



Elizabeth Coplan
Grief Dialogues Virtual Stage Lab

present

GRIEF **DIALOGUES**

The Experience

THE LAB

GRIEF DIALOGUES: The Experience

THE LAB

Produced by:
Elizabeth Coplan

Featuring plays by Paul Atreides, Barbara Blumenthal, Elizabeth Coplan, Donna Hoke, Nambi E. Kelley, Amy Judith Reuben, Leilani Squire, Louisa Vilardi, Tim Woods

With Tyler Bey, Jamey Cheek, Indiana Robinson Dawes, Jeffrey Doornbos, Jeffrey Grover, Georgia Monroe, Erika Vetter, Frank Williams, Amber Walker

Sound
Peter Brucker

Production Design Consultant
Samantha Shoffner

Grief Counselor
Claudia Coenan

Grief Counselor
Corey Kennard

1st Assistant Director
Sarah Stowell

General Manager
Virtual Stage Lab

Director's Associate
Georgia Monroe

Associate Director
Andrew Coopman

Director of Photography
Elizabeth Virkljan

Directed by:
Dani Davis

The Lab for Grief Dialogues: The Experience is produced in agreement with the Screen Actors Guild.

Staff

Audio Engineer

Tim White

Props provided by

Poppins Closet

Production Assistant

Miranda Jones

Production Assistant

Nick Nazarro

Production Intern

Caroline Edmondson

Production Intern

Philbert Qin

B-Camera

Rose Knopper

C-Camera

Roomaline Chemmaly, Anna
Yang

Production insurance provided by
We Make Movies

Plays

Memorial Day by Leilani Squire

with Tyler Bey, Amber Walker, Jeffrey Doornbos

For My Brothers... Whenever I May Find Them by
Nambi Evelyn Kelley

with Amber Walker, Indiana Robinson Dawes, Frank Williams,
Tyler Bey

The Number by Barbara Blumenthal-Erich

with Jeffrey Doornbos, Erika Vetter

Hospice: A Love Story by Elizabeth Coplan

with Erika Vetter, Georgia Monroe

Always and Forever, Jim by Amy Judith Reuben

with Jamey Cheek, Erika Vetter, Jeffrey Doornbos

Lifelines by Donna Hoke

with Amber Walker, Tyler Bey, Frank Williams

You Too by Tim Woods

with Jeffrey Grover, Frank Williams, Jeffrey Doornbos

Fusion by Paul Atreides

with Jeffrey Doornbos, Indiana Robinson Dawes, Frank Williams,
Tyler Bey, Jamey Cheek

Before You Go by Louisa Vilardi

with Jeffrey Grover

Team

Elizabeth Coplan (Creator, Producer, Writer) was a theater kid when being a theater kid was NOT cool, especially in Texas. So, she graduated high school in three years, fled to New York City, and became a struggling actor. When she realized she could not eat AND pay rent at the same time, Elizabeth went to college. After receiving her diploma, she became the managing editor of *Chief Executive Magazine* in New York, and later moved to LA and then to Seattle as a professional services marketer, working for major Seattle-based national firms. In 2001, Elizabeth founded a consulting firm and advised clients like Merrill Lynch and the University of Washington School of Law. As a late-in-life emerging playwright, Elizabeth is known for *The Grief Dialogues* and her recent Off-Broadway play, *"Til Death*. She is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild. Elizabeth lives on Bainbridge Island outside of Seattle where she raised two amazing young men, Spencer and Alexander, with her husband, Scott. Now as empty-nesters, they enjoy producing and investing in quality theater. elizabethcoplan.com and griefdialogues.com

