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A story about the visionary behind this project.

Yves Berthiaume's father died when Yves was twelve years old. His mother then took over managing the family business, Berthiaume Funeral Home, while raising her six children. Yves was "the class clown" and the consummate comedian. He was more interested in sports and entertaining peers than in studying and academics. As his high school years came to a close he was informed by his guidance counsellor that he was not suited for college. This was an eye opener! He wanted to be a funeral director and run the family business. Yves says "Had it not been for the hard work and dedication of my teachers, I would not have made it to college." The teachers took a special interest in him, and encouraged him to work extra hard to realize his goal. Yves learned on a personal level the value of a good teacher-student bond.

As a funeral director, Yves encountered children who experienced the death of a loved one and wondered if there was value in having students tour the funeral home. He outlined a tour of the funeral home that included a question and answer period which allowed students to openly discuss life and death. After several discussions with the local school boards and trustees, the funeral home tours came to fruition. In fact, they have become a regular part of the school activities. One winter when field trips were scaled back, the





Loss, Grief and Growth

Many students are confronted with one or more life-changing events involving loss and grief while they are in school:

- their own serious illness or physical injury or that of a family member;
- a family member with a chronic or degenerative condition;
- family or community violence;
- separation, divorce, and remarriage;
- death of a relative, friend, classmate, neighbour, or teacher;
- loss of a friendship – moving to a new neighbourhood, city, province, or country;
- awareness of violence, global poverty, war, disasters, etc., that generate a sense of helplessness causing intense and free-floating grief.

Grief

Historically, grief was considered something that a person needed to “get over,” and the goal was to “sever the ties with the deceased.”

Today we realize that grief is a process of adapting to a new world in which the person now lives – one without the deceased loved one. Although difficult, grief is a normal, desirable, and healthy response to loss.

Grief is a “whole person experience,” so responses may include:

- **Feelings/emotions** - e.g., anger, sadness, guilt, fear, loneliness, worry, surprise, disbelief, increased sensitivity, wondering ‘How can I live without...?’, shock, helplessness, depression, numbness, insensitivity, concern about being treated differently from others
- **Thoughts** - e.g., inability to function normally or think clearly, inability to focus, inability to complete homework, confusion, nightmares

Death

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Children of all ages are very sensitive to the world around them. They look at life and death and try to understand what it is about. They witness a great deal of death in the media (e.g. on news broadcasts, films, and television). They may be left with the impression that violent death is normal. They pick up nuances and overtones of events and conversations even if they do not fully understand them. When children are faced with tragedy in their lives they may not have role models on which to rely. They recognize that these topics make the adults around them uncomfortable and hesitate to ask questions. Children may be shocked and overwhelmed by their strong emotional response to loss if no one has ever told them that it is normal to be upset, confused, and sad.

- Family and friends can be a great source of support to the healing process offering comfort, advice, and understanding. They can check in with the person, be a supportive presence, provide a listening ear, and help create a safe place. There are also associations (teen help lines), professionals (school counsellors, psychologists), and institutions (faith communities, medical institutions) can be of assistance. Provincial and national funeral services associations also offer information and services.

Students can learn to grow from a personal loss by:

- understanding the cyclical nature of life and the universality of death;
- developing ways of expressing the feelings and realizing that pain shared is pain diminished;
- understanding that when people die we can actively commemorate their lives;
- learning terminology that represents reality in loss situations and developing clear language that helps them name their feelings as they wonder about and discuss these situations;

- understanding that people grieve in their own ways, and that there are differences in the way people handle losses;
- recognizing and respecting the customs and beliefs of different cultures;
- understanding that help is available and that it is okay to seek help in finding ways to go on with life;
- learning how to give and receive social support in loss situations
- developing sensitivity to the needs of grieving and of dying people.

the impact of loss or death on a student may lead to:

- impairment of academic performance;
- reduction of the student's attention span;
- behaviour problems such as attention-seeking, acting-out, aggressive or withdrawn behaviour;
- apathy, depression;
- complaints of illness or pain that seem to lack any physical cause.

- people respond in a variety of ways to death and dying;
- various cultures have different beliefs about death;
- people honour the dead in different ways.

