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**Hadassah International Research
Institute on Jewish Women at
Brandeis University**

Working Paper No. 8

September 2000

**In the Footsteps of Ruth:
Motherloss, Judaism, and Identity**

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A woman of valor--seek her out; she is to be valued above rubies. She opens her hand to seek those in need, and offers her help to the poor. Adorned with strength and dignity; she looks to the future with cheerful trust. Her speech is wise, and the law of kindness is on her lips. Those who love her rise up with praise, and call her blessed: Many women have done well, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceptive and beauty short-lived, but a woman loyal to G-d has truly earned praise. Honor her for her work; her life proclaims her praise.

Proverbs 31

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Preface: Scenes from a Life Altered

I am twenty one years old, making love with my best friend of three years, my first lover. We lay together, afterwards, curled around one another like nomadic green ivy, wandering up the side of an old house.

I am in awe of us, of this small thing, which for the moment shapes the whole world.

I marvel at my two healthy breasts, that he holds in his hands like porcelain tea cups, as though they might break.

Seven years old. I spend the afternoon with my grandmother in the antique store she and my mother have bought together. It is a hot afternoon, and boring and I am trying to find a cool place to sit and read my new book. Suddenly, the door opens with the familiar clinking of the bell and I hear my mother's voice. She is crying.

"Cancer.." She says. I can't see her, from where I have been hiding, behind the large oak chest carved with Chinese characters. "Oh G-d, I have cancer."

I don't know what she's talking about. I don't know big words like "radiation and "mammogram," but I understand better when I go in the mornings with my father to the hospital. My mother is tired and dizzy after her treatments, but she always has time to read to me at night. How bad can it be?

Twelve years old, blood on my underpants, too flat for a training bra.

Thirteen. Suddenly self-conscious, running from the stares of boys in gym class, men on the street. My mother gives me a Look that tells me that my afternoons of playing Anne Frank in the attic are over.

Eighteen years old. Tussling and kissing in a dorm room late at night, cold hands stealing under my shirt, fumbling with the latch on my bra, frustrated cussing. I flinch, worrying about underarm hair, bumpy nipples, body odor. I forget to enjoy it.

Nineteen. My mother dies. I watch her grow thinner, weaker, incoherent. I put my head in her lap and will her with my whole heart and soul not to die the kind of death I know is coming, I feel as though I am swimming in impossibly cold water, and my feet will not touch the bottom, it is hundreds of miles away. I have no choice but to continue to paddle against the current, eternally stronger than both of us.

Sixteen months after my mother dies, I am on a train going from Washington D.C. to Boston. I sit by the window, cocooned in my seat, strapped in by fatigue and the lack of circulation in my left leg.

Would she recognize me, I wonder, if by some chance, she stepped out of the bathroom right now, or came from the cafe car, carrying a paper cup of tea. I don't look so different. Same hair, pulled back, lipstick faded from so many trips to the water fountain. I have been eating Doritos and there is cheese stuck between my fingernails. I am a little chubby, my breasts are round, full, a few sizes bigger than hers. Iffy's face is slightly flushed from the stuffiness of the compartment and a little freckled from the sun. I still wear glasses and a ponytail, and as usual my carrying bag is stuffed with so many books that I have buried my house keys and wallet beneath them. I look exactly the same as I did in that picture she had of me when I was sixteen, at the kitchen table, wearing that old red flannel shirt that I still have, doing my Latin homework and drinking ginger ale. I have that picture now.

Twenty one. My thoughts throw me back into my body with an enormous thump. I am in my bed, at college, and it is raining outside my window, dark in the room except for the glow from the two Shabbos candles. My two healthy breasts are covered with the blue blanket my mother bought for me when I began my freshmen year. Joshua is wrapped around me, snoring softly into my shoulder.

My mother has been dead for almost two years.

Of course she would recognize me.

From her I get my inability to leave the house without lipstick, my yen for a good bargain, my fetish for trashy romance novels, the behind I longed to rid of for years, which no amount of exercise, diet or appealing to G-d would diminish. From her I inherit my zeal for tag sales, for perfection, for impossibility, my discretion, my flair for melodrama, my tendency towards illegible handwriting, and my knack for getting my heart broken.

I close my eyes and lie very still. I can feel every cell in my body flexing and twisting, my bones growing and fortifying, flesh prickling and puckering, blood coursing through arteries, feeding my slow, deliberate heartbeat.

Introduction: Gathering the Voices

"Thou shalt be missed because thy seat will be empty."

1. Samuel 20:18

The idea of a resource guide for motherless Jewish women was a project which crawled out of me slowly and painfully. When my mother died in February of 1998 at the age of fifty three, I began an exhaustive search for books, articles and ethnographies about motherloss. Finally, one afternoon while poking around in the basement of a used bookstore, I discovered Hope Edelman's *Letters from Motherless Daughters*. I bought it, went to a small cafe around the corner, and read the whole thing over a pot of chrysanthemum tea. I sobbed relentlessly tears I had not allowed myself to cry, things I had pressed down inside me like a corsage tucked between the pages of a yearbook.

Later, I put the book on my shelf and went back to being a college student. But I continued to look for more stories, more women, more voices that echoed my own. I wanted more. Now I knew that I was not alone, my loss was unique, there was a name the new identity I had been forced to take on.

I spent months searching, asking questions, and writing down my own experiences. The result is the manuscript in your hand, which has not so much been made, but found. These are the words that I wish had been spoken to me.

Who and Why: The Reason for Ruth

"But Naomi replied, "Turn back my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I anymore sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me.

... But Ruth replied," Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my god. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me, if anything but death parts me from you."

- Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."

(Ruth 1. 11-24)

As Jewish women, we struggle with the idea of place. A place to learn, a place to speak, a place to be heard. We search for women we can identify with, who can us with a role model of strength and faith. There is no greater challenge to this search than the loss we experience with the death of a mother.

For a woman, the death of a mother leaves a critical lack of definition. We are now missing a irreplaceable presence, someone to escort us the dark corridors of life, of childhood, of adolescence, someone to watch and help us grow into the person we are going to be. This loss leaves us standing alone with our arms open, wondering what to do next. Who are we without her? What is left? How can we affirm her importance, her influence, in our everyday lives?

The Book of Ruth provides us with some guidance as to how we can begin. As we can see from the above passage, Ruth devotes herself whole-heartedly to Naomi, and pledges to go with her anywhere she travels. The bond between these two women is remarkable, and even more so if we consider that Ruth is not only not a blood relation to Naomi, but she is a Moabite as well. The outstanding sacrifice which Ruth makes to her mother-in-law, as well as the love, support and assistance which Naomi gives her later by taking care of her and seeing to it that she is able to marry Boaz, is indicative of what we might consider to be the ideal mother-daughter relationship.

Although we may not necessarily have had this with our own mothers, it is important to keep in mind the remarked place which memory has in Judaism. As we light Yartzheit candles, recite the Mourner's Kaddish, and visit the graves of loved ones, we are performing a task which not only honors, but maintains the memory and therefore in a sense the soul of the person we have lost. As Ruth honors Naomi, we can follow in her footsteps by grieving, by remembering, and most importantly by examining the role our mothers have played in making us the strong, proud Jewish women we are today.

