



LUMUNOS

FAITH & LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

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Relationships in Transition

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Doug Wysockey-Johnson

My teenage daughter's favorite statement to me is "You just don't understand!" (I'm choosing to go with just one exclamation point here, but it would probably render the sentiment more accurately to add two or three more.)

Wrong!

I think to myself. I know her almost better than anyone. I know her birthright gifts, her tendencies, I know how she acts when she is under stress or feeling hurt. I know what her silence means, and how she will act in a group. I've been watching her since day one. I understand her.

Right!

I think, later, after cooling off a bit. I don't know what it is like to be a 16-year-old girl in today's world. I don't know her innermost secrets, or what she thinks about when she lies in bed at night. I don't know all her fears and I don't know the deepest longings of her heart. How many times since day one has she surprised me? Ultimately, she is right. I don't fully understand her. She is a different person now than when she was 2 or 6 or 12. She is changing, and I am changing, and the space between us is changing.

On another occasion, and speaking about a different type of relationship, my father said to me: "I've had three different marriages, all with the same woman." The point being, throughout the years he has

changed. My mother has changed. The relationship looks very different now than it did decades ago. Even after 60-some years of marriage, he was acknowledging that he didn't fully know my mom. They both had changed many times through the course of their relationship.

Change is built into the very nature of our relationships. It makes our connections dynamic and exciting and challenging. I'm no physicist, but I'm pretty sure that when two entities are both in motion, there is energy that is created. And sometimes explosions. Change in our relationships will do that.

A New/Old Way to Look at Our Relationships

I've recently begun to look at my many different relationships through a singular lens. The lens is actually a value, one that Lumunos has been embodying for many years. Put simply, the value is that each of us is gifted and 'called' to make a positive difference in the world. As a faith-based organization, we believe that God calls each of us to use these gifts to make the world a little more the way God would like it to be. Because this simple value is anything but simple to enact through the course of a lifetime, we need each other to help figure out what that means.

What if we understood that each of the people we are in relationship with—our friends, parents, coworkers, children and spouses—has a calling to live out in the world? And what if our role is to support that calling in ways appropriate to the relationship? It is important to remember that it is their life and their call, not ours. But we have a role to play. In ways small or large the question we can ask, even as our relationships change is this: How can I help this person live a life of meaning and purpose?

This is not going to look exactly the same in our various relationships. Our interaction with a coworker is different than it is with a parent or child. With an aging parent it could mean affirming their efforts to find meaningful activity in spite of health issues, or helping them

find the living situation that enables them to live as fully as possible. With my daughter, helping her find the college that will nurture her calling is a part of this role. Seen through the lens of a parent or supervisor, even setting boundaries and holding people accountable can be a way to support their calling.

As our relationships change, what that care looks like will probably change, too. But the question remains the same: How can I help support this person in living with meaning and purpose? How can I support their call?

In This Issue

Our theme this year at Lumunos is *Change and Transition*. In this issue of our newsletter, you will read various writers reflecting on how change impacts our relationships. In future newsletters, we will be looking at how change impacts other aspects of our lives. And on our retreats and through our online resources, we want to explore with you what it means to be spiritually well in the midst of change. I hope you can join us on a retreat or one of our monthly online LumZoom calls as together we look at the changes in our lives.

“ In ways small or large the question we can ask, even as our relationships change is this: How can I help this person live a life of meaning and purpose? ”

Doug Wysockey-Johnson is the Executive Director of Lumunos. He lives with his family in Richmond, VT, and can be reached at doug@lumunos.org.

Your Threads Have Come Undone: A Letter to a Grieving Husband

By Kao Kalia Yang

Dear Jim,
I don't know you. I've learned of you just today. Your brother Kou called me up out of the blue. He's a good friend, but we haven't talked in years. He told me that your wife has died. It was a rare form of cancer that killed her. He told me that you're a year younger than him. This makes you and me very close in years, products of the same culture, the same times.

You don't know me. I'm a stranger here to share your grief, as if grief is something that many shoulders can steady. I know, though, that you are in your own cyclone, captive to the winds that rage around you, the gaping hole that sucks you up.

