

## Cowbells\*

**“Cowbells”**—The way unfinished business is stored and its subsequent effects on a provider’s own grief experience is illustrated by the following personal story.

When I was 4 years old, I attended a preschool program in a community center just across the street from where my family lived. Each morning the children would line up and get a tablespoon of cod liver oil—all from the same spoon! After some indoor games, we were sent outside to the playground. This was an area with a chain link fence separating us from the sidewalk and the street beyond. I could see our building and as soon as we got outside, I would run directly to the fence, stick my little fingers and nose through the fence, and look longingly, yearningly toward my home. The image of my “Mommy” was clearly in my mind, and I missed her and ached to be back with her.

At that same time every day, a junkman with a pushcart filled with old clothes and items he had been collecting came by ringing a cowbell roped to the handlebar of the cart to announce his presence in the neighborhood. The sound of that cowbell and my yearning, grieving feelings became connected.

Throughout my life when I have had aching, grieving feelings come up, the look on my face prompts my wife to ask, Cowbells? And I answer—“Cowbells.”

Throughout the years, a symphony of “Cowbells” has rung out. Every one of us has our “Cowbells.”

They accompany us to the bedside of every patient, to our interactions with counseling or pastoral clients, to parishioners, to staff meetings, to treatment planning, and to every human contact we engage in. As care providers, it is our responsibility to be sufficiently aware of them so that our own *Cowbells do not drown out our clients!*—ask not for whom the Cowbells toll; they toll for thee ... and me!

\*Excerpted from:

Jeffreys, J. Shep (2011). *Helping Grieving People—When tears are not enough: A Handbook for Care Providers, 2nd Edition*. New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis.