



Metaphors and Meanings

Helping Clients with Life Reviews in
Hospital Palliative Care



Where we work

- St. Joseph's Hospital site is part of St. Joseph's Care Group, which is a Catholic organization committed to providing compassionate and holistic care and services to the people of Northwestern Ontario.
- Our vision states that we will identify and respond to the unmet needs of our region as a way of continuing the healing mission of Jesus in the tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault St. Marie.
- The Hospice Unit was started at St. Joseph's Hospital through the support of the Sister's of St. Joseph of Sault St. Marie.



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photo by Roy Larson



Hospice Palliative Care Unit

- Hospice Palliative Care at St. Joseph's Hospital is a 32 bed unit that offers two levels of care. 10 private rooms, one semi-private, and the remaining beds are in four bed ward rooms.
- Our clients come to Hospice for two primary reasons;
 1. pain and symptom management with goal to return home;
 2. Or to receive quality end of life care; short term and long term.
- When clients are admitted to Hospice it becomes a place where family and friends come and visit. Hospice can become the client's home.



Palliative Care

On our Hospice Palliative Unit, all staff are encouraged to share in the palliative client's experience.

One of the challenges is walking alongside clients and their families when they have never experienced palliative care or a loved one dying.



The purpose of this presentation is to share different types of life reviews that may be used by palliative care providers.



Types of Life Reviews

- Many caregivers and professionals working in Palliative Care are familiar with Life Reviews.
- A life review can be very formal. A series of questions that facilitate the person with the palliative illness to describe and reflect on their life experiences.
- Some formal life reviews are audio-taped and then transcribed for the client and family members.



A story can paint a
picture and a picture can
tell a story.



Types of Narrative Counselling and brief life reviews

- Story telling and metaphors
- Collages
- River or Path of life
- Memory Books
- Letters



Our Stories are influenced and Shaped by

- Cultural Traditions
- Religious Beliefs
- Family Traditions
- Interconnected



Remember When Stories

By Dr. John Savage

Shared with family and close friends

- Binds us together
- Can make a “rotten” event “funny” with time.
- Often make us laugh.
- Think of how many times your husband, wife or best friend repeats the same story.....and you always laugh.



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Prepared by D. Spear




Tell me a story

Brief story

- From your childhood
- About your children
- About a pet

OR

- About a favorite book or movie.



Stories that may be told in the context of dying

A palliative diagnosis invites the person to review their life.

- Acknowledge choices made, relationships, life experiences.

Stories can include,

- Stories of fear, sadness and loss, regret
- Stories of resentment and bitterness
- Stories of confession
- Stories of life achievements and successes
- Stories of love and concern for significant others

A. Noble & C. Jones (2005)



Existential pain

- Guilt
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger



Each room is a universe

We can only sit with as much
pain as we ourselves can
tolerate.

~Rev. Hugh Walker





Narrative Therapy

- Narrative therapy began in Australia and New Zealand with the work of Michael White and David Epston.
- Narrative therapy considers that stories about people's lives and events are linked overtime and have implications for past, present and future actions, and that these stories are powerful in shaping lives.
(White, 2003)



Key Concepts in Narrative Therapy

- Listening – no decisions or judgments until the whole story is heard.
- Externalizing the problem – emphasizing the principle that the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem
- Deconstruction of the story- by challenging the meaning.
- Reauthoring – which will include balancing the positive with the negative.



The person's

- Use of their own voice
- And their own language
- When telling their own Story
- Helps to provide care



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Benefits of Narrative Therapy in Palliative Care

- Staff
- Client
- Family
- Children
- Counsellors



Life “Rules” Stories

By Dr. John Savage

- How you have been influenced or taught to view the world by your family of origin.
- Sometimes these beliefs are so much a part of us (such an old story) that we do not question this belief.
- These beliefs can be positive or negative.
- This type of belief can affect how well we cope. We normally only examine this type of belief in a crisis situation – when our normal ways of coping no longer work.
- Example...



How Story Telling: Benefits for family members

- Family/friends want desperately to help – sharing stories gives them a focus.
- Relaxes the patient
- Changes the atmosphere in the room.
- Helps shift family members, friends from anxiety, fear, into grieving and honoring the person's legacy.