Educators know how profoundly a student's home life affects his/her school life. Principals and teachers can also take an active role in establishing communication between the family and the school community.

When a death occurs in the school community, educators should:

- follow school/board protocols;
- use judgement to address the needs of the students;
- seek the advice of support staff in their educational community;
- be aware of their own limitations and refer students to professionals when necessary;
- be aware and responsive to students when tasks used in the class; may evoke memories or other reactions.

School personnel interact with students in a variety of settings. All staff (e.g., administrators, teachers, secretaries, custodians, educational assistants) can support students as they deal with issues of loss and grief, as appropriate.

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- meet with their school team and collaboratively outline each member's responsibility;
- decide how students and classes should be informed;
- inform:
 - school board personnel, including trustees;
 - persons directly associated with the school (teachers, support sta);
 - contact person in ethnic/cultural community;
 - neighbouring schools, if appropriate;
 - previous school(s) attended by student, or school where teacher or sta member worked;
- establish a designate to act as contact with the family. In event of a death, find out family wishes (e.g., if they want members of the school community to attend services). Someone should take the responsibility for finding out what behaviours are appropriate for families from a specific culture and ways people who are not of that belief can react respectfully (e.g., should flowers be sent, should people visit);
- prepare a written announcement. Teachers can share this announcement with students in the classroom. It should be factual, containing the nature of the event, and how the event is related to the school community (e.g., *Mr. Singh, grade 5 teacher died after a lengthy illness*). Do not use the public address system to deliver this information;
- prepare an announcement to give to each family in the school community. This could include: circumstances, the name of the deceased (if applicable), the relation to the school, and other pertinent information (e.g., details of the funeral);
- send a letter or announcement to parents/guardians with information about a loss. The school administrator should follow board protocol regarding such communication. Permission should always be obtained from the grieving family before releasing information. Letters should include any information about ways to send condolences that might be appropriate, e.g., “ *The _____ family has informed us of the following details regarding the funeral arrangements:...*”;
- hold a follow-up staff meeting to share up-to-date information (e.g., meet at the end of the day to evaluate the situation and develop further strategies);
- lower the flag to half-mast when a student or teacher has died;
- identify students and/or staff in need of further support, and arrange for that support through board and/or community resources.

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- promote a climate of openness with opportunities for questions and answers to help classmates respond appropriately;
- foster empathy in the classroom, and assist other students in responding to those in need;
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Teachers should recognize that:

- Grief is the natural response to a loss and is influenced by earlier experiences.
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General Guidelines for Supporting Grieving Students

- **Be a good observer.** A student's behaviour can be very telling about their emotions. Communicate with parents/guardians and support staff. Monitor how students are progressing.
- **Be a good listener.** What grieving students need most is for someone to listen and to understand them – not to talk at them. Instead of worrying about what to say, try to create opportunities for students to talk about their loss. Listen for underlying feelings that they are expressing. Students may not have the vocabulary to express clearly what they are feeling. Don't rush with explanations. It could be helpful to ask exploratory questions rather than to supply set answers.
- **Be patient.** Grief is not always typical or obvious in students.
- **Be honest.** Use simple and direct language. Share accurate information and correct terminology. For example, death is death, not "sleeping." Say "I don't know" when you don't know.
- **Be flexible.** Maintain routines and boundaries, yet provide flexibility around homework and assignments.
- **Be available.** Students need to know that they can count on the adults in their lives to listen to and support them. When students want to talk, give them your undivided attention. This will let them know that you value what they say, and that their grieving is important.
- **Be aware**

Indicators of need for additional support

Educators should be aware of student behaviours that indicate the need for additional support:

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- Introduce the topic of changes by discussing how students feel about the snow melting and it no longer being there at the end

Teachable Moments

- Discuss changes that take place at different times of year. When discussing autumn, note that many aspects of nature change and die. Say: In nature we see patterns of how nature changes as we move from autumn toward winter. Many birds fly south. Some animals prepare winter homes. Some creatures of nature die because they are no longer able to live. If students are ready, connect this idea to death in people.
- Read a story that includes the death of a friend, neighbour, or family member. Invite comments or questions from the students. Be prepared to discuss answers to questions such as:
 - What is death?
 - What happens when a person dies?
 - Why do people die?
 - Who takes care of us when someone dies?
 - How would I feel?
- Read a story about someone who is sick for a long time. Discuss

Young students do not understand fully that death is irreversible, final, universal, or inevitable. They need to know that losses can be made bearable; and that it is healthy to grieve.