Dani Davis (Director) is an Emmy award-winning writer, a Tony-nominated Broadway producer, a Helen Hayes Award recipient for producing, a critically acclaimed theater director and choreographer, a television producer, and an entertainment entrepreneur. Her Broadway and national tour producing credits include *The Lonesome West*, *Little Women*, *Billy Elliot*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Flashdance*, and Dreamworks' *Shrek* the musical (original and current). For Sony Classical Records and PBS, Dani wrote the libretto (Emmy award), and directed Handel's *Messiah Rocks* (7 Emmy noms), starring LaChanze, Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops. She also directed the national tour. Dani's award-winning regional directing and choreography credits include *Mamma Mia*, *The Full Monty*, *Xanadu*, and *The UMPO Series: Summer Blockbusters*, *Jaws at the White Lotus*, *Rock the Bard*. She is the director of *Cindy of Arc* starring Cynthia Kaplan (Intiman Theatre in Seattle, Baltimore Theater, Philly Fringe and New York) currently playing, raising money for voting and reproductive rights, She was the co-creator and executive producer for the series *Girl Starter* with Al Roker Productions (Discovery networks). Dani produces Broadway-based benefit recording projects, sits on the board of several organizations serving young people, and is a graduate of Duke University. She is the proud mother of two young artists, Noah and Nina, and lives in New York City and Cape Cod. thedanidavis.com

Andrew Coopman (they/he+) (Associate Director) is a director, choreographer, and playwright of Middle Eastern descent. A Drama League Directors Project alumnus and current Artist in Residence with Skeleton Re(Presents), Andrew's work as a director and choreographer has been seen on stages in Chicago, Dallas, Milwaukee, Ithaca, New York City, Seattle and more. Andrew also currently works as the Artistic Associate of The Drama League. Credits include: *The Apollo of Bellac* (Hangar Theatre), *Head Over Heels* (Lakewood Playhouse), Bryony Lavery's *Frozen: A Play* (Cabaret Theater), *Little Women* (Seattle Musical Theater), *Cinderella* (Village Theatre), and *Orfeo y Euridice* (Seattle Opera). Andrew has also worked on multiple national tour remounts for TheaterWorksUSA including *The Magic School Bus*, *Pete the Cat*, and *Charlotte's Web*. Their original work, *TAROT*, will premier at Strawdog Theatre Company in Chicago. Other new work includes *...and then the lightning struck* and *TREESON: A New Eco-Musical*. They will also direct and choreograph the world premier of *Alan Turing and the Queen of the Night* at The Player's Theatre in August 2025. MFA Directing, University of Washington and MA, Educational Theatre, New York University – Steinhardt. Proud SDC member. IG: @arcoopman AndrewCoopman.com

Team

Virtual Stage Lab LLC (General Manager) was created in 2024 as the brainchild of Tony-nominated Broadway composer Paul Gordon and several of his closest colleagues. We saw an opportunity to help develop new works of art in a way that utilizes technology to capture and market pieces for exposure and distribution. We were quickly introduced to Dani Davis and Elizabeth Coplan from Grief Dialogues and told that they might be interested in working within our model to help market their collection of short plays on grief. What has transpired since that initial meeting is nothing short of incredible. VSL has been honored to help capture and share the beautiful stories you are witnessing today. Grief is such a basic human emotion, and art serves as a catalyst for exploring the human condition, so viewing grief through the lens of art is powerful, poignant, and cathartic. VSL is honored to help further the journey of Grief Dialogues as it works to share its healing message with a broader audience.

Elizabeth Virkljan (Director of Photography) is a Cinematographer based out of Brooklyn, NY. She specializes in highly stylized visuals that border on surrealism. Raised in South Florida, her work is deeply inspired by the Southern Gothic and how trauma shapes our visual reality. Her narrative work has played at festivals around the world including Chelsea Film festival, New York Shorts, Sarasota film festival, and Oscar qualifying Doc NYC and Palm Springs Shorts Fest. Elizabeth is a graduate of NYU Tisch, where she spent her undergraduate years working extensively as a nonunion gaffer and Local 52 permitted electrician. In 2021, Elizabeth returned to NYU as their youngest adjunct professor of cinematography to date. As of the Fall of 2024, she became the first woman to teach their titular production safety and set protocol course. She has a great passion for creating safer working conditions for crew both physically and mentally.

