nothing more hopeful than believing that and having that belief reflected in your actions.

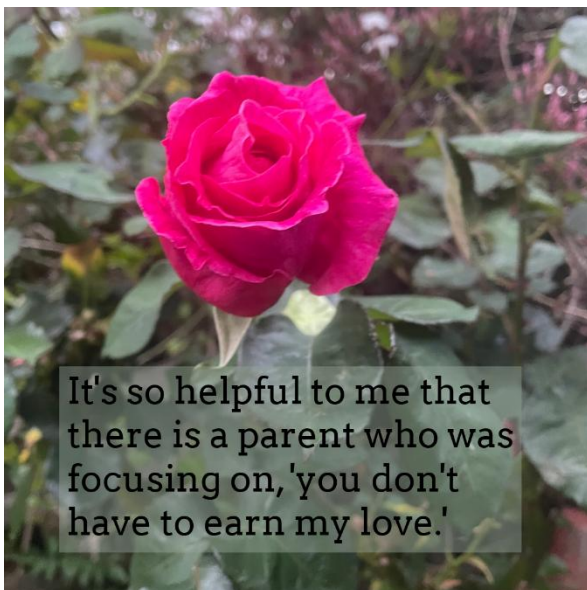
I find only the most hopeful people ask what is hope? And how do I get it? The people who are just like radiating hope, being like, where is it? Where is it?

Tiffany: Yeah. For me, part of what stood out when I read the speech is the hard, messy part of doing something and reaching for something. I think the phrase the parent says is, I have to accept it even though I do not want to, because that is the only way I will heal and move forward. To me, that's how we keep going even though violence against trans people is rising, is not wanting to accept it and knowing that we have to move forward anyway because **we are bringing all of the people we have lost with us and we're holding everyone who's in front of us.**

Stasha: It's so awful. All of our children are at risk. We are at risk. It is dehumanizing. It's fucking awful.

Tiffany: Do you think, has anything changed for you after reading this speech?

Stasha: Yeah. **It's so helpful to me that there is a parent who was focusing on, you don't have to earn my love.** Just knowing that they exist, that a teenager and a parent had that conversation, like the 30-second hugs is adorable. I



would have to start over all the time because that's how I deal with stuff, like talking, talking. It made me think about like, that's so hopeful too. We just try to do harm reduction. We just try.

There aren't words for all this stuff. **There are not words.** I couldn't write it down, my response. 'Cause I didn't want it to be fucking academic, to be like, dead, because I've had some things beaten outta my writing and I don't want to respond in a clinical, cold way to this ask.

It did make me think of all the parents of trans people in different times and different places.

The first time that I got to wish my friend who had transitioned happy birthday with their name, like their real name, it was so impactful, just the difference that makes. They had not been greeted and welcomed with that name yet. And that's wonderful. And there were a bunch of moments in the child's life where she did get to be her glorious self. Like maybe for a second, maybe misinterpreted, but that's cumulative too, right? **It's like the sandpaper and thousand paper cuts of oppression is cumulative, but so are those little flashes.**

And I think **these struggles are intergenerational.** We can't accomplish this in a generation.

And it made me a little bit sad and a little bit hopeful how the parent possibly might find a fit with they/them pronouns. **It gives me a surge of love when parents are discovering themselves led by their kids discovering themselves.**



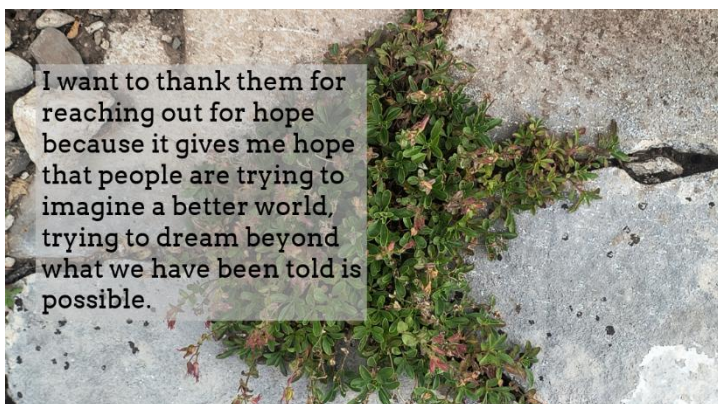
That is wonderful. A magical, sacred process of getting to know yourself, intergenerationally, in a circle. That's fucking powerful. I keep my eyeballs out for circles. And it shows how it goes across space and time. It's not just about how bullshit your society is

when you're born. You know, it's like we have bigger strengths than that. Ancestors, you know?

It seems like they have a lot of wisdom about grief and about themselves and about living their values, what's important to them. These are huge strengths. Grief doesn't go away, but you do have more space to live. I think they already know that, but sometimes I need reminders about things that I deeply have learned over and over again.

I wanted to thank them for reaching out for hope because it gives me hope that people are trying to imagine a better world, trying to dream beyond what we have been told is possible. And that includes what is possible after losing a child.

I also liked the networking of how it went around the world, through these relationships, through love. The counselor crying, reading that speech again, and then passing it to the other counselors who are hearing this. And then you and I, the power of narrative and reshaping community and bringing us together. It's like **this learning exists in our relationship and no one can take that away.** It gave me a meaningful way to do more of this work about making the world more livable for more people. So, it is a real gift, that ask of just spending time reflecting on where is the hope.



A collective response

This is an abbreviated version of the collective letter that was sent to Carla. We met on zoom and read the speech together – each person taking a turn reading a paragraph – and then we responded together to the outsider witnessing questions.

Dear Carla,

First, thank you for inviting us to respond to your profoundly moving speech, and to be with you in your grief and fierce love for R. It is an honour to be part of your 'logical family', and we want you to know that you are part of our family now, too. We are in this village with you, grieving together.

This letter is the result of our conversation on zoom. During this conversation, we read your speech out loud, taking turns reading each paragraph. We all cried as we read it. Your words were heard in Calgary and Balzak on Blackfoot Confederacy land, and Saint-Hippolyte on Anishinabewaki and Algonquin land, and New South Wales on Awabakal land.