Students need assurance that if they are angry, sad, or feel physically sick; they won't be rejected, abandoned, or shamed. Students who consistently react in a strong emotional manner may need additional support.

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- Discuss feelings as a class, using a web/concept map.
- Students individually complete a worksheet showing four picture frames with ovals for drawing faces with different expressions. Remind students that all feelings are acceptable (although some behaviours may not be).
- Discuss attachment and have students make a list of people that they are close to (family members, relatives, neighbours, classmates, etc.).
- Point out that we are sad or disappointed when something happens to break these attachments (e.g., a friend moves away, we change schools, a neighbour dies).
- Read a story about loss such as one about a best friend moving away or an accidental death.
- Discuss the feelings of the child in the story. Point out that it is okay to be sad. Ask: How did _____ feel? How do you know? Why do you think _____ felt _____.
- Role-play to re-enact the story. Guiding questions could include: What would you say or do if you were _____? What would you say or do to comfort _____?
- Brainstorm names of people who are available to help and describe how these people can help. Have students share an experience of a time when they helped or were helped by someone. Point out that the pain of experiencing a death gets easier if we can talk about it.

- Discuss people who can help you when you need it. On a worksheet showing four boxes students draw and/or write about people who can help when you are upset or frightened. Develop a large graphic organizer with the class to show a selection of the people/groups who are available when they need help. Student volunteers can suggest times when some of these people helped them.
- Make a class bouquet of good wishes – paper flowers with wishes written or drawn on them.

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Teachable Moments

- Ask open-ended questions: What is loss? What does loss mean to you? What are different kinds of loss that people have? How might somebody feel if... Have students complete statements such as “I feel sad when...”; “I feel upset when....”
- Talk about how it is okay to feel sad at one moment, and happy at another. Students make paper puppet pals with a happy face on one side and a sad face on the other. They use the puppets to express feelings and role-play.
- Discuss ways we remember someone we miss (e.g., through pictures, gifts received, videos, special places, talking about them). Brainstorm helpful ideas in a grief and loss situation. Have students create a collage: “I Remember...” or “How to Help Someone Who Feels Sad.”

- Have students draw or write about their own happy memories of a friend or relative who died. Plan a memorial to commemorate the death. Students could bring in pictures of people they would like to remember and share why they were special.
- Create a memory book/box to help students keep memories alive and close to them; include objects, photographs, etc. Students write a happy memory message for the memory book or box.
- Go for a nature walk and spend time reflecting on loss and grief. Plant seeds and watch them grow. Be creative with containers. Plant a tree in remembrance of the loss.
- Explain how grief affects the body and mind and how to cope with it.

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- Ask students what attachment means. Together, decide on a definition (*a feeling that binds one to a person or thing*).
- Ask students to think about all the people, places, and things that are important to them. Using concentric circles with ME in the centre circle, students write about or draw people places or things important to them. The circle closest to the centre should reflect who/what is closest to them.
- Invite them to share their work, guided by questions such as:

Teachable Moments

- Students can explore feelings through the Arts. They could draw, sculpt, or use other creative media to illustrate their feelings. They could create a collage: “I Remember...” or “How We Can Help Someone Who Feels Sad.” Some might prefer to use drama or role play to express ideas about feelings.
- Plan a “Memory Day” when students bring in mementos of people they would like to remember and share why the people were special.
- Create a memory book/box to help students keep memories alive and close to them while at the same time allowing them to move on and create new and healthy relationships. Students illustrate a happy memory they experienced with this special person.
- Go for a nature walk and spend time reflecting on loss and grief. Plant a tree or a garden in remembrance of the loss.
- Explain to students that physical activity can be a good outlet when experiencing loss and grief. Have the class participate in physical activity, such as a soccer game or relay race.
- Discuss sad situations which a friend or classmate could be