Claudia Coenen (Grief Counselor) is a grief counselor and a Thanatologist with a private practice in Hudson, NY. Claudia presents workshops, keynotes and in-service training on coping with grief and discovering resilience to live fully after loss. She is the author of *Shattered by Grief: Picking up the Pieces to Become WHOLE Again* and *The Creative Toolkit for Working with Grief and Bereavement: A Practitioner's Guide*, and the *Karuna Cards*, creative prompts for grief and difficult transitions and *Seasons of Grief: Creative Interventions to Support Bereaved People*, with chapters from 17 therapists, end of life practitioners, artists and poets, including Elizabeth Coplan. thekarunaproject.com

Corey L. Kennard (Pastor, Counselor) is Pastor of Amplify Christian Church and also serves as a national activist in the field of healthcare. He earned a Master's Degree from Ashland Theological Seminary and has been involved in the field of healthcare for over 20 years with over 15 years of experience in the areas of Palliative Care and Hospice. He is a Certified Patient Experience Professional (CPXP) and currently serves in Administration as a Director at one of Detroit's largest hospitals. His work also includes serving as a Faculty Lead for Duke University's Institute on Care at the End Of Life (ICEOL) national training program called, "APPEAL." Corey is a Spiritual Life Coach, Motivational Speaker, and a national Leader and Board Member for several organizations. IG: @non.ebrand @iampastorcorey Email: consultclk@gmail.com

Writers

Paul Atreides (*Fusion*)

Paul Atreides is an author, playwright, and theater critic for EatMoreArtVegas.com. His newest play, *The Last Confession*, was a Finalist in the Carlo Annoni International Play Competition. His 10-minute *Tryst* won its category and placed third overall in Emerald Theatre's 6th Annual competition. *Fusion* was adapted in 2020, and won awards in the Chicago and Las Vegas Film Festivals. His paranormal rom-com novels *Marvin's World of Deadheads*, *Jenna's Gang of Deadheads*, and *Nathan's Clan of Deadheads* make up the World of Deadheads trilogy published through The Wild Rose Press. paul-atreides.com [Facebook.com/paulatreides](https://www.facebook.com/paulatreides)

Barbara Blumenthal-Ehrlich (*The Number*)

Barbara's plays are produced off-Broadway and nationwide in Seattle, Boston, Chicago and more. Her work is developed in NYC at Playwrights Horizons, Second Stage, Rattlestick, Roundabout, Urban Stages; regionally at The Kennedy Center, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Geva, Victory Gardens. Winner: Beverly Hills Theatre Guild Julie Harris Playwriting Award, the Israel Baran Award, and a runner up at the Sundance Playwriting Lab, O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, the Heideman Award and Princess Grace Fellowship. Other honors: nominated for Edmonton's Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Award and honorable mention, The Kilroy list. Plays and monologues published by Smith & Kraus and Applause.

Donna Hoke (*Lifelines*)

Donna Hoke's work has been seen in 48 states and on five continents. She's been nominated for the Primus, Blackburn, and Laura Pels prizes, and is a three-time winner of the Emanuel Fried Award for Outstanding New Play. In its final three years, *Artvoice* named her Buffalo's Best Writer—the only woman to ever receive the designation. Her feature film, *Deadly Wives Club*, recently premiered on Lifetime. Donna also is serving the Dramatists Guild since 2012, is an ensemble playwright at Road Less Traveled Productions, a blogger, *New York Times* published crossword puzzle constructor; and children's and trivia book author. donnaHoke.com.

Writers

Nambi E. Kelley (*For My Brothers... Whenever I May Find Them*)

Nambi E. Kelley is an accomplished playwright and actress, developing multiple Broadway projects. She received The Prince Prize for *Stokely: The Unfinished Revolution* (Jeff Award nomination) and an NNPN commission for her play *Re-Memori* premiering at Penumbra Theatre and WP's Pipeline Festival. Nambi has been a playwright-in-residence at the National Black Theatre, Dramatists Guild, Steppenwolf Theatre, and Goodman Theatre. She adapted Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the latter receiving a Drama League nomination and an AUDELCO Award for Best Production. A writer and co-producer for Peacock's *Bel Air*, her TV credits include *Lady In The Lake*, *Our Kind of People*, and *The Chi*.

Amy Judith Reuben (*Always and Forever, Jim*)

Amy Judith Reuben is a lifelong theater creative with a lengthy career in technical and production that paved the way for her becoming a self-producing playwright, specializing in historical drama set in The District, more commonly known as "Storyville," in New Orleans, LA. Amy is currently writing her first opera libretto, and transforming a full length play into a musical. She is Mom to Shane and Rebekah, and a Kundalini yoga and meditation practitioner/teacher for 25 years. She comes to Grief Dialogues with immense gratitude, sharing her personal story honoring Jim Pickholtz, the love of her life.

Leilani Squire (*Memorial Day*)

Leilani Squire is a member of EST/LA, Playwrights Unit, The Dramatist Guild, alumna of Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive and EST/LA's Ignite Project. She's published in Smith & Krauss' 2023 Best 10-minute Plays and WE/US: Monologues for The Gender Minority. *15 Dead Souls* won Veterans Repertory Theater's inaugural 10-minute play competition. *No Ordinary Mother*, a finalist for *The A Chronicles*, was first read in New York in the spring of 2023. She's Founder and CEO of Returning Soldiers Speak, 501(c)(3), whose mission is to empower veterans, first responders and their families tell their stories to the community through the written word and live theater.

Writers

Louisa Vilardi (*Before You Go*)

Louisa Vilardi is a writer and photographer originally from northern New Jersey where she taught high school English and creative writing for over a decade before moving to the Hudson Valley. Her writing on grief has been featured by *The Huffington Post*, *Scary Mommy*, and *Her View From Home* and her plays have been produced throughout the country. She is a proud member of The Dramatists Guild. LouisaVilardi.com

Tim Woods (*You Too*)

Tim Woods is a novelist and playwright. He's the father of two children, one living and one deceased. He's a long time practicing psychotherapist who lives with his wife of 40 years, Joyce Michaelson.

Jenny Coates (*Poetry*)

Jenny is a poet who finds healing and vitality through her writing, giving voice to both situational and existential grief. She deeply values the connections formed with others who resonate with her work, reminding her that she is not alone in life's complexities. Jenny's poetry has been featured in juried festivals in the Seattle area, including the annual Poetry Corners celebration and Arts Poetica. After living on Bainbridge Island for 20 years, she returned to her roots in NYC following a painful divorce. Her poems appear in several anthologies and literary magazines, including *Meanderings*, *Grief Dialogues: The Book*, and *The Amethyst Review*.

Cast



Tyler Bey is an actor and poet from Atlanta living and working in New York. He's a recent grad of the Fordham theatre program. @tyler.isaiah.bey



Jamey Cheek is a longtime veteran of the stage who has been working in regional theaters across the U.S. Favorite regional credits include Sweeney in Sweeney Todd, Count Carl Magnus in A Little Night Music, The Narrator/Mysterious Man in Into The Woods, Man 2 in Closer Than Ever (Watertown Theater), Dr. Madden/Fine in Next To Normal, Tony in West Side Story, and Huck in Big River.



Jeffrey Doornbos splits his time between New York and California. His credits include: Film/Tv - Elijah in "The Forever Purge", Preston in "A Thousand Miles Behind", Gordy in "From The Head", "Dave", "NCIS:LA", "9-1-1: Lone Star", "Famous In Love", "Rosewood", "Rake", "Hot In Cleveland", "Grey's Anatomy", "Private Practice", the "Law & Order" universe. Theatre - a veteran of "Blue Man Group" (performer/director/creative dev), "Naked" (Berkshire Theatre Group), "Museum of Broken Relationships" (O'Neill Theatre Center), "Rabbit Hole" (Malibu Stage), "Is There Life After High School?" (Dir. Craig Carnelia / York Theatre), among others in New York and regionally. Jeffrey is also a playwright, and screenwriter, and collaborates with his wife, Caroline Diani, on her retail business DIANI.