This resource guide is meant to present the reader with materials one might need to begin examining the repercussions of this loss in her life. It is about an absence which asks us as women to re-assess our identities, and as humans to re-examine our place in the world. These voices speak about pain, about loss, about grief and about transition. But most importantly, they speak. They are voices which break through the silence.

Grieving: Beginning With an End

"I shall never hear the sound of her voice again, It was her voice, together with her words, her hands, and her way of moving and laughing, which linked the woman I am to the child I once was. The last bond between me and the world I come from has been severed."

Annie Ernaux

I am awakened at two thirty by my cousin's phone call. "Its over. I f you want to see the body before they take it, you should come now." I tell her I am not interested. The woman who methodically packed lunch everyday, reciting a mantra, "Sandwich, cookie, fruit and something to drink," placing her hand inside the paper sack to identify each element, who signed every permission slip, in big, swooping script, with "Elizabeth L.N. Dubofsky (mother)," has suddenly become the 'body.'

My uncle and aunt stay behind in our house to begin to manage the affairs. How much paper work death brings. My aunt sits at the kitchen table in my mother's chair, surrounded by several small green plastic crates which contain every bill, prescription or report card from the past nine years. Arlene is frustrated. She is no frills, her house is spotless, immaculate, full of space and free of clutter. My mother is a packrat. Elizabeth saves perfume bottles, socks, beads, Brownie sashes, play programs. On her wall, framed in tailored black, is a faded picture of pussy willows that I made in kindergarten. The construction paper was once blue, the cotton balls formerly fluffy, the black ink stems bold and clear,

My uncle Cleans the House. We go to the drugstore, where he buys sponges, cloths, soap and bleach. My grandmother is furious. "We are not slobs, Harold," she says, as if she can still control her forty year old, Florida dwelling son, whom she hasn't seen in months. She tells him that my mother tried to keep the house in murder, but it's a big house, and she didn't feel well. He starts with the countertops.

It is not an easy leaving. My grandmother is frustrated and confused. But there is no stopping me. I have papers to write, exams to make up, some of my professors don't know what's happened. I pack our new red car in the early afternoon, the car that my mother had driven maybe once. I drive an hour, away from the town which I plan never to return to. I play the radio, I sing loudly, the hair on my arms stand on end. The car is clean, spotless, no trash bag, no pennies in the chancre cup. No napkins or straws or plastic forks stuffed into the glove compartment, competing for space with a road map or a glasses case. No carpet remnants on the floor, no pebbles or spare coins gathered and stuck in the comers near the gas pedal.

I drive recklessly, keenly aware of my proximity to death. I have something to prove. I am nervous, my hands shake. I want to get home to school and nothing else. Where I have no room for thoughts, where things are so cluttered I cannot see the road...

At school, I return to a pile of cards and letters, a hundred messages on my answering machine. I devote two hours to responding to all of them. I act as though my absence has been due to a sore throat or a wedding. "It's over, I'm back." No one knows quite what to say. I seem sturdy enough, I attend meeting, I study, I smile. I do not call home. Instead, home calls me. "Do not run from your responsibilities," my aunt says. "Come home, Chanel. There are papers to be signed."

I go home when I fix the flat tire on the car my mother never drove. I stay for minutes, an hour maybe, avoiding the kitchen and my mother's chair at the table, with her orange house sweater still draped around it. Waiting for her.

I tell my grandmother that I am so, so busy; I can't fall behind. The truth is, I haven't been to class in weeks, since before midterms. I just can't seem to get out of bed in the morning. The semester

is hurtling by, I'm going to fail, but I just keep sleeping ... She understands, my grandmother says. Education is the most important thing. You mother would want you to do well.

One afternoon, I am not so successful at rushing out. My grandmother needs groceries, new shoes, light bulbs. I bring her to the store and tell her I will be back in an hour. I am not as patient as my mother. She held the shopping list, decided paper or plastic, counted coupons, checked the receipt math.

At home I go through boxes and bags that have collected beside the piano. Our house looks exactly the same, aside from the added clutter, that the business of death has novels, and bandages. The smell is like an attacker, shoving a cloth in my mouth so that I cannot scream. Months later, I encounter it again, when I am in a car in Connecticut with my college roommate and my best friend. It is late, and we are lost. Natalie pulls over at a hospital and we head inside to ask for directions. It's a windy night. When the automatic doors open, the odor drenches me like sweat in August. I don't make it inside. I sit by the entrance until they come out, and when they ask, I don't say a word.

There is no clearly delineated course for the highly individualize process of grieving. I am jealous of those who cried uncontrollably, unabashedly. I did not cry for three months. I felt inhuman, unfeeling, I felt as though my mother was looking down at me, wondering, "Why don't you cry? Don't you miss me?" For many of us, our mourning begins at the moment of death, for others, it is postponed for years. The end of one life is the catalyst for the beginning of another.

It took me a long time to realize that the way we grieve is as unique as our loss. Tears are not the measure of our grief. For many of us, mourning is represented by an empty, inexplicable silence. We may be roused to begin our grieving at family events, at religious holidays, by smells, tastes or sounds, or by the next life-altering event.

Grieving is multi-layered, multi -dimensional. It can be a surge of pure emotion. It can be a sudden reminder that the inevitable, the impossible, has happened. For this section. I have selected pieces which I consider to represent the many aspects of grief. These voices remind us that grieving is a process. It is not a research paper or a loan on a house. It has no final draft, it has no end.

Five Myths About Mourning:

1. Grief and mourning always decrease over time.
2. After the death of a loved one, it's always easier to put them out of your mind.
3. Mourning is over in a year.
4. You mourn the death but nothing else.
5. Grief is only psychological.

Grief hides in places we don't want to look. The decision to walk toward our problems not away from them-is a brave and difficult one. It's like starting a new exercise plan. At times you gasp for air, you muscles get tired and the next day a little sore, but gradually you grow stronger.

The Motherloss Workbook

Howl

I am a the lost baby, howling in night, annihilated by longing
I cannot moderate or excise, needing you without being able to
speak, before words, their tempering lies, tales of meeting in
another life or hackneyed reassurances: Life will go on. It will,
I know, go on and on and on, relentless, no reprieve from consciousness.

Nessa Rappoport

I felt I would shatter if I had to keep up a strong front even one
more day. Time alone, the voice inside my head kept saying over and over, time
alone. The days following the funeral were filled with silence-and more time
alone than I knew how to deal with. I kept trying to wall off my feelings,
but they were clever, they scaled the walls I built and snuck up on me one
night. I cried before sleeping. I cried in the kitchen while I stirred
a saucepan of soup. I cried when I opened the front hall closet and saw
a black hair on the collar of her winter coat.

Linda Sexton

More than a decade after my mother's death, I still converse with her.
Constantly. I consult her for insights about my father, we argue about
getting married, and she urges me to play the piano again. For years
this dialogue was my secret, the glaring evidence, I was certain, of a
daughter whose mourning had gone awry. The discovery that I was not a mutant
griever but was, in fact , quite normal for a daughter who'd lost her mother
was a moment of pure liberation and relief.

Hope Edelman, Letters from Motherless Daughters

A New Dress

Today for the first time
after seven long years
I put on
a new dress.