We wanted to respond together because there can sometimes be something good about being in community when responding to something as precious and important as what you have offered. We hope that in this document, you have a sense of the community that gathered in honour of you and your child and your love for your child. This document is mostly directly from the transcript, arranged in themes.

their grief is heard, their words are heard, their heart is seen in the parts of life that make it hard to get up in the morning

Annie: One of the things that I really liked that we all read the letter, is in a way Carla can now know that their letter was heard. That's a thing that a lot of people don't necessarily feel like their grief is heard, their words are heard, their heart is seen in the parts of life that make it hard to get up in the morning. So I like that we read it and I like that grief has been made present.



Loving your child into a future that is so far beyond the current realm

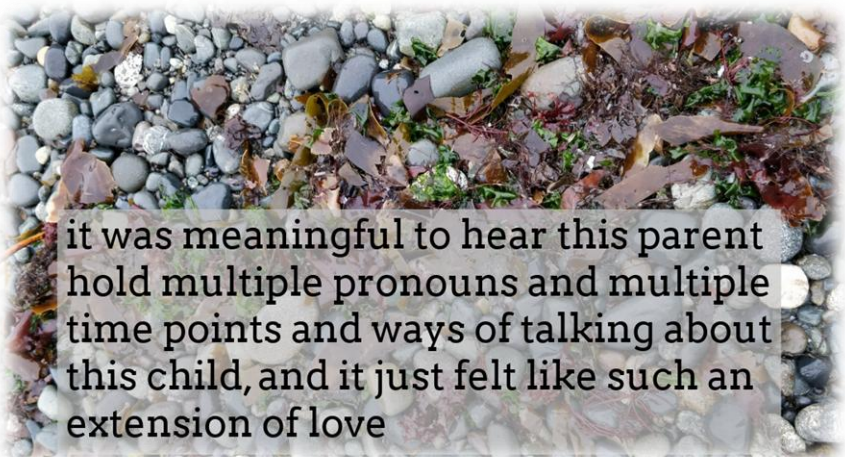
Annie: One of the things that struck me, is the story about leaving their last pay cheque in a bank account for their child to return to. I was like, [amazing] parent move! That is loving your child into a future that is so far beyond the current realm.

Such an act of ongoing parenting.

J: I appreciate the complexity that this parent is holding in the choice to bring she/her pronouns into this conversation, and to also use they/them pronouns. Like, there's so much nuance there, but it just seemed like such an act of ongoing parenting, to insist on claiming space for 'she' for this child, who was moving towards that at their pace, and at her own pace.

I know as a therapist, and just as a person who's not cis, I worry and think a lot about like, what happens to trans stories and identities and non-binary identities when people die and their families don't see and hold them that way. And I think a lot about funerals and just like, misgendering and erasure as something that happens, like an indignity after death. And so it was meaningful to hear this parent hold multiple pronouns and multiple time points and ways of talking about this child, and it just felt like such an extension of that love.

Auggie: What a testament of like, this is what my kid is, this is who my kid was, and this is who I will stand by my child, in spite of what, you know, the going norm is or what the world says I'm supposed to say.

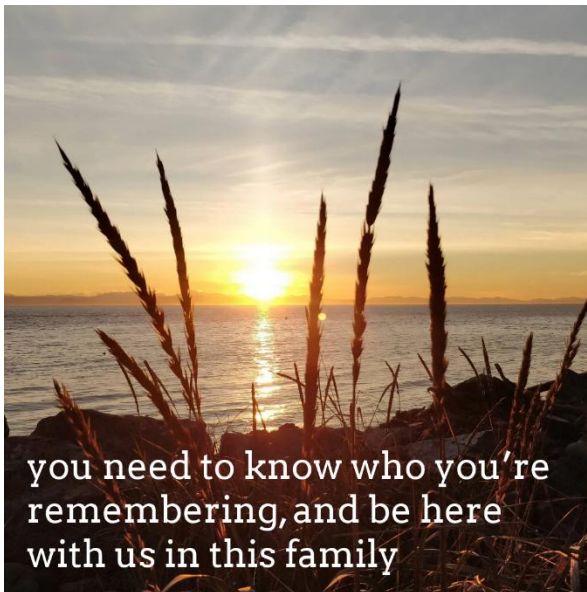
A photograph of a rocky beach with seaweed and a semi-transparent text box. The background shows a close-up of grey and blue stones on a beach, with some brown and green seaweed scattered among them. A semi-transparent rectangular box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing text in a black, typewriter-style font.

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You need to know who you're remembering, and be here with us in this family

Annie: Who is the funeral for? If we're here to remember this person, who are you remembering? Because if you insist on remembering them as they chose not to be, then you can't really claim to be remembering them. And I think taking that stand, making that hard line of like, I realise I'm outing them potentially to a bunch of people, but you need to know who you're remembering, and be here with us in this family.

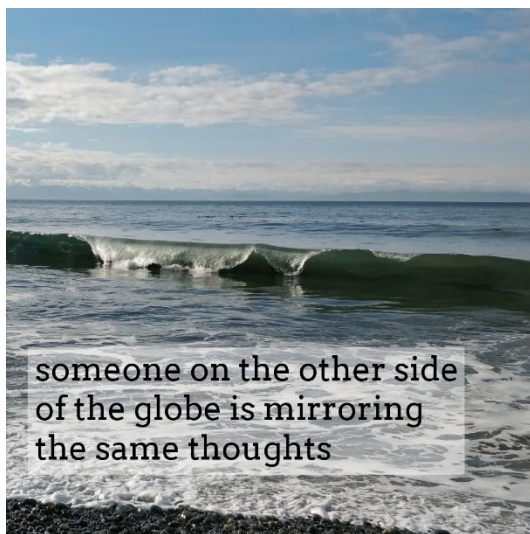
Auggie: But the firmness and also saying, no 'he/him'. Like, it was part of that full message. There are two identities you can use, this is the one that I know they wanted to go for, but this is the one you may not touch. Like, you are not permitted to use that.



you need to know who you're
remembering, and be here
with us in this family

someone on the other side of the globe is mirroring the same thoughts

Auggie: Well, for me, similar to when I first read it, given, you know, that it was under a year ago, a very similar experience. My sibling died by suicide. So many of those words hit true in my heart. I had to actually read it in stages, because it was too hard for me to read, because it is one of those things that you know, if you think about it, someone on the other side of the globe, and this isn't a child, it wasn't my child, that's a completely different ballgame. But someone on the other side of the globe is mirroring the same thoughts... And I can say from a trans perspective, it's just like reading my own journal entry in some parts of it. I think it's awful, but also spectacular, you know, the sense that you can feel so close to somebody who you've never met, that you have no idea about the circumstances of their life, based upon shared experience that isn't even that... they're not the same, it's just close to being, you know?



