

## North Star Reach: Coping with Loss Conference, March 4, 2021

### Breakout Session: Shaping Grief with Language

- **Sara O'Donnell Adler** is a rabbi and board-certified chaplain at the University of Michigan Health System. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetica Magazine*, *The Bear River Review*, and the *Journal for Jewish Spiritual Care*, among others.

More information about Sara and the spiritual care team at the University of Michigan Health System can be found here: <https://www.uofmhealth.org/patient-visitor-guide/our-chaplains>

- **Cody Walker** directs the University of Michigan's Undergraduate Creative Writing Program and is also the co-director of the Bear River Writers' Conference, a four-day conference featuring workshops in poetry, fiction and nonfiction hosted at Camp Michigania. He is the author of two full-length poetry collections and his poems have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Yale Review* and *Best American Poetry*, among others.

More information on the Bear River Writers' Conference (hosted virtually this year, on May 20-23) can be found here: <https://lsa.umich.edu/bearriver>

### Poetry Resources

- **Selection of Poetry Anthologies on Loss and Grief**
  - Robert Pinsky, *The Handbook of Heartbreak: 101 Poems of Lost Love and Sorrow*
  - Kevin Young, *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing*
  - Gregory Orr, *Poetry as Survival*
  - Others
- **Selection of Online Daily Poetry Sources**
  - Poetry Daily (contemporary poetry), [www.poems.com](http://www.poems.com)
  - Poem-a-Day (contemporary poets), Academy of Poets: [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)
  - Poem of the Day (classics and contemporary), Poetry Foundation: [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)

## Poems

### Chaplain

Through the cobalt of winter  
a day is rising. Masked and badged,  
I move toward the steps  
that spill from the hospital doors.

But first, notice  
how a finger of sunlight  
raps a sliver on panes of windows  
where children sleep by soft beep  
of machines and parents knit their brows  
in concern.

Breath almost visible, I stand  
in the beginning day as  
bicycles tick past and commuters  
murmur on muted cell phones.

Here by the path I recognize  
a familiar rock.  
It is Jacob's pillow.  
I want to lay myself down  
before dawn stands  
and shouts the birds awake.

This place on the hill, this ladder,  
this palace of broken bodies,  
this portal where souls break  
free to heaven. While others  
like stardust, spiral down  
into arms of new mothers.

Let me lay down here  
just this once. Let me  
find God in this place  
and know it.

Clutching coffee cups  
interns in white coats revolve  
through morning doors,  
ride the elevators up and down.

I wrestle. I wrestle every day  
with the *why*  
and limp into another day breaking.

- Sara O'Donnell Adler

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## Mad Cognitive Decline

1

She thought she saw a Rhododendron  
(Augury of Danger):  
She looked again, and found it was  
Her shadow. "I can change her.  
I'll bring her cups of tea so she  
Won't see me as a stranger."

2

He thought he saw a Mother's Day  
On Sunday (like before):  
He looked again, and found it was  
An open cellar door.  
"Perhaps it leads to moments we won't  
Speak of anymore."

- Cody Walker

## **The Trees**

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again  
And we grow old? No, they die too,  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

- Philip Larkin

## **blessing the boats**

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide  
that is entering even now  
the lip of our understanding  
carry you out  
beyond the face of fear  
may you kiss  
the wind then turn from it  
certain that it will  
love your back may you  
open your eyes to water  
water waving forever  
and may you in your innocence  
sail through this to that

- Lucille Clifton