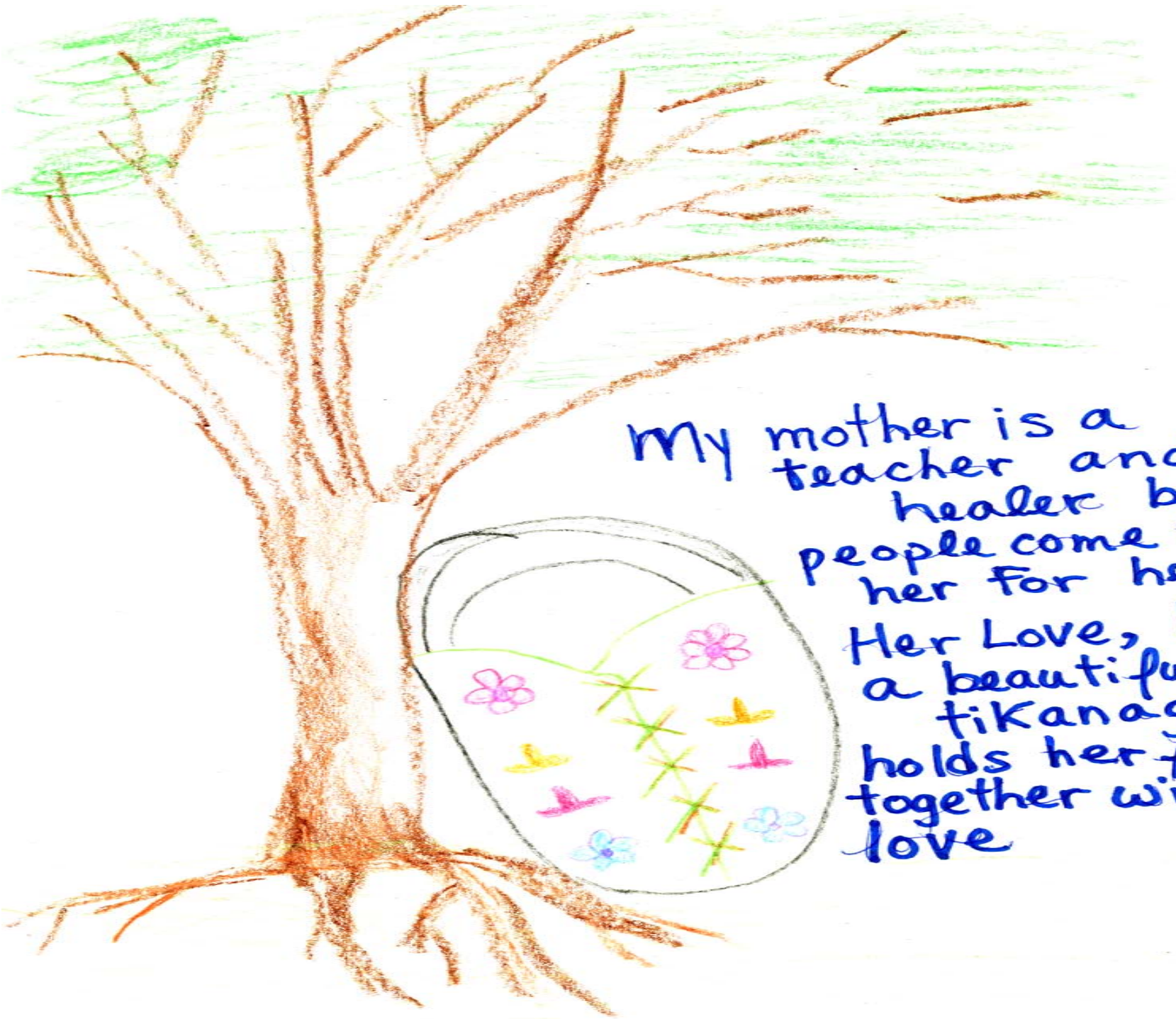


Themes in Stories

- A person will keep telling you their story until they finally hear it. (and in the witnessing you hear it)
- Pay attention to themes in stories. Words, phrases that are repeated.
- Look for metaphors in stories.
- Watch a person's body language, pay attention to their eyes.
- Invite the patient and family members to view their experiences in a new way—if they need a healing story.



What are metaphors?



My mother is a
teacher and a
healer because
people come to
her for help.
Her Love, like
a beautiful
tikanagan
holds her family
together with
love



Closed Systems

- When someone we love is very ill we can become a closed system.
- Stressed, tired, “in our head”.
- Unable to retain information or think clearly. We can only remember a small percentage of what is said to us.
- Often hold in our emotions because we don't want to upset someone else.

Closed Systems



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Open systems

- Open to laughter = open system
- A frustrating experience can become a family tale told over and over with laughter
- Laughter and tears can help us to bond.





Perception: seeing the bigger picture

- Able to view life experiences as a journey.
- Able to identify times when their was hardship or stress that they journeyed through, perhaps transcended. E.g. a troubled childhood or a marriage ending in divorce. Often with the help of their religious beliefs and church.
- Invites the person to acknowledge their strengths.
- When their faith has made a difference in their life.



Perception continued.....

- Often individuals express awe when they look back at their life from a larger perspective. You will often hear them say, “ I never thought of it that way before.”
- Invite the individual to reflect on what helped them to get through that challenging time in their life.



Perception continued.....

- Strengths may include...
Faith, determination, stubbornness, humor,
love
- This will demonstrate themes in their coping that you can discuss and possibly apply to their current experience.
- Or it may be a strength that you can help them acknowledge – has been passed on to their family members – part of their legacy.