- Use a variety of forms of writing, including journals, to express their feelings, clarify their ideas, ask questions, and record thoughts/sayings. If appropriate, respond to journal entries. Have students share their ideas/feelings in a letter or a sympathy card, even if it is not sent.
- Discuss and practise, through role-play, how to make a phone call, knock on the door, or what to say in the school yard the first time you see a friend after they have had a significant loss. Point out that it is not necessary to do a lot of talking in these situations. Just say “I’m sorry” and be yourself. You might say a few words about how you feel or talk about your favourite memory of that person or a special time you shared.
- Make a Good Grief book in which each student writes a suggestion for helping themselves or someone else during periods of grief (e.g., taking a walk with a friend). The book could be done in poetic form with illustrations.
- Talk about why it is important to be a good listener and to keep in touch with a bereaved friend. Students can collaborate as a class to list simple practical ways to help, such as walk with the friend to school, bring homework to them.

- Read a poem about loss. Ask: Why was the poem written? What kind of loss/pain was experienced?
- Students write a poem to express personal loss or feelings that might be experienced in a situation of loss.
- Plan a memorial to commemorate a loss in a positive way. Students could illustrate a happy memory they experienced with this special person. They could include stories or photographs. Some students might create a memorial webpage, an electronic tribute involving peers, or a computer slide-show including images that speak to loss and grief. This tribute could be presented at a school assembly. • •
- Explain to students how physical activity can be a good outlet when experiencing loss and grief. Encourage students to make a list of appropriate physical activities. As a class, choose an activity that they can organize and participate in.
- Brainstorm names/titles of people who are available in times of trouble and describe how these people can help. Invite students to share an experience when they helped or were helped by someone. Students can research community services and compile information into a booklet. Working in small groups, they write and illustrate one page of this helpful booklet.
- As a class, compile a reading list of books/movies that include characters who dealt with death and grief. Discuss the ways that these characters worked through the grief process.
- Have students write a letter or a story to express thoughts and feelings. Others could create a sympathy card, writing a message inside. Share some examples of appropriate sympathy cards and messages with them.
- Invite students to survey their family members about how death and grieving are respected in their faith tradition and culture. Students decide how they will share the information.

- Share the story of Christopher Reeves and his limited physical health after the accident which left him a quadriplegic or people limited by Parkinson's disease, such as Michael J. Fox or the late Pope John Paul II. Discuss how loss can be experienced through
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Students are supported by teachers who remember that relationships are a central concern and loss of peer respect is a source of anxiety.

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- There is no right way to express sympathy to people who have experienced the death of a loved one, but it does show respect to the family when you care enough to respect their beliefs. Together list some of the faith traditions with which students are familiar.
- Working in small groups, students research to collect data about beliefs associated with death as held by one or more of these faith traditions. They can research information on:
 - understanding the nature of death
 - beliefs about the afterlife, reincarnation, etc.
 - ritual celebrations and practices about death and funerals
 - mourning practices and ways of supporting others in time of loss.
- Students can incorporate video clips, electronic slide presentations, charts and diagrams, drama, and/or mock interviews into their presentations. Encourage them to be respectful yet creative and remind them that this is not a time for humour or critical comparison.
- Student groups make presentations to the class.
- Students write an entry in their journals, reflecting on the importance of understanding and respecting the diversity of ways in which various cultures and faith traditions experience the grieving process associated with the death of a loved one.

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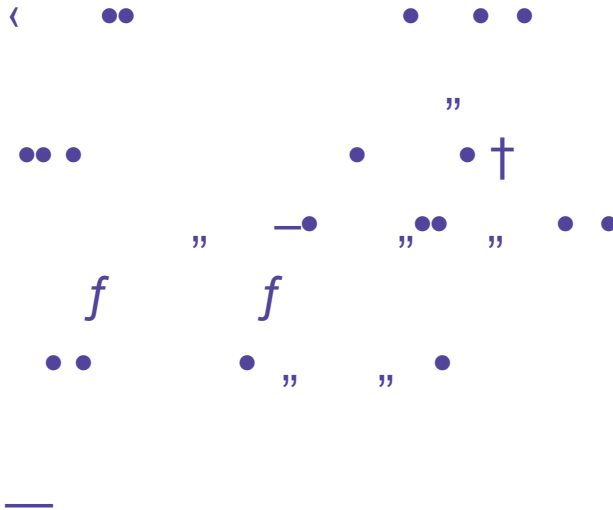
Teachable Moments