I want to mobilise

Linden B: I had waves of grief and also the urgency of anger, and like, what can I mobilise to do, I want to mobilise. And I'm just really feeling that in the letter as well. And how much she did, and what she did to advocate for and fight. [And] this community piece of holding pain and the greater the pain the greater container that is needed for holding, and...yeah. And also that piece around honour, to be their logical family now, and just... I've never heard it said like that, but yeah, there is a logical family with this lineage, I guess.

It's systemic.

Sonn: One of the things that really struck me is having grown children in my body as well, is they start out these tiny little things, and they're inside your body and then they get bigger and then they're outside your body, and you know, that it just wasn't enough, as a parent. Like, it didn't matter how much they loved and how much they did, it wasn't enough, because their child wasn't only in relationship with them. And of course that's what we want. We want those rich, broader connections in terms of going out, but that protectiveness when it's not there... when that cruelty is there.

Auggie: I think that's a really beautiful point, the idea that raising them, growing them, and then having your child around. The thing is, it's not just your love and that child, it's a world's worth of damage that stands around us constantly, especially when you think about like, what a grievous moment for a parent to realise... they get to a point where it's not just you and them anymore, you know? It's them and the world, and you are a facet of that. And

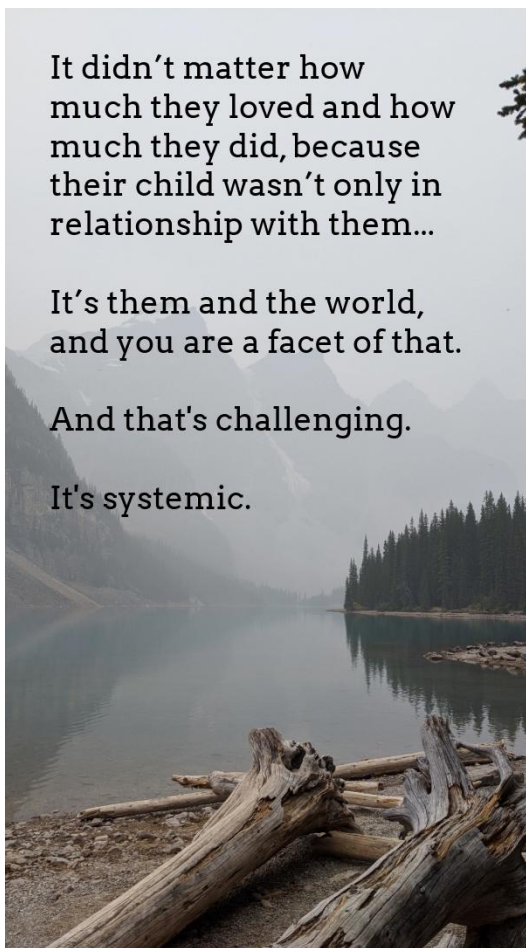
sometimes that facet is greater than... it's too much, you know? And that's challenging. I think it's a really challenging thing, a beautiful thing to bring up, because you want to believe that [you can protect them]. [But] even with community around, I think community helps, don't get me wrong, but I think there's points where it can just...what do you do? It's systemic, is what I'm trying to say, a lot of these issues are extremely problematic and challenging to deal with.

It didn't matter how
much they loved and how
much they did, because
their child wasn't only in
relationship with them...

It's them and the world,
and you are a facet of that.

And that's challenging.

It's systemic.



It might take a village to raise a child, but maybe it takes a whole world to grieve them?

Linden B: The image of just like, where in the planet, the village that is now grieving or stepping up to grieve. It takes a village to raise a child, and to grieve one. Just thinking about that as well.

J: The phrase that came to my mind was I think it might take a village to raise a child, but maybe it takes a whole world to grieve them? And that there's a gift to me in being invited to grieve with you all, this person that none of us ever had the pleasure of knowing.



As queer community, my heart is broken in this conversation. And it feels a little bit stitched together by this conversation. I feel really grateful to this parent for sharing this speech with us.

But like, as queer community, my heart is broken in this conversation. And it feels a little bit stitched together by this conversation. And so I feel really grateful to this parent for sharing this speech with us. Because I think aloneness and isolation and disconnection are one of the things that really fuels death by homicide by oppression, and really fuels homicide by oppression, and really fuels hopelessness.

you parented with hope, and you parented with connection

Annie: I was struck by like, this is a shining example of just what parenting is supposed to be. Like, right from the beginning, with the bank account thing, you parented with hope, and then the story of the hugs and that you parented with connection. And at the funeral of your beautiful child, you parented with strength, and it just keeps going, 'cause it doesn't matter if your child's still here, you're still parenting other people's children by doing the work, being the strength to make those changes, to make it not have to happen for anybody else's child. That's top notch parenting. Top tier human.

Where the speech took us...

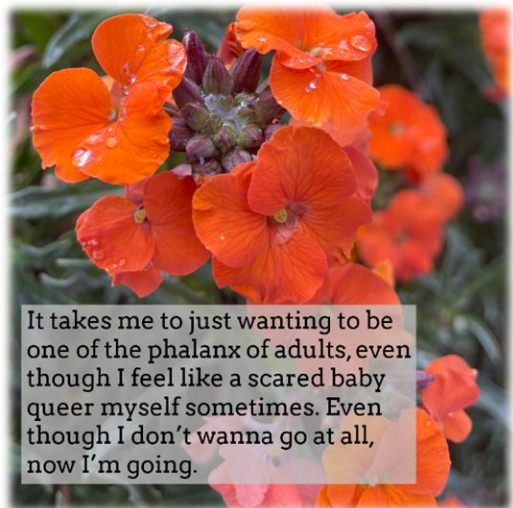
Looking at all the ways we can step up

Sonn: [The speech took me to] so many places. The one I'm going to identify right now is one of my niblings, they had their football Grand Final, and they play in a girl's competition. They're the only out non-binary player. And they wanted me to come to their final, and I went to their final. And they ran off the field in tears, because there were things said to them by the other team, 'cause there were kids there who they'd gone to primary school with. And they ran into my arms. And they're 14 and they can still run into my arms. And I'm so grateful that they can still run into my arms and cry, but I don't want that, you know? I don't want that. And so there are so many resonances, and I am really, really grateful to see the work, and for the letter writing, and for the sharing, and for having the opportunity to sit in this conversation, even on other sides of the planet, and look at all the little ways

that we can keep stepping into, bringing more ease so there is less need to come off the field and have a hug, apart from in joy.

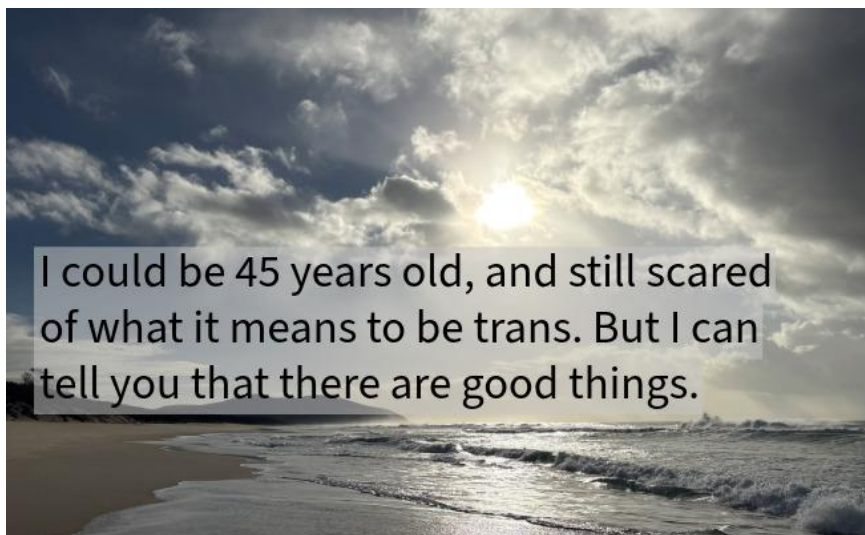
Showing up

J: [The speech and this conversation] is taking me to the [Pride] parade tomorrow. Before Sonn, and Annie, and Auggie, before you got on, I was just talking to Linden B and Tiff about how I think the Pride parade here needs a critical mass of people to show up and I deeply don't want to. Like, I wanna stay at home, curled up, hooking a rug, feeling safe. And I feel like connecting with this parent and their practices, it takes me to standing in front. It takes me to like, fiercely protecting. I'm a therapist and my partner is a middle school teacher. And it takes me to just like, wanting to be one of the phalanx of adults, even though I feel like a scared, you know, baby queer myself sometimes, in front of the kids, and in front of my community, even though I don't wanna go at all, but now I'm going for sure. And as a non-parent, I'm just thinking about like, auntie-ing. It makes me wanna go and like, uncle my community in the ways that I can. So, I think where it's taking me is to action, and I'm really grateful for that little nudge, because I needed it.



It takes me to just wanting to be one of the phalanx of adults, even though I feel like a scared baby queer myself sometimes. Even though I don't wanna go at all, now I'm going.

Auggie: If we don't [show up], who will? And like, not everyone is built to go and stand in a crowd of a thousand people, I understand that, but on the basis of that level of understanding of community, to be out and to be open, and to be able to say, look, I could be 45 years old, and still scared of what it means to be trans. But I can tell you that there are [good] things. It is a great motivating factor to have that ideal of saying like, I don't want to, but if I don't, who will? If we don't, who will?

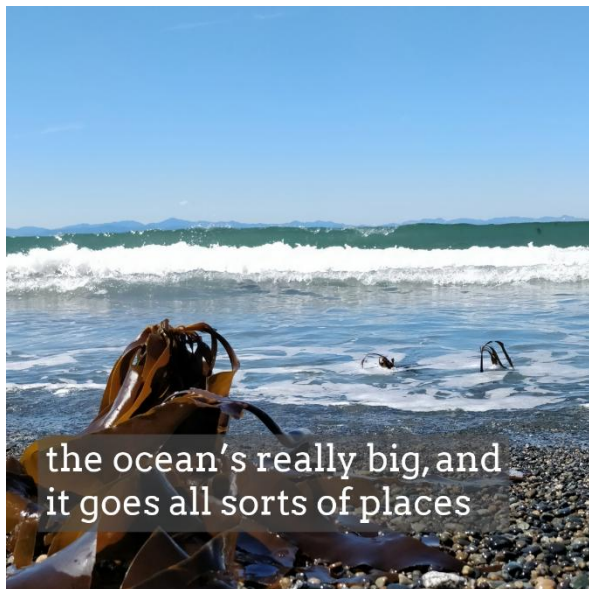


It inspires me to make sure that I'm parenting with intention at all times

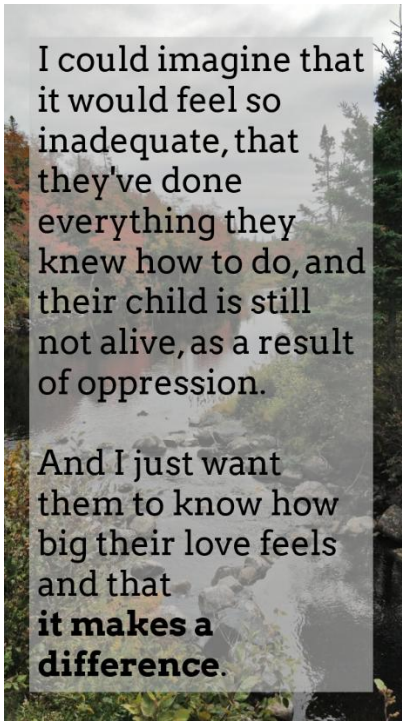
Annie: I think as a parent to kids that fall on the LGBT spectrum, it inspires me to make sure that I'm parenting with intention at all times. That I can't assume that because I've you know, set up good communication and we have strong relationships, I can't just assume that my kids are okay, and they'll come to me if they have bigger problems.

honouring people who are alive, but also remembering people who aren't

Sonn: One of the actions that I'm reminded to go back to, I've been a bit sidetracked by a different grief in the winter, but is that I've got some friends who are trans and non-binary who wanna learn to ocean swim. And that's something I've kind of started doing, to find ways to support folks who wanna be doing that in that very embodied way. And there's also an idea to have a bit of an honouring and remembering, honouring of people who are alive, but also remembering people who aren't. I'm still thinking about what that will look like, but maybe making like, little boats or writing on leaves and then swimming out with them. 'Cause the ocean's really big, and it goes all sorts of places. So, I'm reminded to go back to that.



