

Portland Institute for Loss and Transition

Grief Therapy Learning Retreat (August 21-25, 2026)

List of Presenting Faculty

Brooks, M. P., PhD

Maegan Parker Brooks is Associate Professor and Chair of Civic Communication & Media at Willamette University, where she teaches Death and Grief Communication, Autoethnography, and Artful Communication for Wellbeing courses. Brooks serves the bereaved as co-founder of the Diversity of Loss Arts-Based Grief Support Group at Willamette and has served as a facilitator at The Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families. Her teaching, service, and research are informed by compassion-based and meaning reconstruction approaches to supporting death and non-death losses. Certified in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy, Brooks integrates expressive arts methodologies into her grief pedagogy and the grief groups she organizes. Brooks has published her scholarship in peer-reviewed journals, encyclopedias, edited collections, and books.



Coenen, C., GTMR, FT, CGC

Claudia Coenen is a grief counsellor in private practice in Hudson, New York, where she helps people process grief and discover personal resilience as they learn to live fully after loss. A skilled public speaker, she presents workshops on creativity for grief, loving after loss, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and how grief arises in the body. Claudia has certifications in grief counseling, thanatology and Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction. Claudia is the author of two decks of Karuna Cards containing creative and mindful prompts for grief, personal growth and thriving after loss. She is also the author of three books and the editor of a third, all with expressive, arts, nature and compassion-based methods to help people bereaved by death or other difficult life transitions.



Coplan, E., Award-Winning Playwright, 2024 Pulitzer Prize Nominee

Elizabeth Coplan is a playwright, producer, and founder of *Grief Dialogues*, an innovative theatre initiative that uses immersive, participatory performance to explore grief, loss, and meaning making. Her work engages audiences as active participants, integrating live theatre, facilitated reflection, and communal ritual to support relational witnessing and shared inquiry. She is the creator of *In the Wake of Life* and *In Honor*, nationally presented immersive works that frame grief as an evolving narrative process rather than a fixed endpoint. Coplan's practice draws on narrative theory, performance studies, and arts-in-health frameworks, positioning theatre as both an artistic medium and a reflective methodology for grief engagement. In addition to her grief-centered work, she is the co-book writer and producer of *Let's Write a Musical*, an original musical inspired by a true story that explores love, loss, and creativity through a 1950s romantic comedy lens. With more than 40 years of experience in strategic communications and marketing, Coplan brings a disciplined, ethical approach to storytelling that supports clarity, integrity, and sustainability in grief-informed creative practice.



Greenbaum, J., EdD

Jill Greenbaum is a contemplative chaplain, an Appreciative Inquiry facilitator and coach, visual storyteller and story catcher, end-of-life death literacy advocate, and teaching artist in private practice. She is a graduate of the Upaya Zen Center’s Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program, the Art of Dying Institute’s Integrative Thanatology Program, and received her Certification in Art-Assisted Grief Therapy from the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition. Her one-to-one coaching and interactive workshops integrate her deep compassion, knowledge, and skills with powerful frameworks that help participants engage in their work with clarity and courage. She creates safe, inviting spaces to explore living fully every day, and preparing skillfully for their someday, one day deaths.



Hunter, S.

Sandra Hunter is an empowerment coach, educator, author, and advocate for intergenerational leadership. As founder of empowerHER, she equips women with the tools to navigate workplace challenges, lead with purpose and step into mentorship. Drawing on over 19 years in academia and more than 15 years of career coaching, Sandra combines strategic mentorship, story-healing, and community-building to drive systemic change and cultivate the next generation of leaders.



Lichtenthal, W. G., PhD, FT, FAPOS

Wendy G. Lichtenthal is the Founding Director of the Center for the Advancement of Bereavement Care at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and Professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences, Division of Prevention Science and Community Health, at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, which she joined in 2023. She is a licensed clinical psychologist and federally-funded researcher with more than 25 years of experience specializing in grief, bereavement, end-of-life care, and cancer survivorship, with a focus on meaning-making and intervention development. Dr. Lichtenthal began her career at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in 2005, where she was the Founding Director of the Bereavement Clinic and now serves as Consultant Faculty. Her work has been recognized by awards from the International Psycho-Oncology Society, the American Psychosocial Oncology Society, and the Association for Death Education and Counseling.



Maes, M. L.

Madeleine L. Maes is an undergraduate student at Willamette University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Civic Communication & Media in 2027. As a co-facilitator of the Diversity of Loss Arts-Based Grief Support Group, Maes supports bereaved students, faculty, and staff grieving death and non-death losses. She is deeply committed to enhancing grief support at universities. She developed the *CLOVERS* peer grief support model, which she uses to train student leaders. In both her facilitation work and her publications, Maes weaves together the expressive arts and peer support to enfranchise the bereaved.



Mahat-Shamir, M., PhD

Michal Mahat-Shamir is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Ariel University, Israel. She is an active scholar in the field of loss, trauma, and bereavement, with a particular interest in traumatic and disenfranchised grief, including losses that are sudden, violent, stigmatized, or socially unacknowledged. Her research explores how bereaved individuals make meaning in their loss, navigate ongoing bonds with the deceased, and cope with the psychological and social challenges that follow traumatic events. Alongside her academic work, Prof. Mahat-Shamir maintains an active clinical practice, drawing on more than 20 years of therapeutic experience. Her clinical work and research are closely intertwined, as she designs and conducts studies grounded in the experiences and needs of the populations she serves.



Neimeyer, R. A., PhD

Robert A. Neimeyer is Professor Emeritus of the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, maintains an active consulting practice, and directs the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, which provides global online training in grief therapy. Neimeyer has published 37 books, including *Living Beyond Loss: Questions and Answers about Grief and Bereavement* and *New Techniques of Grief Therapy*, and serves as Editor of *Death Studies*. The author of over 600 articles and book chapters, he has been recognized in the Stanford University/Elsevier list of Top 2% Scientists in the world, with over 60,000 citations to his work according to Google Scholar. Neimeyer is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process. In recognition of his contributions, he has been made a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and given Lifetime Achievement Awards by both the Association for Death Education and Counseling and the International Network on Personal Meaning.



Ng, C., PsyD, MMSAC, RegCLR

Carolyn Ng maintains a private practice, Anchorage for Loss and Transition (www.anchorage-for-loss.org), for training, supervision and therapy in Singapore, while also serving as an Associate Director of the Portland Institute. Previously she was a Principal Counsellor with the Children’s Cancer Foundation in Singapore, specializing in cancer-related palliative care and bereavement counselling. She is a registered counselor, master clinical member and approved supervisor with the Singapore Association for Counselling (SAC), as well as a trained end-of-life doula and advanced care planning facilitator. She is also trained in the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, USA, community crisis response by the National Organisation for Victim Assistance (NOVA), USA, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) by LivingWorks, Canada. Her recent writing concerns meaning-oriented narrative reconstruction with bereaved families, with an emphasis on conversational approaches for fostering new meaning and action.



Pitcho, S., PhD

Shani Pitcho is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. Her research focuses on grief, traumatic loss, and interpersonal trauma, with particular emphasis on homicide bereavement, domestic violence, and other disenfranchised losses in culturally marginalized communities. She examines how survivors navigate guilt and blame and engage with social and institutional responses to trauma. Alongside her academic work, Dr. Pitcho maintains a clinical practice, supporting individuals coping with traumatic bereavement and complex trauma. Across her roles as researcher, clinician, and educator, she aims to bridge research and practice, generating knowledge that informs sensitive, culturally responsive interventions for those living in the aftermath of traumatic loss.



Rynearson, E. K., MD

“Ted” Rynearson is a clinical psychiatrist and researcher from Seattle, Washington where he founded the section of psychiatry at the Mason Clinic. In addition to full-time clinical practice, he has served on the clinical faculty of the University of Washington as a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry. For over 40 years, Dr. Rynearson has maintained a particular clinical and research focus on the effects of violent death on family members published in clinical papers, book chapters and three books entitled, *Retelling Violent Death*; *Violent Death: Resilience and Intervention Beyond the Crisis: The restorative nature of ongoing connections with the deceased*. Dr. Rynearson lives on Puget Sound and when younger rowed each dawn in his rowing scull (weather and tide permitting) and almost always saw a seal or an eagle.



Scout, L., BSW, MFT

Lies Scout is a Belgian social worker, marital and family therapist, and hypnotherapist with extensive training in complex trauma, grief, and themes of separation. She has developed a series of creative, arts-based techniques for grief counseling with children, families, teachers, and helping professionals. Lies has more than a decade of experience in crisis and disaster response in schools and communities and has authored several books on understanding grief and loss in children and families, supporting children undergoing cancer treatment and palliative care, helping children cope with anxiety in times of war and terrorism, and answering children’s questions about death in their own language. She coordinates and teaches the Postgraduate Program in Grief and Loss Counseling at PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts, maintains an active private practice, and provides training for grief counselors and first responders in several countries. She was the first professional learner to be awarded the Certification in Grief Therapy as Meaning Reconstruction by the Portland Institute.



Sharma, P.

Prageeta Sharma is the author of six collections of poetry; including her most recent collections *Grief Sequence* (2019) and *Onement Won* (2025) both out from Wave Books. She is the founder of the conference *Thinking Its Presence: An Interdisciplinary Conference on Race, Creative Writing, and Artistic and Aesthetic Practices*, a recent recipient of the 2025 NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, and is currently the Henry G. Lee '37 professor of English at Pomona College. She is currently working on a memoir about multiple spousal losses and racial grief.



van Wielink, J., MA, PGCert (Didactics)

Jakob van Wielink is a leadership coach for executives and their organizations in times of transition. He is the founder of the application of secure base philosophy in coaching, therapy, and counseling. Since 2017, he has been a partner at De School voor Transitie (The School for Transition), which he initiated. Together with a dedicated team of senior trainers and coaches, he designs leadership programs. Jakob is also a faculty member at the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition. In addition, he is a member of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement, a group of international leaders in the field of loss and grief. Jakob is the author of many works on leadership, transition, loss, and grief, including four books published by Routledge. These include a volume in the series in *Death, Dying, and Bereavement* edited by Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD. His latest book, *The 5 Laws of Transition*, will be published by Routledge in the summer of 2026.



Vaughans, D. C., PhD, LPC-S

Doris Vaughans is a licensed professional counselor and supervisor in Alabama and Georgia and the owner of the Tuscaloosa Center for Cognitive Therapy. She serves as the Associate Director of Embedded Counseling at The University of Alabama, is a faculty member at the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, and an Adjunct Professor at the University of West Alabama, where she teaches grief counseling. A former registered nurse with more than 22 years of experience in hospice and palliative care, Dr. Vaughans has counselled over 2,000 individuals and families navigating grief and loss. She is a nationally recognized speaker who provides professional trainings, consultation, and presentations on grief, bereavement, and end-of-life care for clinicians, educators, and healthcare professionals.