But it's too short for my grief,
too narrow for my sorrow,
and each white-glass button
like a tear flows down the folds heavy as a stone.

Ruth Whitman

No Answer

This is the third time this week
I've tried calling you
down under the ground.
This has got to stop .
I know you don't pick up the phone
in fact, there's no number listed,
but this connection we've had for years

first umbilical
lately over the wires is hard to break.
Who else cares about the kids' first day of school
or my electric bill.
I phone you up in the heavens
but it's no dice.
I'm not into the afterlife
and your burial pursues me
without mercy,
I know you're down there
MA
answer me.

Judith Steinbergh

In the Rearview Mirror

Driving all night in winter, I watch in the rearview mirror as the
small towns disappear behind us, ceasing to exist the moment we pass. Hills
rise and fall brindled with snow, and in the fields a few lit windows small
as night lights reminds us of a child asleep upstairs, the blanket rising
and falling with his breath. How the particular loses itself. Downstairs
the dough is rising under its cloth, and the Mother whose hands have
learned the wisdom of kneading touches the Father. And one town dims and flickers
out, and another stirs ready to rise three hundred miles later when the sun
touches the farthest edge of the sky in an endless relay race of
light, at a place half-resurrected from childhood and waiting to be unwrapped like
a withheld gift from the white ribbon of unwinding road.

Linda Pastan

Dream Kaddish: Meditation from Breakaway

My mother was calling from far, far away, perhaps another world.

The telephone was a model from the time of my birth: Black, heavy,
with a rotary dial.

But its cord was shimmering: Translucent, somewhat metallic and
pulsating-filled with veins and blood-connecting us after her death.

It is the silver cord that links the worlds, before and after we take
our human breaths.

The cycle, like the circular dial, rotates, yet the connection remains.

The Kaddish is the silver cord.

Debra Orenstein

Packing up the Clothes

First the sweaters go in piles: burnt orange, a brown wool so deep and

rich, surely it was pulled from the very center of the earth. I can fold these easily-the body knows when to obey, even in grief. Then I cross the hall to her closet, pass the mirror where she checked herself each morning, refusing the illness which burrowed in, then crawled its way out.

Each year I grown more and more like my mother. Her words tumble out of my mouth the desperation of love. Those same hands, thin and distracted, the gray hair surfacing.

I remember her eating with such concentration-delicate as a small bird-as if each mouthful mattered, and it did, so little flesh on her to sustain life.

Now I inch my way to the silks and cottons. The dress she wore to my wedding, its black spots spread like ink in water. The other clothes retaining shape and smell. And when I come home, open my front door, I still anticipate her voice on my machine, ever surprised when there is no message.

Carol V. Davis

From A Leak in the Heart

My mother wrote me one letter in her life. She was in California then, seeking treatment for the disease whose name she was never allowed to utter, as if in some magical way, speaking the illness would confirm it. I found the letter in a dresser drawer the other day, written in the round hand of Americanization school on tissue thin paper banded at the top with the narrow edge of gum rubber than was once attached to a tablet.

March 7, 1947

Dear Faye Chaim and Roger,

How are you kids? I am filling little better. My back still hurts. Today I was a doctors for a light tritement and Saturday I am going again for a tritement. I hope to god I shut fill better. Please write tome. How is everething in thehouse? How does daddy fill. The weather is her wonderfull nice and hot. I was sitting outside today. Well I have to say good night. I have to be in bet 9o-clock for my health. Take care of daddy. your mother
Regart from evrywone

On the back flap of the envelope she had written her name, Sophie Stollman, and the street address of the sister with whom she was staying in Los Angeles. On the last line she had lettered in Detroit , Mich., her home. Now, older than she was when she died, I am shattered by that confused address. Loneliness, homesickness and fear spill out of those laboriously penciled words, and the poignant error that was not a mistake speaks to me still.

I supposed I realized from the beginning that my mother's illness was a serious one: I had seen the fearful loss of symmetry where the breast had been, the clumsy stitching around it, like that of a child sewing a doll's dress.

I was out late with friends the night of my mother's death. Walking alone up the darkened street, I saw my house, windows blazing as if for a party, and I knew what had happened. Word must have already spread, for on the sidewalk behind me I heard low voices and soft footsteps, stripped of purpose now, by her surrender.

She lay, hair bound in a white cloth, and I could feel her body, blood and bone under the sheet, pulling away from me, slipping into stone. The memories crowded around me, witnesses to my guilt; the many time I had resented caring for her, the times I had to flee my house when her pain became an imitation of my own mortality.

I remembered, the bas-relief of shame, the evening I came home from somewhere, to find her leaning on the kitchen sink, washing a stack of dishes I had left undone. "Shut up!" I had shouted when she spoke to me, angered at the robe and slippers, the cane lying on the floor, the medicine bottles, accouterments of a mother too sick to care for her own. Now we were cut off in mid-sentence. Now I would never be able to tell her how sorry I was for everything.

I still grieve for the words unsaid. Something terrible happens when we top the mouths of the dying before they are dead. A silence grows up between us then, profounder than the grave. If we force the dying to go speechless, the stone dropped into the well will fall forever before the answering splash is heard.

Faye Moskowitz

Since February, she had packed her life full, pushing herself forward, taking up hobbies, swimming, gardening, doing piles of laundry which had accumulated in the corners of the dusty old house. She watered plants, unpacked boxes, rearranged furniture. In the evening, she stayed upstairs, in the small room with the fresh green paint, the antique rugs, the trio of large windows that let sunlight in on bright days and showed the black sky on stormy evenings. She read book and made plans, and cried silently into her closet and her pillow.

She remembered summers spent in this room, when she was very young, reading every book she could find, watching old movies on television until she fell asleep in her clothes with the lights on, humidity soaking her sheets and running its gummy fingers through her hair. In the middle of the night, with the television droning on without end, her mother would come in, coax her into a nightgown, and turn out the light.

This summer she was alone. The house was different. She tripped over library books on the way to the shower, dragged her damp swimming towels to the basement to launder on her own, and did not pack lunch with four desserts simply because she could. She paid her bills, remembered to walk the dog, and made sure that there was milk and bread. She went to bed at a reasonable hour, and tucked her wallet into her front pocket instead of in her purse, where it was most likely to be stolen.

But, oh, how she missed being greeted at the door, the sound of a car pulling into the driveway, the call to supper, the tall, elegantly dressed figure in her doorway, asking about her day.

She was awakened at night, sometimes, by warm, comforting hugs and words she thought were real, others by a face haunted by the determination to overcome the diseases that had slowly eaten her stubborn disposition, the bright smile, the joy.

She was too old to cry. This knowledge made her feel heavy inside, like indigestion, a slow burn. The relatives that were left were sorry substitutes, she preferred old sweaters, photographs, and perfume bottles. The tragedy, she thought, is that I am an old lady at nineteen, and that I feel nothing anymore.

Chanel Dubofsky

For a few years after I graduated from college, I lived in Knoxville, Tennessee. I worked for a magazine that had its offices in a twelve story brick building, a former hotel where both Hank Williams and Alice Cooper's boa constrictor were rumored to have spent their final nights...