Your brother has asked me, a writer from our community, to find words that may comfort your heart. All I have is my own experience of grief and the lessons I've learned. I share the following experiences of my life in the hopes that it will help you travel through yours.

It begins with a love story, perhaps not so unlike your own. You're walking with someone you like. The wind picks up. The

clouds roll in. The sky rumbles with hunger. Soon, lightning is flashing across the sky. The sun is gone. The world is gray. Rainfall, heavy and strong. You find yourself holding hands, running through the storm. There is nowhere to hide. You end up hiding in yourself and each other because the world has grown wet and wild and you are both scared.

When at last you get home, after you've dried yourselves, you laugh from the adrenaline of your flight in the gray. You know you've flirted with danger, and perhaps each other. No matter how young or how old, in that moment, you know that life would be dangerous. You realize that somehow you were braver together than apart.

My love story, like yours, led to marriage. I found myself in a



Continued on page 4

Conversations: Continued from page 3

shared life, planning a shared future. Late at night, when the world had grown quiet and the busyness of the day dimmed, we both looked out our bedroom window, a square full of sky, starlight and moonlight mingling, airplanes and shooting stars shifting across the high heavens. We talked of the future. We whispered of babies. There in that talk, without our knowing, we planted our first seeds of grief together.

My husband and I were very much looking forward to having a baby. Nineteen weeks into that pregnancy, our baby died. He was delivered, a small weight across my palm, limbs loose, fragile skin and bone, a face that looked like mine. In the days after, we went through our lives, a piece at a time, looking for the parts that could hold him, a ghost baby, a dream baby, a baby that was but never will be.

It was autumn. I remember my flowers were beginning to die. The leaves were drying out in the sun. My heart was so heavy I could not find the strength to water them. I decided they would die anyway. What did a few more days of bloom matter?

The autumn passed between moments of life feeling almost normal, me talking to the people I love who loved me, trying to find perspective, and then other moments when I wished I had never met my husband and fallen in love with him, gotten married, gotten pregnant, when I wished I had never delivered a dead baby into the world — a baby the world would never know as mine. Then, I would cry and cry and cry until there were no more tears, until the throbbing in my head grew stronger than the beat of my own heart.

One day, I went outside in cold November. I looked upon my dead plants, pots full of earth and debris, spider webs where once petunias had bloomed. Small snowflakes started falling from the gray skies. The cold air cooled the heat in my chest. I breathed deep and watched as white flakes began covering the world, bit by bit.

My birthday was in December. I could not get up. I was so tired, deep in my bones. I felt I was on water, floating in some dead sea. My husband insisted I take a pregnancy test. I complied only because I did not have the will to argue.

I was pregnant that December. By late August a little girl entered my life. I was pregnant two Decembers after that. By late August, two little boys had entered my life.

From somewhere in the high heavens, the places I could not see, far beyond my gaze, there was a future floating down. I was alive, feet on the earth, so I could not outrun that future and slowly it covered me up.

There is, my dear friend, in the heart of every living being, the will to go on.

“ *You will find the strength you need to continue putting your feet, one in front of the other, firmly on the earth. Some future somewhere is floating on down.* ”

“ *She is yours to keep for always in memory, laughing and living, loving and well. She is and will always be an unforgettable part of your love story, your life story.* ”

For all the dark days ahead, for all the love story you’ve lived, the lives you’ve loved, a spark of light, a hope for life grows stronger day by day, night by long night.

You will find the strength you need to continue putting your feet, one in front of the other, firmly on the earth. Some future somewhere is floating on down.

Today, though, is a gift from the past, the final days of your love story as you knew it to be, not as it will always be, but as it once was.

I did not know you. I did not know your wife. All I know is your love story ended long before you were ready, and now you live in a story unfolding. Like a tapestry, *ib daim paj ntaub*, your threads have come undone. I know the hopelessness of holding on, of letting go.

I think more often these days of my living babies than my dead one. I know with more certainty every day that meeting my husband has given me more of life rather than less of it. Still, no love story lasts forever; it doesn’t take forever to be together for always.