I feel like I've been loved on the other side of the planet, by the magnitude of their love



I could imagine that it would feel so inadequate, that they've done everything they knew how to do, and their child is still not alive, as a result of oppression.

And I just want them to know how big their love feels and that **it makes a difference.**

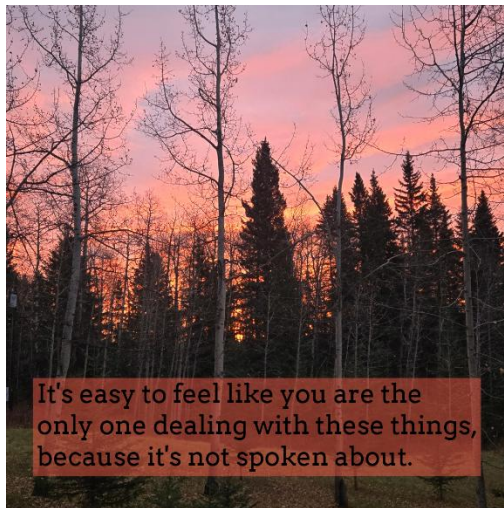
J: I want Carla to know that I felt parented by this letter. Seeing the way that they practised love through action, and continue to take action as a parent. Their love for their child is so evident, and it just... Like I feel like I've been loved on the other side of the planet, by the magnitude of their love. And I could imagine that it would feel so inadequate, that they've done everything they knew how to do, and their child is still not alive, as a result of oppression. And I just want them to know how big their love feels and that it makes a difference.

Auggie: I think it's so easy to feel isolated and alone. It's easy to feel like you are the only one who is dealing with these things, because it's not spoken about. We have very few realms in which we talk about you know, simply just death by being trans. And it's not being trans that kills the individual, it's because they are trans, they are killed.

I think that, you know, it's an extension of love from across the world and an understanding of parenting, but also a sense of this unannounced union – there's a unity behind it. If someone on the other side of the world could understand and mirror feelings that I am feeling here, then we're not quite as disassembled as we think.

We just need to find the words to assemble ourselves. And that unity is the most empowering thing that you can feel, because no one likes to be alone. It's awful. But to know that there people and individuals who, they themselves may not be trans and may be trans, but mirror that.

You know, we put ourselves at risk by stepping out. We put ourselves at risk, and it's terrifying. That's our livelihood, that's our children, it's our loved ones, it's everything to us, it's our identity that can be robbed. And to be solaced in that knowledge that we're surrounded by millions of people who feel the same way, or similarly enough that community could be built in an empowering and life changing way.



Carla, thank you for inviting us to be part of your grieving and your expansive, incredible loving of your child.

With love and respect,

Auggie, Annie, Sonn, J, Linden B, and Tiffany

For R's Mum

By Auggie

You don't know me, And I don't know you

Yet we are orchestrally linked by loss and by love

By off canter goodbyes and hellos that echo empty

Engagements that seem tuneless, ever arching to a melody

In which our keys are left out

Because living is losing, and love makes it worse.

I remember my news, when it broke

And the void it created. The endless sounds of wailing voices

Echoing in my heart

A chorus of seraphim, a harmony of the angelic, reminding me

Reminding me

Reminding me.

Now you know, now you know

As one of their own had rejoined the chorus

almost to mock me

From their perch amongst the void of space

*That their ending is a beginning, a start to a race no one signs up
for*

But we had no choice.

No one else on this earth, but us, will carry this tune.

I'm sorry.

Responses from Frankie and Carla

Poem response to Stasha

Hope as a verb

We ask other humans to witness our pain

Hope as a verb

We remember our loved ones before their death

Hope as a verb

Let this moment radicalise you toward caring, rather than apathy

Hope as a verb

We ask the unanswerable questions

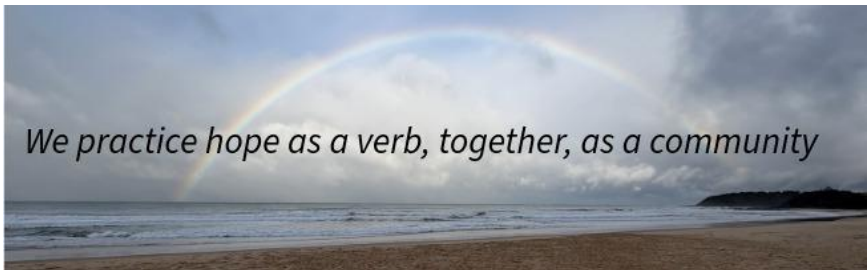
Hope as a verb

We are trying to dream what is possible after unimaginable losses

Hope as a verb

Nothing can take away the love and the connection we shared, not even death

We practice hope as a verb, together, as a community



Dear Frankie, Auggie, Annie, Sonn, J, Linden B, and Tiffany,

Thank you so much for this collective letter and poem. **I am so grateful that you are feeling my radiant and outrageous love which burns even fiercer now that my child is gone.** I am grateful that you feel the strength of this love and I am touched and nurtured that you feel parented by my love. I am honoured to be a role model for radical care for my logical family, now worldwide in community, I take this role as an important opportunity to act on and in my values.

I have found the most empowering action I have been able to take in my grief is to open up to others and give whatever I can to any and all people who may be struggling around me. **Sometimes the only thing I have to offer is space, time and an ear to listen.**

I am so glad that some of my child's friends still stay in contact with me and come for a visit to talk about 'stuff' because so many of their friends and family just don't talk about 'stuff'. If I can be a shining light for these young people I will.

I will not have the privilege of watching my bright, beautiful, inquisitive and terribly sensitive child grow into the adult they could and should have been. They/She saw no future, no other option but to disappear. **My breath catches in my throat as I write that. My heart skips a beat.** How could my child who I protected and supported to thrive see no future, no other option but death?