A perverse sort of history had settled on this block, which may or may not have had something to do with what I experience there the autumn after I turned twenty-four, I hadn't exactly been having a stellar year. In May I'd abruptly ended an engagement with a man I'd deeply loved and my world immediately turned upside down. I tried to right it by jumping into bed with another man, who was wise enough to walk out on me by summer's end. Two weeks later I got caught in the middle of a bar brawl that landed me in the emergency room with a split lip and a bump the size of a golf ball on the crest of my head. Things, you might say, were getting slightly out of control...

Worried I would bore my friends with a noncommittal kitten I often turned to for advice. In the evenings if I felt only I walked across the street to pick wildflowers and play with my neighbor's goats and sheep. I'm sure that part sounds idyllic, but the truth is, I was scared. There was no one to take care of me but me, and I didn't feel up for the job.

By mid-October, I was getting to work late every morning, taking two -hour lunches and crossing Gay Street several times a day. On this particular afternoon I was returning from post office, and as I reached the middle of the crosswalk I looked up and, just as a cloud passed, saw the midday sun bounce sharply off one of the glass panels of the Butcher Building. Or should I say I felt it? Like a size-twelve workboot kicked into my gut I felt it. And I clutched my stomach, unable to breathe. The light turned green and cars started honking and a few drove around me; someone leaned out of a truck window and shouted, "Hey, you! Are you okay?"

I couldn't speak. I couldn't move. All I could think as I sat there holding myself was "I want my mother. I want my mother. I want my mother, now."

Hope Edelman,

The grief lives in my body whole, not only in my throat. When it rises to the surface, just behind my eyes and right inside my mouth, I swallow, everything. Then I feel it on my skin. In the crevices of my fingers as I run my thumb back and forth slowly in each finger. I am holding my breath, swallowing the memories one by one until they are choking me. Only the memories live in my body, until all I am is one giant memory of motherloss.

Everything reminds me of her: finely wrapped chocolate kisses and toasted pumpkin seeds; sheets of colored paper and matching envelopes-printed with my name in large, black script. She is on the page in Nelly Sach's poetry; or Hannah Senesh's parachute. While my body floats in steaming water, her spoon stirs the mint tea, she sings with Julie Andrews. I am forty, she is dead, but we are still flossing my teeth, planting olive trees in Israel at the kitchen table, eating Girl Scout cookies, and plucking all the feathers from Kosher chickens.

Jyl Lyn Felman

Identity: Who was She? My Mother's Shoulder Bag

It accompanies me on a plane the second summer after she dies. I am terrified. Her bag sits on the floor between my feet. My fingers tremble uncontrollably as I tuck my prayerbook bent and smeared from laborious recitations, into its abysmal pockets. I continue to pray fervently as we leave the ground, and the whole time we are in the air. My mother would have prayed too, not in Hebrew, but slumped in her seat, hands covering her eyes, salt and pepper hair falling onto her trembling fingers. "Please, G-d, don't let us crash.. "

I sip a chardonnay. I am underage, but the stewardess takes pity on me. I pace the aisles, envy the calm frequent flyers who read magazines, laugh with one another. I twitch at every movement, every message from the pilot, who assures me before we take off that he will not be crashing the plane. Please G-d, don't let us crash.

I remember how she packed that bag. It was stylish, the shade of almond butter, deep and full of mysterious packets and crevices. It took several minutes to find even the simplest object. Comb, half-finished tubes of lipstick, sets of keys fastened to the fabric with the same safety pins I use now, pillboxes, makeup bag with mirror, glasses, recycled scraps of paper with her handwriting scrawled on them in stubby pencil-phone numbers, directions, grocery lists...

We took trips together every summer until I graduated from high school. Providence, Martha's Vineyard, Kennebunkport, Bar Harbor, Portland. I think of us, transferring Greyhound buses with that shoulder bag, meticulously packed the night before, the contents wrapped in plastic bags, pillowed with tissues. Enormous lunches, with tuna sandwiches and nectarines and cookies. The mystery was how we would manage to keep the leftovers from spoiling during the ferry rides, boutiques and museum tours.

February 1998. I ascend the bimah, averting my eyes from the casket. I did not know it would be there. I have offered to make a speech, which I have managed to avoid writing in the upheaval of the past twenty-four hours.

I am frantic. Suddenly I have been handed a index card with the last task my mother is asking of me emblazoned on it in screaming red ink. Convince the people in this room that she was separate from the cancer. Remind them that she was beautiful and funny, brave and outspoken, a warrior, a head turner, a daughter, a mother, a sister, a person Do not lose it under any circumstances.

I tell an ancient story, from two years ago, our college argument. How she was right all along. Everyone laughs, and I sit down again between my uncle and my grandmother, with our paper booklets like concert programs, detailing the service. I don't pay attention to rest of the funeral, I think of the blank book my aunt handed me earlier that morning. My mother's journal. I do not read it. I put in her shoulder bag and pile it next to the door with the rest of the things that I am taking to school.

December 1999. I still carry her bag to class with me sometimes, although the pockets are split and the lining is torn from a summer of being stuffed with too many notebooks. I have yet to read her entire journal. I skim it from time to time, this artifact, thick with the program from my graduation, the ticket stub from my senior play, a report card, a postcard.

It is difficult to read. The sentences are short and simple, written in her curly, elegant script. It is a log of everyday, but so telling that I often have to close it before very long. How much of her life was absorbed with me. We share an obsession for detail, for information. A desire to do more, to be stronger, not to worry. It is impossible to read it, to think of her, without seeing myself.

Discovering Our Mothers and Ourselves

"After her death I began to see her as she really had been ... It was less like losing someone than discovering someone."

Nancy Hale

Uncovering our mothers is an individual journey. No two women will end up in the same place. The bond we share with our mothers is seemingly unbreakable, but when she dies we are forced to examine her as an entity separate from ourselves, perhaps for the first time in our lives.

Who was she? As children, we see our mothers within a confined role, the parent. She is a source of comfort, frustration, angst. No matter what role she played in our lives, it often never occurs to us to attempt to see her as different from "mother." Death is a painful reminder to us that she had a multifaceted identity. The faces of high school friends, past lovers, aunts and uncles, and co-workers prompt us to begin thinking of the woman she was before making the choice to become a parent.

For many of us, this separation of identities may be more involved than others. Women who have lost mothers to cancer, to AIDS, to circumstances which grew progressively worse throughout their lives, have the tedious task of remembering the person before. This also involves questioning the evolution of relationships between parents and children. In retrospect, I find myself considering that adolescence, a period which is inevitably tumultuous, was made more complicated by my mother's worsening medical condition. Cancer has no respect for time, it does not postpone metastasizing so that you can enjoy your senior year in high school. This has been an especially hard lesson to learn as I try to imagine what must have been her thoughts in the final months of her life. As I grow older, the list of questions I want to ask grows longer. Was she a virgin when she married? What was her greatest mistake? Did she love my father? These questions are reminders of the woman she was before me, and how different her life was after. What is most painful is that they may never be answered.

The following selections are meant to prompt your own thoughts on your mother's identity. What do you know about your mother before your relationship with her began? What do you want to know? How is your life affected by what you know about hers? How can you apply what you know about her to the future?