Jeffrey Grover is a NYC-based actor. Represented by Boals-Winnett & Associates and Ingrid French Management. Recent television: Feud: Capote vs. The Swans, Succession, Daredevil: Born Again, Partner Track, New Amsterdam. Recent film: Alto Knights, Dark Waters, I Feel Pretty, Miles Ahead, The Thaw, The Rite of Spring, Charliebird. Theater: Muse, The Journey, The Whale Play, Leah The Forsaken. Jeffrey conceived, wrote, produced and stars in the new LARRY SILVER series. He recently completed two short films which he wrote and directed, BLINK and I Killed Angela. Member of Actors Equity and SAG-AFTRA. www.jeffreygrover.com



Georgia Monroe (Assistant Director/Actor) is a dancer, singer, actress, choreographer, producer and assistant extraordinaire! She is an Associate Producer with Every Day Dreams The Studio, led by Dani Davis. With Dani, Georgia has successfully produced and assistant directed many shows and projects including: Cindy of Arc, Patten Disregard (the Podcast and LIVE), WBEC Pacific Awards (Honoring Excellence in Business), and UMPO: Jaws at the White Lotus. Favorite performance credits include: The Little Mermaid (The MUNY), Beauty and the Beast (The MUNY), Cabaret (Goodspeed Opera House), Escape to Margaritaville (National Tour), and Rock of Ages (PCLO). In 2020, she graduated from Pace University with a BFA in Commercial Dance.



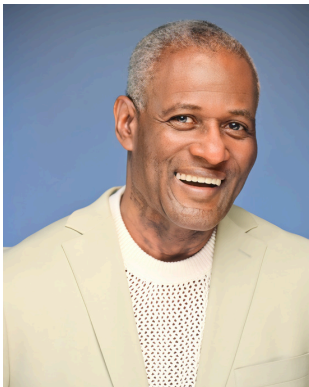
Indiana Robinson-Dawes is a British-Caribbean actor who came to New York to pursue her passion for the arts and train at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her theatre credits include Henry IV part one (dir. Timothy D. Stickney), Smash (dir. Susan Pilar), and Macbeth (dir. Caitlin Morley). Physical theatre/ Dance credit: Dance for Solidarity (dir. Sarah Dahnke).



Erika Vetter has worked on stages and screens across New York, California, Washington, Colorado and Pennsylvania. Favorite credits include: Elizabeth in Teenage Dick (Seattle Repertory), W in Lungs (Really-Really Theatre Group), Soubrette in Émilie (The Flea), Rose in The Flick (Mendocino Theatre Co.), & Rosalind in As You Like It (Merely Players). Film/TV: Only Murders In The Building (Hulu), Somebody I Used To Know (Prime Video). Training: BA, University of N. Colorado; MFA, University of Washington PATP. Gratitude to you all for moving through grief with us. Love to Mr. F. erika-vetter.com



Amber Walker has spent the last few years performing in Seattle and Portland after graduating from the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington (MFA Acting, 2022), and is thrilled to be back home on the east coast in NJ and NYC. Most recently she spent time at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival 2024 season understudying Jane Eyre and Lady Macduff. She is grateful to her mentors, friends, and family for their everlasting love and support.



Frank C. Williams is a New York-based actor, member of Screen Actors Guild. Frank is a US Naval Veteran, Computer System Analyst and studies at Negro Ensemble Theatre Company as well as studying at The Roger Simon Studios which focuses on both contemporary and classical works. Frank has starred in *Law & Order SVU*, *Nurse Jackie*, *Alias*, *Resurrection Blvd.* and NBC's hit *The Blacklist*. Most recently, Frank plays DS Agent John Kendall on *Madam Secretary*. Currently Frank has three Short Films in post production: *Oasis* by Lucie Pottecher, *The Eulogy* by Tracey Evans and *Good Things* by Peter Dolshun, based on the book of the same title by Maryah Greene.

Producer's Note

Thirteen years ago, I experienced three deaths in one year. Although I was more than willing to share those “loss” stories, no one wanted to hear them. Did people think death was contagious? If I told you about my friend’s accident, would that lead to a tragic event among your friends? If I spoke of my father’s cancer, would your father receive the same diagnosis? Death was a taboo subject. I felt silenced. I channeled that silence into writing plays about loss.