Dear friend, she will be your wife long after she is gone. She will be your wife until you go. There is, in this, salvation to be found, my friend from the same generation, my brother from the same culture. She is yours to keep for always in memory, laughing and living, loving and well. She is and will always be an unforgettable part of your love story, your life story.

May your treasured memories be strong and fierce, make you even as it breaks you, in the days and the years ahead.

Your sister and friend,
Kao Kalia Yang

NOTE: This essay was originally published on the On Being website on July 28, 2017. It is printed here by permission of the author.

Kao Kalia Yang is a Hmong-American teacher, public speaker, and writer. She is the author of the award-winning book *The Latecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* and *The Song Poet*, nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award in 2017. She is a graduate of Carleton College and Columbia University’s School of the Arts. Kao Kalia lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her family.



Seasons of Friendship

By Marjory Bankson



In her book *Seasons of Friendship*, based on the Ruth and Naomi story, Marjory Bankson describes four different kinds of friendships: spring is the season of birth, representing friends who nurture our new growth; summer friends stretch our individuality; autumn friends confirm changes we have made; and winter friends walk with us in silence. In the following excerpts, Bankson sets the stage by giving some background on the importance of friendships outside of our primary relationships with family, partners, and careers. She then goes into a story of summer friends.

Invitation

We live in a promiscuous culture in which the quiet support of committed friendship goes largely unnoticed. Yet we long to be known, understood, and received without conditions, so we move from person to person, group to group, looking for a place to be loved. We search for the perfect mate, or we compromise ourselves in a harmful relationship, because we are afraid that no

one can really accept the full range of who we are.

In our transient society we tend to ignore or compromise the very friendships that can support a primary relationship: a marriage, a job, or specially-bonded relationship with a parent or child. Without friends, however, even our primary relationships lose their quality because we lose our capacity to sustain a sole relationship. Without friends, we lose touch with our humanity. The friends who provide space for our individuality—and companionship for the loneliness created by that individuality—also provide a context for self-identity that is essential to being truly alive.

The trouble is that close friendships are hard to nurture and even harder to keep in our transient world. Most of us have learned more about losing friends by moving away than we know about finding new ones or about deepening the friendships we have. I thought that marriage would solve the problem—that I

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Aim Toward Love: A year of loss, learning, and connection

By Matthew Perry



This is a selection from Matthew Perry's book of poetry, *Aim Toward Love*, self-published in 2010, the year of his divorce from his first wife. Matt found that he could still trust in truth, hope, love, friendship, and family, even while dealing with the devastation caused by the ending of his 10-year relationship.

Elevation

I took the longest, steepest path
walking deliberately and teetering
between displacement because I was alone
and familiarity because I was alone,
stepping for connection,
breathing for understanding,
heart beating for peace,
drinking for certainty.
I said let me find five words on this walk,
five words that signify five ideas
that express five ways of being
that mean five ways of staying alive.
At 100 feet, I discovered Truth,

which I knew had seen me that far,
which I knew would see me further,
which I knew, just knew.
At 200 feet, I found Sacrifice,
since the truth had hurt so much,
since I knew it was right to let her go,
since she had let me go, too.
So at 300 feet, there was Reciprocity,
obvious as an outcropping on the cliff above,
offering its gifts in exchange for
observing the first rule of social survival.
At 400 feet, I knew I was near something big,
something so important, like the ground
under my feet that I was missing
because it was there all along, and it was Hope.
And I must admit that what I found at 500 feet
I had actually been saving for the peak
because I knew my destination before I began the journey,
and the word encompassed them both: Love.
I paused because my last step had brought the connection,
because the air I had just inhaled brought understanding,

because the blood just reaching my brain brought peace,
and because I knew it was time for a drink.
I knew then, at the top of the hill,
as I looked back at the path I had climbed,
that these five words are at the heart of all illumination,
all spiritual impulses, all struggle, all survival.
And I had never felt as connected
to the great leaders and nameless followers,
to the truest writers and their truer characters,
to the world's unnamed future millions.
How could I have felt so alone
when the words, the ideas, the ways of being,
and the ways we make it to the next day
are so common and so common to us all?
I finished my drink and smiled, looking down
the five hundred feet of elevation to the path's end,
and thought: Getting down will be simple—
just put one foot in front of the other, and aim toward love.