She never saw herself for what she was: a brave pioneer in the new world, a female wage earner unbowed by a grade-school education, a single parent who supported and educated her child throughout the Depression, a gifted artist and designer, an intrepid student, a maker of feasts and celebrations, a relentless optimist, and a true and giving friend ... I see now my mother's brilliance lay in her ability to create a persona as original as the dress designs she coaxed out of a few folds of fabric. In her context, for her generation, she was a miracle worker. She invented herself.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

I read of her affairs-"other men sex never meant anything to me" -which were surprisingly passionless until one at the very end of her life ... The idea of having to look at or listen to anymore seemed too much--I couldn't bear it. No daughter would ever want to know these intimate details about her mother's life.

Linda Sexton

By the time she was twelve or so, intimations of her own sexuality would have begun troubling my mother, and her father's womanizing may have become a painful question. With a philosophy of lofty, pure sensuousness, of appetite subordinate to art, she could hang on to her ideal father... she had internalized his attitudes -taking her own talents and skills lightly ... her philosophy allowed her the illusion of compensation for her father's careless disregard, that had so casually deprived her of the fight to make demands on him, or on any many, and so had deprived her of that strong sense of herself on and of the earth that might have enabled her to take herself seriously enough to stay alive.

Signe Hammer

I went to Southern Florida after the hurricane to visit my mother's best friend. There were some things I needed to know. Minor facts, mostly, and episodic detail, like what my mother talked about at dinner parties and what made her laugh when her children were out of the room. But I had some larger questions, too, like why she had chosen my father and why the woman's movement seemed to have passed her by. Behind my mother had been a woman, and she was someone I never knew ... My memories of her are bracketed by the dawn of my cognition ... Her attempts to coax me into adult confidences were almost always premature I was twenty five before I wanted to learn about my mother as a young adult and as a wife ... Sandy told me about her as a sorority sister and young bride; another friend told me about the night she lost her virginity, a story that had elicited only an embarrassed, "On my wedding night, of course, " when I'd asked her about it at fourteen.

Hope Edelman

This poem was written in response to my own questions about my mother's relationship to her body.

Breasts

At twelve her breasts are two flat smooth boards waiting.

Sixteen and graduated from skinned knees jelly beans evening adventures with fireflies and flashlights to string bikinis necking and slow dances.

At twenty two her breasts are small round pointed hair spilling down curve of back comers of mouth arching with her delight in sustaining herself.

At thirty three she nurses a daughter chubby winsome creature with fistfuls of chocolate hair the soft pink mouth tugging at her nipple like a lover savoring each bite of warm vital flesh turning it over in mouth: cloud of sweet marshmallow air.

Forty seven swathed in bandages like a baby in a diaper. Hands meander blindly over neck and chest searching for re-acquaintance with her one perfect breast, nipple puckering fount of mauve perfect pale solitary.

Chanel Dubofsky

Who am I? Hair

A month after my mother dies, I perm my hair. I luxuriate in its lightness, the feel of the thick, springy curls on my shoulders and between my fingertips. I feel deliciously rebellious as I surrender a wad of bills to the receptionist, and depart with an armload of hair products and my new self. My mother's words echo in my ears, "You will never have nice, straight hair again." "Good," I say out loud, and the voice in my head is silent. For the next ten months, I straighten, crimp, layer, and highlight the life out of my hair. I cultivate this new and awful freedom, I groom it. It is well dressed. I hurl myself, full speed ahead, into being independent, as if somehow it is a choice. I will be strong, I will be empowered, I will divorce myself from Elizabeth.

I prickle with delight when people comment. "You are so strong," they say, when I announce that my mother has died. 'So energetic, so pro-active," when I arrange a conference about women's health. I spend hours designing, calling, copying, writing, researching, speaking. I exhaust myself, but I will not topple. I will make my mother proud of me, or die trying.

September, midmorning. Joshua and I lay in bed listening to Miles Davis and the rain on the roof. Our conversation turns to Sunday dinners, birthday parties, and tumultuous adolescence. Before I know it, I am confessing mental sins (sometimes I didn't love her). I gush like an open wound, I am caught in a flood, and I can't stop telling. In the space of an hour I relay everything going on in my head that as been impossible to articulate for almost two years. How her voice echoes in my head every time I walk or think, the deafening sound of it, the responsibility of listening which I cannot shoulder. The constant second guessing of myself which used to be so rare, the self esteem and confidence I now lack, the safety net that has been ripped out from under me, the thought that I am dishonoring her that will follow me to the grave. I am like jelly afterwards, quivering and soft, afraid of myself, in awe of my own words.

With and Without: The Difference In Selves

"I cried in mourning for my lost opportunity to have known my mother, and to have her know me as a woman."

Lynn Davidman

"I feel about mothers the way I feel about dimples: because I do not have one, I notice everyone who does."

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

We mark our lives with milestones. Learning to drive, first kiss, realizing your parents aren't perfect, coming out, moving away from home. Each of these events leads us to reflect back on our lives before they happened. Motherloss is no different. Before she dies and after is often starkly separate. This loss makes a remarkable change in family dynamic, in lifestyle, in self-perception. We are no longer able to enjoy the same safety, or to take things for granted. Our sense of reality has been altered.

I distinctly remember standing in the shower the morning after my mother died, and realizing that it was the first time I had been alone since the phone call had come the night before. I remember thinking, So, what now?

This question is more complex than living arrangements, than finances, than a house full of possessions needing to be divided evenly. We may not fully understand the repercussions of

motherloss for years. Confusion, pain and fear may manifest themselves in unthinkable ways that will affect us profoundly.

For years, I carried in my head a calendar of my mother's doctor's appointments, a list of her medications, and a memorized version of her medical history. I sat in the waiting room while she saw the doctor, holding a magazine and willing my hands to stop shaking. Together, we weighed options, compared medications, scheduled operations and hospital stays. Cancer occupied the space between us. It brought us together after a fight; it drove me away to college and kept me there. I did not think I knew how to function without it. I took care of my mother, and we were a team.

Two months after she died, the phone rang in my dorm room at 1:30 am. I could not answer it. I shook uncontrollably, swallowing vomit. My friends looked at me questioningly, but I did not move. My boyfriend touched my arm lightly. "What are you afraid of.?" he asked me. "The worst has already happened."

I still grapple with the fact that I have no one left to take care, and that there is no one to take care of me. I am a different person because of this; it is as though I am the last survivor from a ship that took eleven years to sink. Motherloss can leave us haunted by many specters. I cannot schedule a doctor's appointment for myself without imagining that I have cancer. I cannot bring myself to perform a breast self-exam, although my mother found her own lump while showering. The death of our mothers brings us face to face with the prospect of our own mortality, and the challenge of survival. Will we live longer than she? Is her fate ours? Will our lives reflect hers? My mother lived in the same town all her life, with her mother and siblings in a house we could drive past on the way to the supermarket. At fifteen, she had her thyroid removed because of her first cancer, but still she was brilliant, beautiful and popular. She turned down a scholarship to Johns Hopkins to work, and then she married my father.

I was a quiet child, introverted, awkward, afraid. I wanted to go to Europe as soon as I knew where it was. I dropped out of Hebrew school. I quit ballet; I didn't practice the piano. I went to high school in a different town and college forty minutes away. While my mother clung, I fought to get away. I will probably never know how deeply that hurt her. As I grow older, I have begun taking an inventory of myself. At twenty-one, I have lived away from home, finished seven semesters of college, supported myself, cared for my grandmother, and continued to achieve the way my mother would have wanted me to. But what would she say about the other decisions I have made? Would she approve of my meandering around the country, my boyfriend, my college major, my life's plan? Am I doing things to spite her, to silence her voice in my head, or is this what I really want?

This loss leaves us torn, between growing into the person we know that she would want us to be and gravitating towards the impulse to purge from ourselves everything that reminds us of her, to live by the words, "I will not become my mother." We are challenged by her absence to make our own choices without approval, without the consensus, without boundaries. It is this new, horrible freedom that we grapple with, the responsibility of being completely and entirely alone. Just as no one can teach us to grieve, it is also impossible to know how to weld together the past and the future.

In this section, I have highlighted voices that exhibit this same confusion, but also offer words of encouragement. Our journey of healing starts with reclaiming our sense of empowerment, which we can gain by finding where our lives intersect with hers.

If she had lived I might not have this husband and these children. I probably would not have gone away to college at sixteen, then lived alone for five years, traveling by myself, becoming self supporting, learning to take risks. More likely, I'd have stayed close to home, gone to Queens College, and married upon graduation as my sister Betty did. My mother's aspirations for me were entirely oriented toward marriage and child bearing. But her death forced me to live a

different life. And since that life has suited me, and I have made gratifying decisions without mother's advice or counsel, I wonder irreverently, ironically, whether she mothered me best by dying.

Letty Collin Pogrebin

It seems an ironic twist of fate that my mother, my own Edith, could do nothing but look back. And yet she had named me Yael, a constant reminder of where I come from, perhaps a premonition of who I was to be. Yael means gazelle, an antelope noted for graceful movement and lustrous eyes. Yet its secondary Hebrew meaning derives from the root "to go up, to rise." In the Book of Judges, Yael, a non Jewish descendent of Moses' father in law, rose up and boldly slew an enemy of the Israelites, for which she is memorialized in poetic battle song. Perhaps, I was the one meant to rise up from my mother's pain..."

Yael Flusberg

I imported several bottles of her liquor from our home in Weston, and set up a little bar in my room, to the horror of my roommates, so I could entertain my friends. I liked a drink before dinner a lot And then I liked a Scotch at bedtime, -it helped me sleep. This ritual with alcohol , taken so directly from my own childhood, mirrored the landslide occurring inside of me: who was I now? Linda alone? Linda taking care of Anne? Linda masquerading as Anne? Or-perhaps more horrible of all-Linda trying to keep Anne alive by being Anne?

Linda Sexton

Try to strike that delicate balance between a yesterday that should be remembered and a tomorrow that must be created.

Earl Grollman

My constant mourning has lessened over the years, but an incredible fear of death has taken its place. The thought of death horrifies me ... This fear of death has begun to play an increasingly important role in my life. It has caused me to think very seriously about what is meaningful ... Now, the people I love are more important to me than books and papers are. Still, I know a person cannot live entirely by this attitude. I'm constantly debating whether to live for now or to prepare for the future. I suppose every person must find a way to balance the two, but I've never been very good at balancing things.

Sherri, Letters from Motherless Daughters

... after thirteen years I am back in the city of her birth, with my memories and her jewelry and our shape. Some possessions are easier to return than others. Each time I walk past a store window and glance sideways into the glass, it is my chin that juts out, my hair flapping against my back. But it is her chest pressing forward, her ass that protrudes . Her ass. And it is so easy to imagine, with each thought gliding smoothly and silently into the next: Her ass, her breasts, her fate.

Hope Edelman

In a final letter written after the death of her mother, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay said, 'the presence of the absence is everywhere.' Most likely those words ring very true. You are the sum

of all your experiences. Taking their full measure tells you where you are. It's up to you to determine where you're going. We may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

From the Motherloss Workbook

Final Thoughts

The eminent second century mystic and scholar Rabbi Shimon bar chochai instructed his disciples not to mourn on the anniversary of his death. That day, he said, should be celebrated with song and study. This positive attitude toward death was shared by other Rabbis of the Talmud. The Midrash relates the following.

When a person is born, all rejoice; when he dies, all weep. It should not be so. When a person is born, there should be no rejoicing over him, because it is not known how he will develop, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad. When he dies, however, there is cause for rejoicing if he departs with a good name and leaves the world in peace.

This may be compared to two oceangoing ships, one leaving the harbor, the other entering it. Everyone cheers the outgoing ship, but no one is exuberant about the incoming one.

One wise man witnessing the scene commented: "I see things differently. The opposite should be happening. There is no reason to cheer the passengers on the ship that is departing, for no one knows its fate; no one knows what storm or crises it will encounter. When it returns safely from its trip, that is the time for rejoicing. " "Similarly," continued the wise man, "when a person dies, all should rejoice and offer thanks that he has departed this world with a good name and in peace." That is what Solomon meant when he said, "Better is the day of death than the day of birth."

Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:4

Mourning and Moving Forward

In remembrance lies the secret of redemption.

The Baal Shem Tov

At the time of my mother's death from cancer, I had been living under the specter of cancer for eleven years. The language of the disease, words like adriamycin, carcinoma, and palliative had become mine and I spoke it as fluently as anything. On the refrigerator, between my report card and the neighbor's phone number was a small white card reminding my mother of the next appointment with her oncologist. When I packed her things into boxes months after the funeral, I found piles of surgical protocols and prescriptions mixed with symphony ticket stubs and the program for my senior play.

Although her death was not a surprise, I still find myself grappling with the repercussions of it on my development as a human being, a woman, and a Jew. When it came time to make the necessary arrangements to give my mother a Jewish burial, I panicked. I had no idea what it meant to be buried "Jewishly" as she had requested. My knowledge of Judaism was consisted of five years of Hebrew day school, a handful of books, and attendance at a few Shabbat and High Holidays services, most of which had taken place in college.

I was ashamed of myself. My mother had died leaving no will and no specific instructions for anything, only that she wanted a Jewish funeral and I had no idea how to give her one. I went to visit the rabbi of the synagogue my mother and I had sparsely attended. He knew her, had visited her in the hospital during her final days. Together, we discussed the Jewish view of death and the process of burial and mourning. I left his office in awe, having every confidence that this was the right thing to do for my mother.

I have observed the reactions of my family to my mother's death: my grandmother, who has done the unthinkable by outliving her favorite child. My aunt and uncle, getting a late night phone call

and taking a plane and a car from Florida and Baltimore, only to arrive too late. Some members of my family have retreated from Judaism and from G-d all together. For them, it is impossible to rationalize my mother's death, or to place any spiritual significance upon it. It never ceases to amaze me that our loss has affected us in so many different ways.

My own experience has been one of bringing Judaism closer to me, as the centerpiece of my identity. At the wise old age of eleven, I decided I wasn't interested in Judaism and spent the next six years pretending that being Jewish had nothing to do with me. When I made the decision to immerse myself in Jewish life, I realized that by cutting myself off, I had ignored an essential part of which I was.

By creating this resource guide for motherless Jewish women, I have attempted to moderate between the Jewish and the secular. Therefore, up until now, I have left the task of connecting Judaism with loss up to the reader. However, it is important to present the basics of Jewish ideas of death and mourning, and to explore how we can take these concepts with us as Jewish women and apply them to our own methods of grieving, coping and honoring.

Judaism places protective fences around grief. Barriers of time and ritual shield the mourner, permitting him or her to do what must be done: weep, rant, rest. But the fences also protect against an excess of grief-, to keep sadness from overwhelming the life of the mourner.

Anita Diamant

Kevod ha-met, caring for the dead, is one of the highest mitzvot, or commandments, that a Jewish person can perform. The body of the deceased is known in Judaism as nireh v'eyno ro'eh, or one who can be seen but who cannot see. Friends or synagogue members may watch over the body. These shomrim, or guardians, recite psalms and stay near the deceased until the time of burial.

The only ritual that can be performed on the dead person at this point, immediately after death, is a process known as taharah, or purification. Taharah is a manner of demonstrating physical respect for the person who has passed on. It is often done by a group of people from the Jewish community known as a chevra kaddisha, or burial society.

Tahara is a ritual washing of the body, where it is cleaned. Only the parts of the body that are exposed are cleaned, being ever considerate of one's modesty. The body is held in a standing position by the members of the chevra kaddisha, and twenty four quarts of water is poured over it, while the members say three times, "Tahor hoo" (He is pure), or "Tahor hee" (She is pure). The body is then dressed, in shrouds known as tachrichim. These shrouds are the same regardless of gender, and consist of a shirt, pants, belt and head covering. They cover the entire body, including the face.

It is the mother of my high school friend who does this for my mother. When I find out, I am awed beyond belief. Beverly, sitting beside my mother, reading the twenty third Psalm, faces illumined by the candles burning at my mother's head and feet ... My mother, cradled in Beverly's arms, being drenched in 'living waters.' Supported by G-d.

Usually, burial must take place within twenty-four hours of death. According to the Torah, "You shall bury him the same day ... His body should not remain all night." The exception to this rule is Shabbat and holidays. There are no wakes or open casket funerals in Judaism. The casket is simple and pine, and generally no objects are to be placed in it, except a small bag of dirt from Israel, "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

While the family of the deceased usually does not have a role in shomrim or tahara, they are emphasized in the funeral service a great deal. One of the most painful and striking parts of a

Jewish burial is the act of filling the grave. When the coffin is lowered into the grave, the rabbi recites a blessing and then indicates to the principal mourners to begin dropping soil onto the casket. This task is meant to give the mourners an opportunity to not only symbolically, but also literally bury their loved one.

My grandmother sits shiva for her daughter, the traditional seven days of mourning that follow the funeral. We go to my cousin's house, and people bring food. I have never seen our family together in the same room before. It is amazing. Aunts, uncle, cousins, nephews, people I have never met before in my life hug me, and tell me they are sorry. I don't know what to do. I'm supposed to eat, but I can't put things in my mouth. I don't want to breathe or smell or shower, but I dress well and I wear makeup. My mother would want me to, of this I am sure. Where do you think you are going without lipstick, young lady? To my funeral? You know how many people will be there? You have to look nice!

When I come home again, the house is silent. I don't know what to do. The TV in the kitchen is off, and my grandmother won't let me turn it on for a month, the length of the shloshim, the next period of mourning. We are both still wearing kria, the black ribbon symbolizing that we are mourners, pinned to our clothing. It is my badge, I tell people when they ask. So you can pick the Jewish person out in a crowd.

It's scary, living in our big silent house. We are a TV family, we have six of them, and there are only three of us. We watch all the time; during dinner, in the evening while we drink our tea. When I am ten, eleven, my mother and I watch on Saturday night together, detective shows movies of the week, the news. Having the TV off reminds me that something is different. I want to turn it on, I want noise, I want my mother coming through the door with her four Absolutely Essential for Everyday Bags. I sleep in her bed, now instead of mine, until the day my grandmother calls me at school to tell me she has sold the bedroom set. "It was so old, she kept saying how she wanted to buy another one anyway, you understand, nu?"

I begin to say Kaddish for my mother, the standing prayer affirming the righteousness and glory of G-d. I still stand to say it now, although technically the mandatory time is passed. At each Shabbat service, I get up slowly, unwrapping my skirt from the legs, where it clings like a frightened baby. I avoid the twenty-five pairs of eyes that are focused on me, and lean on the chair in front of me for support. Technically, I am not even supposed to say it, but my mother has no sons, I am her only daughter, and this duty, along with all the others, is mine. This prayer is memorized by now; I hug my prayerbook to my chest, reciting the Hebrew words with my eyes closed. It is a bath, purification, a tahara of my own.

We schedule the unveiling for the day after Thanksgiving. It's an enormous deal, trying to gather all the relatives in one place, to pick out the stone, to decide what to write on it. When we arrive at the gravesite in the morning, it is there under a white sheet, like some sadistic door prize. The service takes ten minutes. I am oddly relieved. The place where my mother is buried is now marked.

In early February, a card arrives in my mailbox from our synagogue, reminding me that the one year anniversary of her death, the *yahrzeit*, is approaching. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Everyday is an anniversary, another occasion which reminds me that I don't know what to do. I leave school early on a Thursday, cutting all my afternoon classes and driving home, crossing the bridge over to the town where my mother is buried. I bring her tulips. Someone has to take care of her now, I think to myself. If I don't decorate her grave, she'll think that no one loves her. I try to tell her what's been going on, school, classes, projects, papers. But no one talks back; no one laughs in response or asks questions. And suddenly, I am sobbing. I want to leave, I want to walk away, get back in the car and drive away. But I can't leave her. This is the only place where she still is.

How can it have been a year already? How could we not have seen one another for a year? How can she not know what I did today, how could she not have called to find out? How could we miss each other so much?

December 1999. I haven't been to my mother's grave since that day in February. I have a hundred excuses, to go with my hundred questions, juxtaposed by zero answers. I know that something began within me that day, something that drew me to Ruth, to this project. Throughout the funeral, the burial, the shiva, and the aftermath, I felt as though I had been handed an insurmountable task-to honor my mother the way that Ruth honors Naomi, to stand by her and be loyal, to commemorate her by doing what she asks.

It has been a more than frustrating task. Not only has it forced me to consider my own experiences more closely, but also the search for resources is tedious. The literature on this subject is just now coming to the surface, only recently has motherloss begun to be looked at as an event which has such unique consequences. There are no easy answers. As motherless daughters, we often feel as though the answers will never come. As Jewish women, our task is multi-faceted. We know that we have a duty to honor our mothers but there are still more questions. Where does she stop and where do we begin? How do we honor her, beyond yarzeit and tahara and Kaddish? How can we decide this when we are still in such conflicts with our own selves?

The resources I have provided are merely meant to be a catalyst for beginning one's own healing process, to provide a source of meditation on the role of motherloss in our individual lives. From Ruth, and from Jewish tradition, we can learn and take comfort. The tenets of Judaism provide a shield of protection in which we can shelter ourselves, and take from this shelter strength. Perhaps, however, the greatest source of healing is within ourselves, from the inner strength that we all possess, but the discovery of which takes time. We must begin to cultivate the identity which we now have and to embark upon the powerful and rigorous task of restoring ourselves.