- Students might draw, sculpt, or use other creative media to illustrate their feelings. Have students create a collage/poster titled “I Remember....”
- Invite a local elder or spiritual leader to the classroom to talk about the role of their culture, spirituality, and community with regards to the healing process.
- Have students reflect on: What is grief? How do people deal with grief in your culture? How does your culture facilitate mourning? What are some of the various ways in which individuals suffer loss and grief? Have students choose music that reflects their feelings. They might compose a piece of music (instrumental or with lyrics).
- Plan a memorial to commemorate a death. Have students bring in pictures of people they would like to remember and have them share why these people were special.
- Students could create a memory book/box or an electronic presentation. Each person in the class could contribute a “memory” message. Some could create a computer slide-show including images that speak to loss and grief that could be presented at a school assembly. As an alternative, students could participate in a social networking site that pays tribute to the friend or classmate.
- Explain to students how physical activity can be a good outlet when experiencing loss and grief. Encourage students to participate in physical activity such as a staff/student soccer game. They could list physical activities that might be good outlets for individual students to participate in.
- As a class, prepare a suggested reading list that might include:
 - texts that provide examples of how characters had to respond to change and did so in a positive way. Students discuss their responses.

- ction texts about someone who has died. Students share feelings and thoughts about how to deal with death and grief.
- non- ction texts that demonstrate young people who approached others to cope with feelings after a tragic accident. Students compile a list of community agencies.
- Students write a poem or essay on the healing e ects of forgiveness and the harmful e ects of guilt.
- Brainstorm people who are available to help in times of trouble and describe how these people can help. Invite students to share an experience when they helped or were helped by someone. ey research the supports available in the community for people who have experienced di erent types of loss and grief:
 - the death of a loved one;
 - a missing child;
 - a chronically ill person;
 - a tragic accident.
- Share the story of Christopher Reeves and his limited physical health after the accident which left him a quadriplegic or people limited by Parkinson's disease, such as Michael J. Fox or the late Pope John Paul II. Discuss how loss can be experienced through illness that does not necessarily lead to death.

To better understand the child's culture and to identify ways in which the school community can best support both the child and family, educators could ask questions such as:

- How do people in this cultural community demonstrate their feelings of grief?
- What things will people in this cultural community be doing to support the family right now? Over the next few months?
- What is expected of the student at home during this time? At the funeral/memorial? In the coming year?
- How do we best offer our support to the family? Is it appropriate to send flowers? cards? letters? to visit the home? to attend the funeral?
- Is it acceptable for students or teachers to come to the funeral/memorial?
- What is expected of children who attend?
- What is the proper attire to wear to the funeral/memorial? Is there anything to be aware of in advance?



Resources

Included are a few of the many resources available for teachers and students on the subjects of loss, grief, and growth. Consult your board or local librarians and/or the Internet for further suggestions.

For Teachers

Publications

Christ, Grace Hyslop. *Healing Children's Grief: Surviving a Parent's Death from Cancer*. Don Mills ON: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Eaton Russell, C. *Living Dying: A Guide for Adults Supporting Grieving Children and Teenagers*. 2007.