Flood

With her sitting two seats away,
perpendicular to me,
in the courthouse waiting room,
staring into the distance,
gazing past the chance for small talk,
cauterizing the recent past and the present moment,
I realized that I hadn't lost the last ten years—
I still have those and always will—
I had lost the next forty,
or fifty,
the rest of my life
that was supposed to go this way,
but went that,
and then I realized that I hadn't lost the time itself—
I had lost the idea,
the expectation,
the placidity of the daily flow
when the banks are so defined and certain,
and the ocean so far off and unknowable but welcoming—
and I had gained instead a muddy, roiling flood
pushing outward past banks, not forward toward the sea,
making mud out of time and a mockery of expectations,
and then, just before they called our names,
and we left our seats to walk awkwardly
with others between us like islands, I realized that
this flood will leave the coming years
not ruined and fallow,
but rich and fertile.

NOTE: These poems are from Matthew Perry's book of poetry, *Aim Toward Love*, self-published in 2010. It is printed here by permission of the author.

Matthew Perry is a teacher, tutor, writer, and birder who is about to embark on a year of traveling the world with his wife. He tries to help everyone he meets find ways to express their passions in everyday life. He is hoping to publish his first novel in the next year or two.

Physics

relationships move
according to their own gravity,
finding circuitous orbits
that defy all the formulas
physics can throw at them

Multiplied

My dad said something,
and my mom said something,
and everyone laughed.
Then my stepmom caught my mom's eye,
and they both smiled.
My stepdad saw that and smiled to himself,
I smiled at my dad,
and my sister smiled at me.
That last smile said this: we're so lucky
that it turned out like this, that love was multiplied
when it seemed it would be divided.
What an example: what integrity and courage and will,
what a triumph of love over the eroding, enticing pull of loss.
The force that defines us
is the centripetal force of family,
of shared history, values, and hopes,
of choices that we respect and of respect itself,
and of the power parents possess to shape the world.





Relationships, Human and Holy

Eddie Fischer and wife, Cailee, on their wedding day

Through the years, Lumunos has remained vibrant in an ever-changing world because of the community of people who have been part of our work. We have been blessed by these “Lumunaries”. Lumunaries are people who embody the values of Lumunos — people who are using their gifts and living their call; people who value authentic relationships and continue to grow spiritually. Lumunaries are also people who have supported Lumunos and advanced our mission in one way or the other.

Eddie Fischer lives in Chicago with his wife, Cailee. Before they were married in 2018, Eddie attended the Chicago Men’s Retreat. He went reluctantly, but his experience at the retreat was not what he expected; in fact, it was far more meaningful during this time of transition in his life. At the Lumunos Bocce Ball Fundraiser in October of 2018, he shared a reflection on his experience. Below is a synopsis of his speech:

Though I went to the Lumunos Chicago Men’s Retreat willingly, it honestly was not with genuine interest or openness. I essentially went because roommates and friends were going. I went as a way of showing I support these types of events, when in reality I would rather be pretty much anywhere else.

It just so happened that the retreat corresponded to a time in my life of great change. I was “lost in process”, so to speak. I was getting married soon. Coming into the weekend I was fairly overwhelmed by the existential thoughts surrounding being engaged and eventually becoming a married man. I didn’t want to engage with those thoughts because it scared me how lost I was. *Am I ready? Do I really love my soon-to-be wife? Spiritually, am I mature enough to make this decision?*

I felt very lost, both spiritually and personally. I had been neglecting the conversations I needed to have with The Father—who I call Papa (a reference to the book *The Shack* by William P. Young) as a way of making my connection to God more intimate.

When times get scary, confusing, and require more work and focus, I often run away by using my frustrations with God as a crutch

instead of an intimacy-building place for God and myself. Essentially, I choose to focus the blame on the work Papa isn’t doing, when in reality I am not even giving Papa a chance to carry that load with me.

In the midst of it all, I arrived at the retreat and was surrounded by a variety of men: young and old, married, divorced, dating, and single. Some of the men were similar in life experience to me, while others seemed to have experienced all of life’s many twists and turns. Oftentimes, I would get lost in thought with God during our group sessions when listening to men who were 30–60 years older than I. These men were shedding light on the real facts of life: none of us have it perfectly together and all of us need brothers and communities around us to encourage us in the mundane, scary, twisting turns of life. Papa spoke to my lost nature in that truth.

