

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
 - Poem-a-Day (contemporary poets), Academy of Poets: www.poets.org
 - Poem of the Day (classics and contemporary), Poetry Foundation: 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