When Narrative Type Therapies do NOT work

- If the client is too ill – family may want to do a memory book.
- When the client thinks that it is

Stupid

When there are no happy stories to
share



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Photo by John Pineda

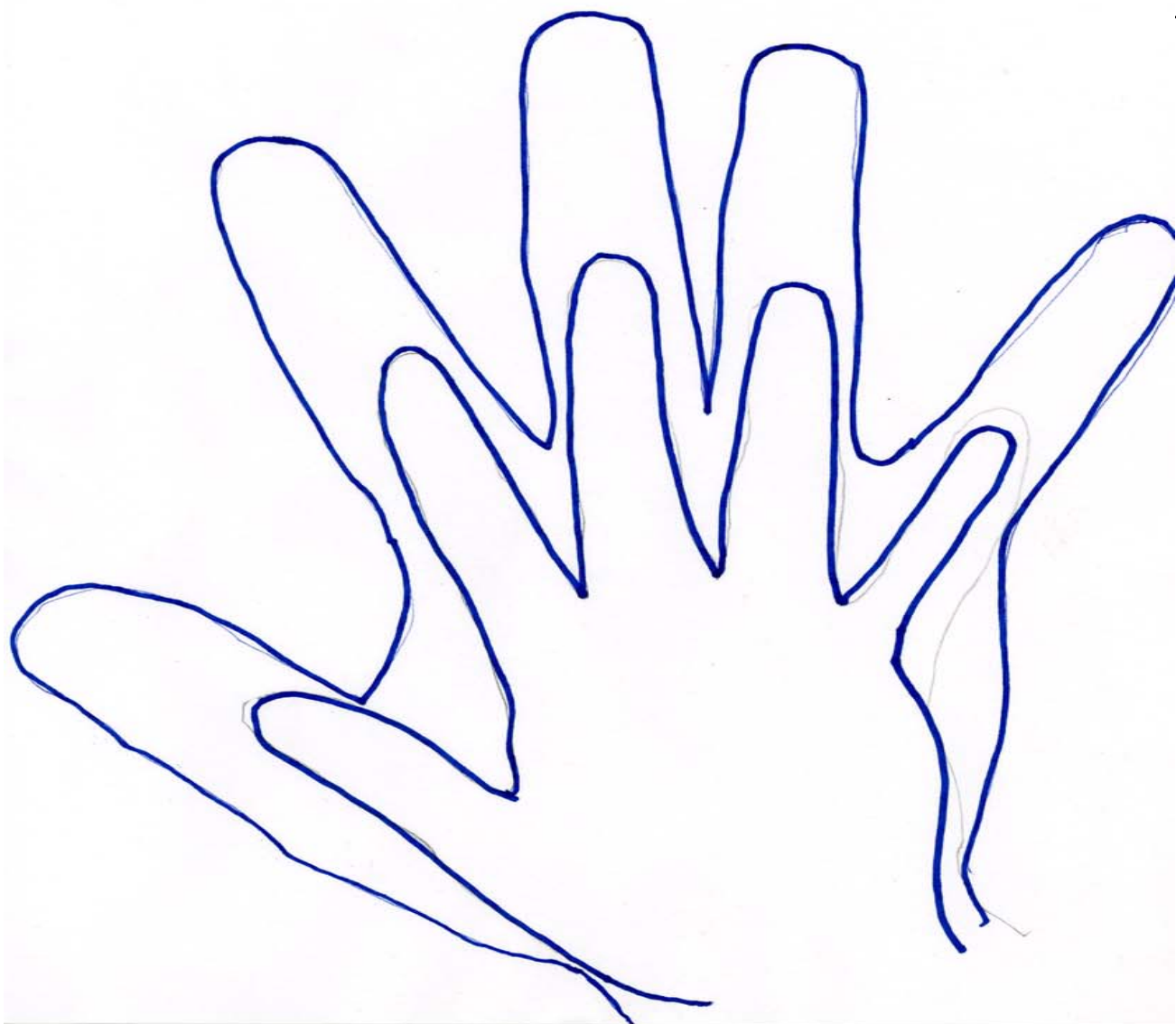


Memory Books for Children (and Adults)

- A family activity
- Helps to shift the focus to family legacy and life stories
- Provides a way for children to initiate a conversation about Papa or Nona.
- Children can take down their book anytime they want to read and tell stories.
- Parents have a “safe” way to share. To laugh and cry while expressing their grief.

my Papa loves us. He waves
his hands and puts the bumble
bees to sleep so we can
play outside







River of Life

- What is it? Why is it useful?
- Never interpret someone else's meaning. Let them explain to you what a picture or color means to them.
- Be curious, you can say e.g. "that colour looks very interesting, what does it mean to you?"
- This activity takes **TIME**. Allow for enough time to complete the exercise and for the person to debrief with you.
- Be prepared that the person may need additional support and/or counselling if this exercise causes them to remember a distressful event or memory.







Thank you Closing Exercise

- We live in a beautiful world, full of meaning.
- Take a moment to be still and quiet.
- Then chose a colour or colors to draw a picture of something that gives you peace and comfort, and helps represent your faith.

- My example; a tree,
- the trunk (strength, with God's blessings),
- the sunlight (joy),
- roots (strength, feeling grounded by my faith),
- the green leafs (renewal),
- the wind in the leafs, God's grace acting in my life.