I skipped a few group sessions here and there to take much needed alone time with Papa as a way for me to reconnect aspects of my identity and purpose in this season of my life with those parts that felt lost. I spent time in my cabin, in front of a window overlooking Lake Geneva, rambling to God about what I really hoped for from this life-changing year ahead.

I wrote in my new journal, which I specifically started that weekend as a fresh start to this new adventure of engagement, a personal statement of the character I wished to have coming out of the year ahead.

*Being a man of the details (not be negligent to the little things that matter).
Pouring into new and old communities and helping them be stronger.*

I was inspired to seek a newness out of this season, although aspects of my life felt like they were coming to a close.

God spoke through the lives of those men around me, in the simple and real community built that weekend—we’re all along this journey of life together, and we all need getaways to reveal and remind us of this truth.

LOAVES & FISHES

Remember or honor those you love with a special gift to Lumunos in their name.

**In Memory of all those
who have gone**
Diana Kenyon

In Memory of Tim Anderson
Peggy Eiss

In Memory of Gloria Antworth
Charnley & Ronald Marsden

In Memory of Rev. Shelly Baer
Rev. Linnea Turner

In Honor of Marjory Bankson
Susan & Peter Heldman

**In Memory of Marjory and Peter
Bankson**
Gwynna Taylor

In Memory of Dick Broholm
John & Amy Anderson

In Memory of Dick Broholm
Thomas Ott

In Memory of Rev. Richard Broholm
John & Betsy Brink

**In Memory of Gordon & Mary
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In Honor of David Cubbage
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In Honor of Dan Davis
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In Memory of Ted Dornseifer
C.S. Dornseifer

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Jean Dunbar

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Judith & Douglas Armstrong Bowers

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In Memory of Ivan Fahs
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In Memory of Bruce Hall
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Bill Hill

In Honor of Maya Lou Hill
Betsy Perry

In Honor of Maya Lou Hill
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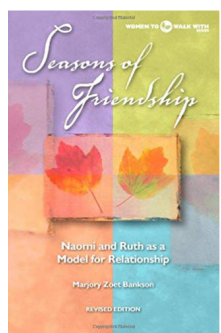
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**In Honor of Laurel Van Ham
& Tom Pappas**
Bill Johnson & Carter Echols

In Memory of Lauren Ann Wallace
Margo Druschel

In Memory of Margaret Ruth Zinn
Wayne & Rebecca Liskey





would marry Peter Bankson and have a friend for life. I do have a friend in Peter, but that friendship is not enough! I have discovered that different seasons in my life require different kinds of friendship and different levels of companionship. For many of us, learning how to love a friend is more complex than finding an ideal mate!

This book is about friendship and about being a friend, but there is no advice or easy formula here. Rather I

have taken the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi as a polarizing lens through which we can look at our lives. Through the story of these two ancient women, I hope to bring focus and clarity to some of the dynamics that assist or hinder friendship.

The connection between my own search for a close friend and the biblical story of Ruth began quite unconsciously twenty-five years ago. Like many other couples of our generation, Peter and I used Ruth's pledge to Naomi as the basis for our marriage vows: "Where you go, I will go." We didn't think much about the relationship between Naomi and Ruth which lay behind this vow; we never discussed how one-sided Ruth's promise was. Because it was my role to shape the wedding ceremony, I just chose Ruth's pledge as the ideal statement of my own intention to give up my past for our future together. As we turned from the altar, the minister read Ruth's pledge:

"Whither thou goest, I will go;
and where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
thy people shall be my people,
thy God, my God." (Ruth 1:16 KJV)

The statement was true for us, and it still describes the intent of our marriage, but the process of going and lodging and finding "our people" and discovering the nature of God has been varied and difficult, rich and rewarding. The process has brought me back to the story of Ruth and Naomi with different eyes. I now see that God's story, as it is revealed in the lives of Ruth and Naomi, is a story of friendship after the conventional supports of marriage and family are stripped away by death. It is a story of how two women began to experience God's presence in a way that gave them value and worth—at a time when the culture regarded women as property and mere incubators for children. The Book of Ruth is also a parable of God with us in daily life, of God as friend.