Thank you for helping me hold this grief and attempt to contain it. Upon reflection, I do not want to contain this grief. I want it to boil over. I want my grief to have the power to move systems and individuals who oppress our community. **I want others to hear my struggle and be inspired to join me at the front lines.**

I want people to hear themselves say the frequent incidental words of erasure and violence. Ignorant words such as 'I don't do pronouns' or 'I don't know much about the they/them thing' or 'all their peers are doing it at school, it's just a phase', and all the other words, and to understand that **it is up to all of us to be good allies.**

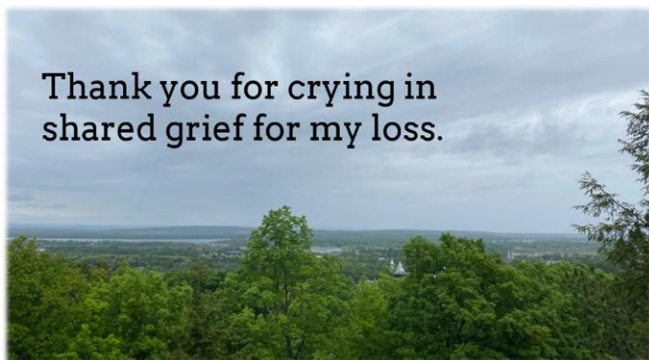
It is up to every person to take stock and take charge of how they accept and support and protect all people in our society, especially the most vulnerable. That is the only measure of our society's worth and value, how safe its most vulnerable feel, not our GDP or value of our national currency...

Thank you for becoming part of my extended logical family and community of support. **Thank you for crying in shared grief for my loss.** Thank you for sharing your words of inspiration and encouragement.

I will keep pressing and hope that I may stay in contact with this burgeoning international community of trans/neurodivergent activists and advocates for change. I hope to see you on the front lines over the years, if but virtually.

In solidarity

Carla



What this work has made possible

Across the years between the initial collecting of responses and the creation of this zine, we have kept in touch. Carla, Auggie, Frankie and Tiffany have been in touch the most frequently, but we've also stayed in touch with the whole group. In late 2025, as we were drafting this zine and the companion article, we sent out an email to everyone involved, asking them the following questions:

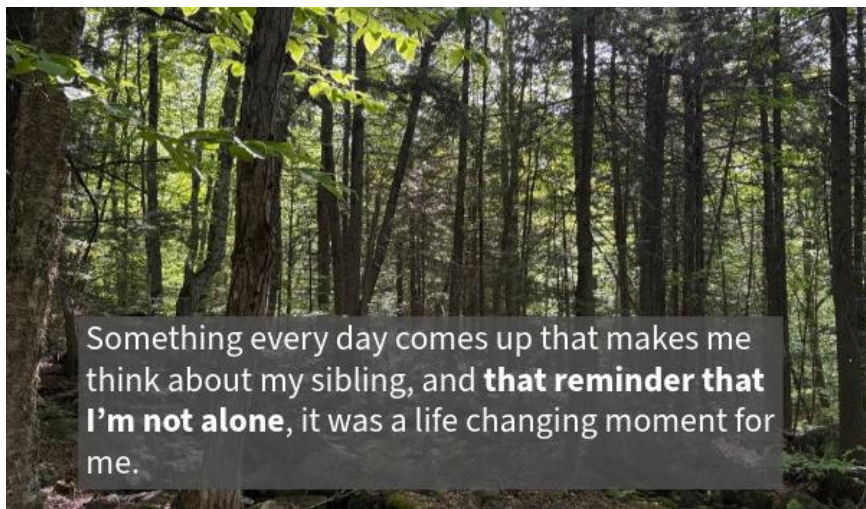
- What difference has participating in this project made for you?
- What made it possible for you to be part of this?
- What would you want to share with someone who is thinking about initiating a project like this? (This could be a practitioner, or it could be a person who is grieving who wants to initiate a project.)
- What would you want to share with someone who is thinking about participating in a project like this?
- Has being part of this project changed anything about your practice or your engagement with community?

If you are interested in initiating or joining a collective project like this:

- What would make it possible for you to be part of a project like this?
- Are there people that you might want to join with? What do you know about those people that has you thinking of them?
- If there aren't people in your life already who you might want to join with, who might you reach out to for new connections?
- What might a collective response make possible? What are your hopes?

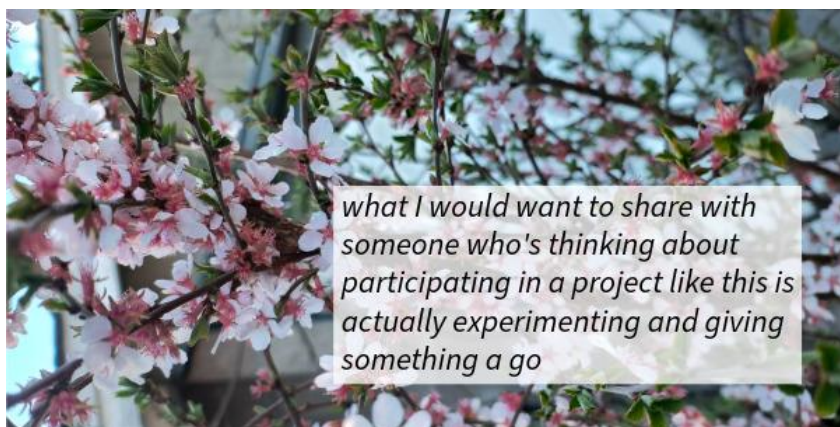
"I gave my memorial speech from the funeral for my child to you and I got your words back and now it's becoming this zine. I've lost a lot of capacity to focus and do and complete... And this project percolating in the background, it just keeps growing and growing. And maybe that's at the pace that I need. **I'm on the journey.** I am not turning back, but I don't find my people all the time. Thank you for being my people." Carla

"It's such an isolating position to be in. To read something that was said about someone who was loved and adored... What you wrote meant the world to your daughter, and it meant the world to me, because those are the words that make change. Even if it feels like it's too little, too late, it makes a difference and it makes a change. I was so honoured that I was invited to be a part of that. You can't reach people if you're always keeping your thoughts to yourself. **You changed my life when I got to read that letter.** For me, it was like listening to an echo of my own voice on the other side of the globe... That pain is always going to be new and always going to be fresh. **Something every day comes up that makes me think about my sibling, and that reminder that I'm not alone, it was a life changing moment for me.** I think that you changed a lot of people that day." Auggie



“This project has attended to multiple sites of isolation, you know? I didn't really realise that myself as a practitioner would experience the remedy and the balm of this project, whilst also being able to experience this incredible tenderness and political solidarity of everyone involved in the project towards Carla's loss.