I didn’t give up my day job. For me, the biggest reward was knowing I was not alone. After each performance, audience members shared with me their own stories of grief and loss. Those stories ranged from funny to tragic, often in the same sentence. Occasionally the loss was recent. Other times it happened years ago — the grief still lodged in their throats as they named their loved ones and the circumstances around the deaths. This realization was both humbling and inspiring. If my story could foster a community of shared experiences over death and grief, think what the addition of other people’s stories could offer.

I then assembled an evening of curated short plays by a diverse selection of playwrights from across the country. In 2016, I launched my non-profit Grief Dialogues, and began to envision something even more artistic, something bigger, something global.

Last year, in 2023, the Abingdon Theatre bravely interpreted my full length play *TIL Death* under the careful direction of Chad Austin. The reaction? According to the critics, reactions ranged from enthusiastic to appalled with not much in-between.

Almost nightly we were asked to leave the lobby an hour after the curtain call so the theatre could lock up. And nightly we carried our death and grief conversations to the bar next door. It was clear. People wanted to talk about the show, but more importantly, they wanted to share their own loss experiences. We openly spoke the names of the deceased. We laughed. We cried. We shouted, “YOU TOO,” and we embraced each other as friends-in-loss.

Fast forward to today’s performance of *Grief Dialogues: The Experience*. The selected plays and their playwrights are revolutionary and courageous. The playwrights realize the power of their story is even more important when combined with a visionary director, a passionate group of actors, and a devoted crew. Include on and offstage guidance by grief experts, and this theatrical experience becomes more than an interesting night out. It becomes a healthy community engaged in immersive dialogue.

Out of Grief Comes Art.

With love and respect, Elizabeth Coplan
Email: elizabethcoplan@gmail.com

Director's Note

Can we create a world in which the presence of grief is honored? Can we create a world in which our experience of grief allows our hearts to expand, one in which our capacity for holding grief and joy simultaneously feels possible, and makes perfect sense? Can we create a world through art that welcomes us to lean into a topic most of us avoid talking about, thereby changing our perspective on the topic, to its presence in our lives? Over the course of these last several weeks, this beautiful team of humans has pursued these questions in this lab with curiosity and care. Through weaving together these jewels of plays written by our gifted playwrights, each addressing the topic of grief via diverse stories, we have learned a great deal about the range of grief related experience - it is limitless - as well as about our own ability to communicate the truth of the impact of each story.

In welcoming you today to join us, you are helping us to further explore the purpose of *Grief Dialogues: the Experience*. It is our hope that this immersive world we are building can be a pathway to more plays (we are scratching the surface here), more stories, more connected conversation about the one thing that happens to every person who ever loves anyone.

On behalf of our entire team from the Grief Dialogues organization to the actors and creative team to the expert counselors who have guided us (and are here for you, too) to the Virtual Stage Lab team giving us the chance to share this experiment as authentically as possible with you, we invite you to get close, pull up a chair, stand beside us, walk with us, take the gifts of the experience with you, and to leave something of yourself - your story. We are all in this together.

Thank you for being here.

Dani Davis

Director, *Grief Dialogues: The Experience*

Email: Dani@thedanidavis.com

Special thanks to Larry Pellegrini.

Untitled

by Jenny Coates

A thousand pieces of paper
sailing in the wind
—pieces of your heart
which will
find itself again.

Today is for
weightlessness, a life
broken to then
be repaired,
no plan,
just healing,
mending bones.

Each cut, each club
to beat
you down,
leaves less of you
on the ground.
Victims grow here
but you will
not be
one.

You let go
and float towards
what is possible, leaving
the bog, the
entropy.

Beads of northern light
find you
where you are
through windows
high enough to meet
sea gulls.

You are not
tethered
but, at center, still
oddly stable
—connected to your own
true seeking

in answer to
that persistent yet
inconvenient yearning
your eyes wouldn't
reveal until
now.

You make home
anew inside
the borderless agency
of your
displacement
wondering what colors
come next.

There Is

by Jenny Coates

There is
a hole where
you were,
open sky ahead
which places you
exactly
Here

—in the thick
moss of it,
tasting
the air, touching
strangely
slanted light,

a blank
page
waiting to write

your future.