Summer Friends

Leaving home and claiming the separateness of "I" from the inevitable fusion of a family (childhood or adult) marks the season of summer for our own friendships. When we reach beyond the comforts of home, of known roles and religion, toward an unknown summertime landscape, then we reach for friends who will meet us in our travels and cause us to stretch for something more...something far away, even alien. External restlessness usually signals an internal change. We may feel hungry or thirsty, even when there is enough literal food for sustenance. Indeed, we may try to fill that spiritual hunger with physical food and notice that we are gaining (or losing) weight during an intense summer period.

For some, an internal summer season comes when children grow up and mothers begin to ask, "What's next?" For others, marriages dry into routines and jobs lose their challenge. We begin to search the bookshelves for other people's stories to stretch our minds or disturb our souls. And those solitary figures cross our paths with strangeness, reach out a dry hand, or meet our glance with a piercing glare. Summer friends come singly, not in pairs.

Summer means finding a way to live in a strange land. It means strengthening ego boundaries and forging ahead with an inner will, rather than depending upon approval or support from a mothering figure. A summer friend is more partner than parent. My own summertime friends have called me beyond the conventional safety of marriage and teaching. Each one has challenged me to find a new language of expression and a new structure for offering my gifts.

After two years of teaching in Alaska, I decided to go back to school for a graduate study in history. I was longing for something to fill the terrible hunger and thirst for...what? I told myself that I wanted something more to feed my mind than teaching eighth-graders, but I knew I also felt a thirst for some other kind of community, for books and for the arid world of ideas instead of the fleshy reality of so many people living close together on the Army post. Perhaps, too, I was experiencing an end to my romantic dream that marriage would complete me without further inner work (I didn't even know there was such a thing then). My inner world developed a stormy kind of loneliness, fed by books and ideas, crackling with energy.

Through a connection from my college roommate, I met a summer friend. Sheila was teaching economics at the University of Alaska. This tall Jewish woman from New York embodied difference in Fairbanks, challenging the values implied by Peter's Army career with her anti-war remarks, and inviting my friendship out of her own loneliness. Her questions helped me to find language for my own opinions, and her presence validated an intellectual part of my life that was submerged in the homey closeness of my spring friendships. Sheila was obviously different from me, and that helped me to identify my own boundaries, to experience myself as "I" instead of part of a "we."

As a summertime friend, Sheila did not stay in my life as part of the pattern of friends who have continued to sustain my sense of self. Perhaps summer friends are more likely to connect deeply and then slip out of our lives because they are not rooted in an on-going community. Instead, summer friends are likely to be solitary figures who meet us at critical times of stretching boundaries and risking beyond the safe dyads of spring. Summer friends belong to a particular time and place, at the edge of one's known past, calling forth unique differences, righting the balance between pairing and person.

NOTE: This article is an excerpt from the 1987 book *Seasons of Friendship: Naomi and Ruth as a Pattern* (available on Amazon). It is printed here by permission of the author.

Marjory Bankson is a published author, working artist, and seasoned spiritual guide. Her books, *Call to the Soul* and *Creative Aging*, present a spiritual template for discerning call at every stage of life. Marjory was president of Faith at Work (now Lumunos) from 1985 to 2001. Now she writes, speaks and facilitates group discernment events around issues of call and transition.

Upcoming Events



Monthly LumZoom Calls

Check www.lumunos.org for dates/times

Appalachian Area Women's Retreat in Newland, NC

April 26-28, 2019

Transitions and Change Mini-Retreat at Montview Church in Denver, CO

June 15, 2019

Transitions and Change Mini-Retreat at UCC Norwell in Norwell, MA

September 28, 2019

Denver Area Men's Retreat

October 4-6, 2019

New England Women's Retreat in Duxbury, MA

October 11-12, 2019

For questions about these or other future Lumunos events, please email becca@lumunos.org.



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FAITH & LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

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"You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through."

— Anne Lamott