Annotated Source List

Broner, E.M. *Mornings and Mourning: A Kaddish Journal*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1994.

Broner's journal follows the early stages of her grieving process, and her dedication to honoring his memory, so great in fact, that she continues to say Kaddish for him every day in spite of the abrasive nature of the men she encounters in the Orthodox minyan. For me, Broner's powerful account of her experiences provided the perfect backdrop for the undercurrent I sought to create with this guide. Her passion and devotion to commemorating her father is a demonstration of how we may bring Ruth's message into our everyday lives.

Diamant, Anita, Ed. *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew*. New York: Schocken Book, 1998.

The tradition surrounding death and mourning in Judaism were a source of great comfort to me when my mother died. I believe that it is quintessential to make readers of this guide aware that these rituals can also be helpful to them. In this collection, Diamant has included Jewish texts such as the *Book of Ruth* in addition to other genres such as poetry, to provide the reader with an accessible selection on which to meditate. I have drawn heavily on the resources from this book, since I feel that they are applicable in many of my sections, and resonate the pivotal role Judaism can play in the face of such a life-alternating situation.

Dubofsky, Elizabeth Nathan. Journal. May 10, 1992-September 2, 1997. (Unpublished)

The decision to my mother's journal in this resource guide was both a difficult and emotionally taxing one. I had not read it in its entirety since the day my aunt encouraged me to take it in the days immediately following her death. It has proven to be a valuable resource, for both my own grieving and for purposes of examining her identity and relationship to me. I have done my best to do her writing justice, and to place her entries in the context of accuracy and respect.

Edelman, Hope. *Letters from Motherless Daughters*. New York: Addison Wesley, 1994.

This companion volume to Edelman's *Motherless Daughters* was the resource I had been searching for when I found it eight months after my mother's death. At a time when I considered my emotions to be very much in check, it provided me with the opportunity to begin my grieving anew. Finally, I had access to what I had been desperate to find: the voices of other motherless daughters. I now knew that my feelings of shame, guilt and resentment were normal. I began to feel very empowered, and grew very protective of my right to my intense emotions. These letters represent women at all stages of life, as well as the grieving process.

Edelman, Hope. *Motherless Daughters*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

I stumbled upon Edelman perfectly by accident, tooling around in a used bookstore in Amherst, Massachusetts. I blinked in disbelief at the title. Hours later, I found myself in the throes of a profoundly cathartic experience. This book explored avenues I had not thought of once in the eight months since my mother had died. I began thinking about identity, about our relationship, about what it meant to be a motherless daughter. I realized that the journey of grieving never ends, and that I was developing into a person I did not yet understand, Edelman's book turns motherloss in to not only a life altering event, but an opportunity to assess one's entire persona. It is essential reading for any women faced with this experience, and an intrinsic place to begin grappling with unique loss.

Eisenberg, Gail, Hambrook, Diane, and Herma Rosenthal. *A Motherloss Workbook*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

The *Motherloss Workbook* is an excellent way to begin navigating one's way through the long and complicated grieving process. Through writing exercises, checklists, and journal entries, the authors help the reader to explore her emotions and to confront them with raw realism. I chose this for my guide because I felt that it would make excellent supplementary material to the poems, essays, and meditations I had already chosen. Like Edelman's book, these exercises provide a cathartic effect and therefore realistic in encouraging the motherless daughter to care for herself at a time when such a concept may seem unheard of.

Ernaux, Annie. *A Woman's Story*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.

This slim volume of poetic prose seduced me into including it from its first words. Ernaux's technique of cataloging events through imagery led me to not only utilize this book for its quotes, but also for its technique. I decided to use the idea of describing memories through a series of images in my own recollection of my mother's life and death and through my resource guide. Ernaux's honest and poignant description of her own relationship with her mother provided me with an excellent basis for which to begin what has been a painful yet rewarding odyssey.

Felman, Jyl Lyn. *Cravings*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

My initial impressions of Felman's memoir was that it had nothing to do with me. I was nineteen and heterosexual. How could I understand or benefit from the perspective of a thirty-something lesbian? Felman's novel turned out to provide the basis for the opening piece of this nerves and on the backspace button on my keyboard. I was struck by Felman's originality, her honesty, and at times, the parallel nature of our experiences. *Cravings* was instrumental in my decision to select "The Meanings of Things" as a theme for this guide. Felman's attention to detail heightened my already inherent connection, and encouraged me to further consider identity of objects from the perspective of loss.

Hammer, Signe. *By Her Own Hand*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Hammer's reflections on her identity before and after her mother's death made this an important piece to conclude. One unique aspect of the piece as well was the author's discussion of own thoughts of suicide and death. This is essential to include in a work about motherloss, since a common element of this experience is to begin seeing oneself as a separate entity, but also one which is closely intertwined with her mother. It is not rare for women who have experienced motherloss to become obsessive about their own deaths, especially upon reaching the age at which their mothers dies. Hammer's memoir is also unique in its candid treatment of her grieving process, which unfolded over several years and in several different stages. It is its sobering honesty and fearless confrontation of this subject which encouraged me to include it.

Moskowitz, Faye. Ed. *Her Face in the Mirror*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Moskowitz provides the reader with a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between mother and daughters, while placing it in the context of Judaism. She includes poetry and essays in her section on motherloss which are eye-opening both in terms of literary and emotional merit. The excerpt from Moskowitz's own piece, "A Leak in the Heart," is an important one to include when confronting one's feelings about a mother in retrospect of her death, especially one who has lost her mother after a prolonged illness. Moskowitz expresses the fear, resentment and frustration of an adolescent girl going through this crisis. I can relate to this on many level, and I feel that many other women can also benefit from it.

Orenstein, Debra. Ed. *Lifecycles: Volume 1*. Woodstock, Vt: Jewish Lights Publication, 1994.

I found this Source to be incredibly to be incredibly interesting and valuable in terms of its boldness in creating ritual around various stages in the Jewish life cycle. I immediately connected with the intimacy of Carol Davis' poem, 'Suite on My Mother's Death.' I recalled the difficulty in

encountering my mother's personal possessions after her death, and therefore deemed this piece to be essential for my own work. I was also excited to see such a wealth of material on the subject of women and mourning from a Jewish perspective.

Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. *Deborah, Golda and Me*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

At first I sought this book out for the purposes of negotiating my confusion with being Jewish and feminist. However, early in my reading, I realized that Pogrebin and I had much in common. In her chapter "Mother, I Hardly Knew You," she delves into complex issues surrounding her mother's identity, and her own identity in regard to her death. Her speculation as to what would have happened had her mother not died gave me the courage to confront the question myself I also found her handling of issues surrounding Mourner's Kaddish and other Jewish aspects of death to be beneficial for various sections of the guide.

Sexton, Linda Gray. *Searching for Mercy Street*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.

My fascination with the poetry of Anne Sexton is what originally attracted me to this book. Linda Sexton details her experience as the daughter of the brilliant and disturbed poet. Through her childhood experience of her mother's hospitalizations, breakdowns, and self-destruction to the culmination with Anne Sexton's suicide in October 1974, Linda touches on issues of sexuality, femininity and maturation. I found myself strongly connecting with the similarities between her mother's madness and my own mother's battle with breast cancer.