So maybe what I would want to share with someone who's thinking about participating in a project like this is actually experimenting and giving something a go. I think I've really been inspired by the timelines on this because, [we have kept] the momentum over a long period of time and I really have learnt a lot from that. That's the kind of long-term political work and long-term community work that is really... yeah, I've seen it in practice [in this project].” Frankie



“It felt important. It felt significant. And it also felt like something useful, like doing a thing in a way that strengthened connections between people and resisted the isolation and hopelessness that can come with seeing what's happening in the world. There's something about taking an action that continues to have effects that feels sustaining.” Tiffany



Go as slow as you need to, to make it more possible. It's very okay. And in further snail wisdom, it's okay to curl up in your shell sometimes and just be with you, with grief, with whatever is there.

“This is profoundly honouring work, which is very meaningful to be a part of. Well worth the effort. It's okay to take your time with it. **Go as slow as you need to, to make it more possible.** It's very okay. And in further snail wisdom, **it's okay to curl up into your shell sometimes and just be with you, with grief, with whatever is there.**

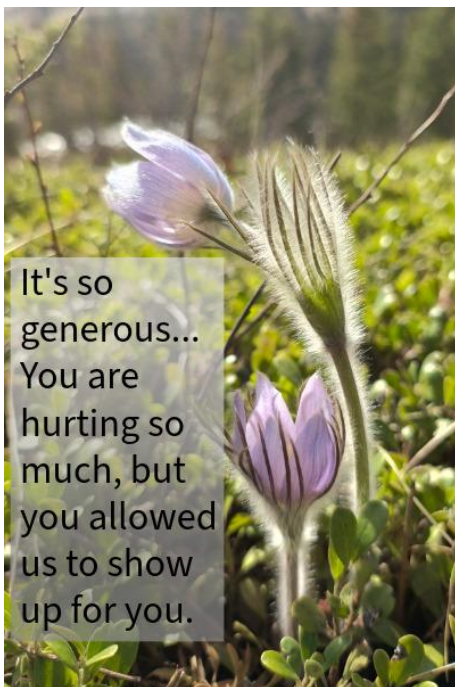
This project has made it impossible to not see and feel the interconnectedness of us, of our loves, and of our losses. This project offered a profound opportunity to witness and to offer solidarity – in tears, through words, and in community. The opportunity to collectively breathe with Carla across the world's oceans and right back again. To hold Carla and each other in pain and in longing for better and for more. And for those we know and love and those we've never met. For a kinder world that can hold space for trans, non-binary and genderqueer folks just exactly as we are... I just want there to be room for everyone. And so many folks, including trans, non-binary, and genderqueer folks, are afforded so little room. Rue sounds like they felt there was none. I feel deep sadness about this. **Losses connecting to losses. Love connecting to love.**

[This project] has supported me to trust and love my compassionate heart and the ways it can hold and connect with

others in community, in life-honouring and therefore sustaining ways. It's supported me to trust me with grief work in my practice and in my life. It's helped me take my own place in community, and reminded me not to hold back on telling people just how much I appreciate them just exactly as they are. **It's brought hope to a place that can feel hopeless and therefore helped sustain me in my practice and justice-doing efforts."** Sonn

"I don't listen to what people say about their values. People can say their values are whatever they want, but I watch what they do, and Carla, what you do, is you are living your values.

It is good to practice [love] with people close to us and with strangers. That's what protest is, expressing your love for strangers. We can love and that is what brings down capitalism. So for me, **I experienced a genuine human experience, and it had been so fuckin' long. And to me, that is just so precious.** It's so, so precious. **And that's why it's generous, Carla. When you are hurting so much, but you allowed us to show up for you.** And that is the most meaningful thing I've done about love or being a human in five years, ten years, who knows, right? Because it's not oh, this is my family, this is my neighbor, this is... you allowed us to be more human. I really thank you for that. how we treat each other, how we actually act, is living our values." Stasha



“I remember when we did the conversation, and I particularly remember we decided to collaboratively read Carla's speech so that the speech was heard by the people in the room. **The whole conversation felt like ceremony. It felt like a ritual.** I think we're all just kind of gaping at the horror around us a lot of the time right now, and sometimes it's really hard to know what to do with that. And being able to read your speech, Carla, and hear about the particularity of your child and your love for Rue felt like **it transmuted that amorphous pain of being in the world into something particular and specific and tangible.**

It felt like it moved the energy of the pain of being in the world in a way that felt somehow sustaining. It felt like a chance to participate in dignifying your love and Rue.

Loss through suicide is such a degraded form of loss in dominant culture. It's such a marginalised experience for so many people who lose a loved one to suicide or who die by suicide. And to recentre the love and the dignity of Rue and their choices and your love for them felt politically meaningful.” J

The whole conversation felt like ceremony.

It transmuted that amorphous pain of being in the world into something particular and specific and tangible.

To recentre the love and the dignity of Rue and their choices and Carla's love for them felt politically meaningful.



This has been a slow project, and it has happened over years. Many of us in the reflection conversation talked about how we can be overtaken by feelings of failure about how slow we are, how we are not being productive enough, how we can't focus. Carla spoke about their garden and the way the compost takes so long. To make your own soil takes time. Sonn, who loves snails, talked about bees and snails appreciating that slow pace.

If you are grieving, or if you are trying to do love and hope through action but you only have the energy for those actions sometimes, we want you to know that it's okay.

You can welcome yourself in your "snailiness" to come back in to the work when you're able. It will still be there. It will still be precious and valuable a year later, two years later, three years later, a decade later.

"It feels like a failure when it only happens when there's energy. But the thing is, it does still happen." Tiffany

"We need to work with what we can get and move away from it's got to be like this or it's a failure." Carla

We hope that by documenting and sharing this project, that other people who are grieving, and people who are loving those who are grieving, and people who want to show up for others even if those others are strangers... we hope that this zine offers invitations into collective responses to grief.