Goldman, Linda. *Breaking the STi**ts***

- Hindmarch, Celia. *On the Death of a Child*. UK: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2010.
- Holmes, Joan Schweizer, et al. *Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers*. Portland, OR: The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1998.
- Hospice Calgary. *Good Grief. Supporting the Bereaved Student: A Resource Guide for Educators*.
- Kanyer, Laurie. *25 Things to Do When Grandpa Passes Away, Mom and Dad Get Divorced, or the Dog Dies: Activities to Help Children Heal After a Loss or Change*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, 2003.
- Klicker, R. L. *A Student Dies, A School Mourns: Dealing with Death and Loss in the School Community*. Taylor & Francis Group, Florence, KY, 2000.
- Ross, Cheri Barton. *Pet Loss and Children: Establishing a Healthy Foundation*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Saunders, L. *What We Don't Discuss: A Teacher's Guide to Death and Dying*. Pacific Edge Publishing. Gabriola, BC, 2007.
- Silverman, Phyllis Rolfe. *Never Too Young to Know: Death in Children's Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Silverman, Phyllis & Kelly, Madelyn. *A Parent's Guide to Raising Grieving Children: Rebuilding Your Family after the Death of a Loved One*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2009.
- Sorenson, Julia. *Overcoming Loss: Activities and Stories to Help Transform Children's Grief and Loss*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008.
- Wells, Rosemary. *Helping Children Cope with Grief and Loss*

Wolfelt, Alan. *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2001.

Yeomans, Ellen. *Lost and Found: Remembering a Sister*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, 2000.

Websites

Kids Help Phone (sections on coping with grief and loss)
<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca> or talk to a phone counselor at 1-800-668-6868)

PBS Kids: Dealing with Death: So Many Questions
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/index.html>

KidsHealth: When Somebody Dies
<http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/somedie.html>
Somebody in My Friend's Family Died. What Should I Do?
http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/friend/family_friend_died.html

Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood: Family Communications: Helping Young Children with Death
<http://www.fci.org/viewproject.asp?ID=%7BEE8B56D3-08CF-44E6-BEA7-3D2B31407AB4%7D>

Films

Blizzard. DVD. LeVar Burton. 2003. Toronto: Knight'scove Entertainment.

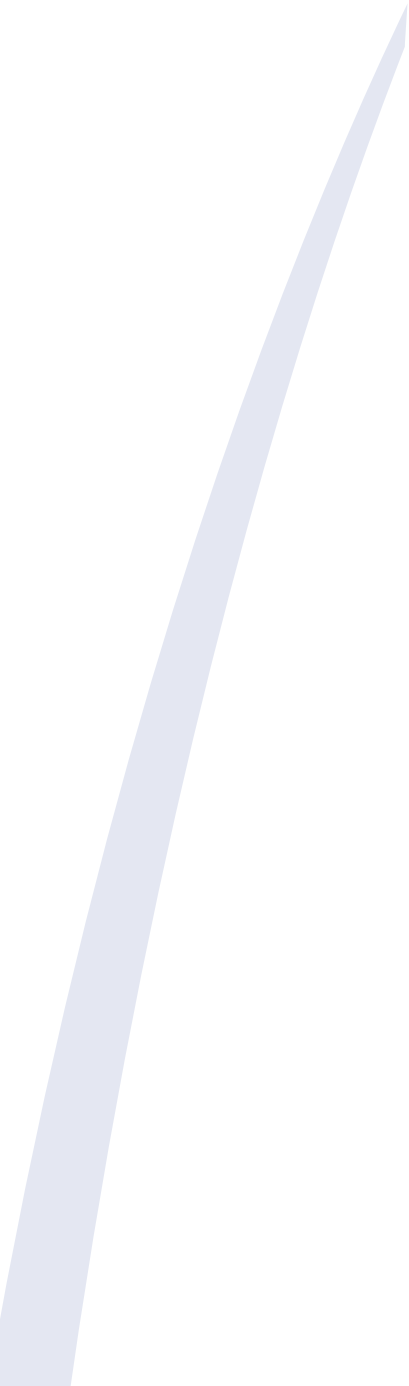
Carved from the Heart: a portrait of grief, healing, and community. DVD. Ellen Frankenstein and Louise Brady. 1997. USA: Fanlight Productions.

Fly Away Home. DVD. Carroll Ballard. 1996. New York: Columbia Pictures.

e Lion King. DVD. Roger Allen and Rob Minko . 1994. Los Angeles: Walt Disney Feature Animation.

Lorenzo's Oil. DVD. George Miller. 1992. Hollywood, CA: Universal Pictures.

Sleepless in Seattle. DVD. Al Pacino. 1994. Los Angeles: Warner Bros. Entertainment.



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