We also hope that you know that you don't have to do the same things that we did. You could find your own way, and we imagine that you might go in many different directions.

"We were fortunate, Carla, that you chose to step up and speak for your child and that this piece of writing existed, based on the circumstances and the choices that you made to parent them through that.

A lot of people who are grieving could probably really resonate with everything you've said about like, I can't even listen to an audio book right now, I can't even look at my email. And the idea of writing our grief is probably out of reach for many people who didn't offer a eulogy.

What that made me think about was just **how might we make something like this accessible to community members who don't have writing available?**

And it made me think, can we record a video or could a practitioner draft a therapeutic letter based on the conversations that they check out with the person?

You know, just thinking about ways to make this accessible to people." J

What ideas do you have for making a project like this accessible? What would make it possible for you, or someone you care about, to create something that others could respond to?

Some particular considerations for therapists

“It was just community care. It wasn’t a ‘therapy’ thing.” J

There will be a companion article written for practitioners, but here are a few ideas for therapists or other ‘professionals’ who are thinking about undertaking a project like this.

This project moved out of therapy and into community, but it still had its start in therapy, and it was initiated and held by people (Frankie and Tiffany) who are narrative practitioners. There was particular care taken in facilitating the shift from therapy to community care, and it might be useful for you to read a bit about how that happened.

“I was quite careful about who I sent the invitation to. I sent it to people that I had established relationships with and that I knew could, if they had the capacity for it, hold it in a good way. Everyone who got that initial email from me is someone that I trusted. It wasn’t a wide invitation, because it was so precious and particular, and new. I hadn’t done something like that before.”
Tiffany

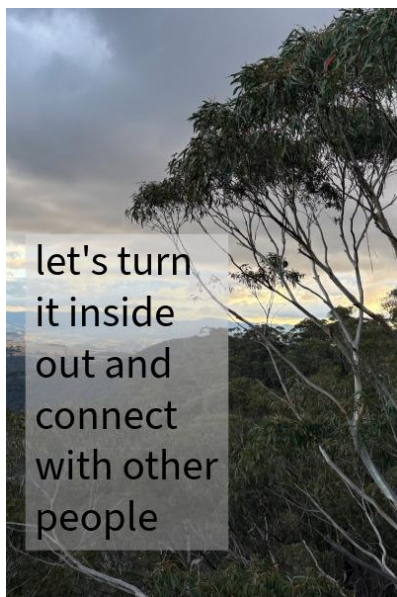
“I don’t know if I ever knew your name, Carla, and I don’t know if I ever knew Rue’s name until [this reflection conversation]. **There was a lot of confidentiality, protocol-y stuff that was included in how we did it that I think professionally makes it maybe feel more possible to practitioners.** That feels worth naming. But also, **what a treasure to get to see you and meet you today and to know your name and to know Rue’s name.** And like to...I don’t know, there’s just a layer of specificity and particularity and humanness to that that’s really precious. So, I’m glad that I got to be here with you today.” J

"I didn't realise this was a new thing, that it was kind of experimental or whatever. Frankie, I'll just say as a professional, you presented it very confidently, like, yep, this is something we can do. Let's just do this. And I'm like, cool, let's just do this. I didn't have that 'how do we do this' part.

And so now to see behind the curtain and to hear both of you, Tiffany and Frankie, who were there kind of making this happen, the fears that you faced to make that happen and the cautiousness... I didn't feel or see any of it, you know? You were doing that as professionals to make this happen. It required that you knew what needed to be done for the job side of things. I'm sure it hasn't always felt comfortable. I felt very held and very confident that you knew what you were doing even if you didn't. [laughs]

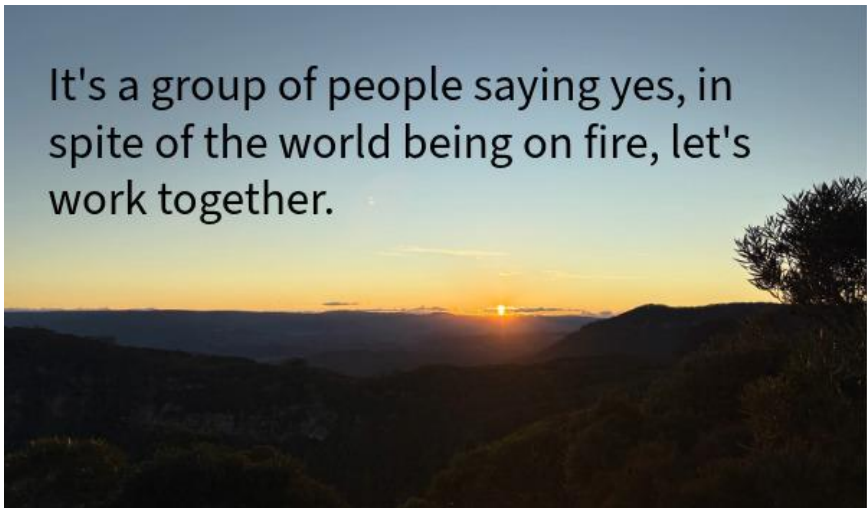
Usually therapy or recovery is when you go to a therapist and it's a commodity, you know? You pay for it, you get funding for it. And this [project] is outside of all of that. And I see that as, you know, it's anti-capitalist. I think the way we're doing this is groundbreaking and connects emotionally and in practical ways to how we want to address mental health and community well-being and all those things...

We were taking that academic or professional idea of counseling and therapy and recovery and emotional stuff in a contained confidential space to actually, let's turn it inside out and connect with other people." Carla



"I always hope in these kinds of conversations that everyone walks away with a little bit more strength or a little bit more hope in their heart or a little bit of something to be able to fall back on. Because no matter how challenging a conversation is, as long as there's community happening, I think it helps us kind of lift our eyes, you know? It's a group of people saying yes, in spite of the world being on fire, let's work together. Even if we can't undo the event that happened, perhaps we can work together to give peace or solace or hope to those who may experience it again. People all over the world are willing and ready to help if you just know where to look." Auggie

It's a group of people saying yes, in spite of the world being on fire, let's work together.



We would love to hear from you, if you have any questions or if you would like to share any reflections. You can reach Tiffany at tiffany@groundfireccw.ca, and your responses can be passed along.

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