dynamics. My experiences of being more and less comfortable knowing emotion have proven useful in my work with my patients who are similarly ambivalent, helping me to empathize with their difficulties and with their frustration at how long it sometimes takes to move from "insight" to relief. My own marriage is a constant reminder of this life-long journey. It has taken me a long time to emotionally commit to my husband, something that I have only become aware of in hindsight. Although I have felt deeply committed, I can see how this commitment and the risks inherent in such a relationship cause me great anxiety (now perhaps exacerbated by my pregnancy), often experienced by my husband as having a wife with separation anxiety.

As I approach motherhood, I am also acutely aware of my anxieties about the vulnerability and mortality of the child I am bringing into this world. I find myself consciously attempting to figure out how I might manage my anxiety so as to encourage my child to freely explore the world without being saddled by an excessively protective mother. I am aware that one cannot protect one's children from all life's dangers, and that the price of trying can be decreased autonomy, self-reliance, and frustration tolerance in the child. I hope that my somewhat hard-won insights will help afford us both a bit of distance through which to better navigate the complex and often messy entanglements between mother and child.

Attributing my propensity towards anxiety to inhibitions and restraint often seen in an individual raised by an overly anxious mother, and being personally faced with trauma and mortality at such a young age, I do wonder to what extent this anxiety is related to an unconscious sense of my parents' inability to protect me from harm, much as they were unable to protect my brothers from harm. As I consider how I would like to parent my own child, it is difficult to consider the ways in which I hope to be like my parents versus what I might want to do it differently. At some level, to do so makes me feel as though I am not appreciative of all they have done and the magnitude of the problems they have experienced. To find a balance between allegiance and "objective" ideas about what did and did not work, while also appreciating that "the best laid plans…" makes the task of being a "good enough mother"—whatever that means—seem quite daunting. It is in those moments that I am most able to appreciate my husband's very different, but complimentary, ideas about childrearing, knowing that our differences will require continued conversations as we try to help our child to develop resiliency in the face of life's inevitable difficulties. Despite my fears and anxiety, I try to find solace in the thought that as we continue to learn about and try to understand one another, using *both* of our experiences will help us to strike the necessary balance to keep our child in mind as we face life's uncertainties together.

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Grief and the Loss of a Loved One in the Bush Family

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How families talk about emotions, loss of a loved one, and problems arising in all human relationships is important. Here the discussion is on the issue of dying and bereavement in the family of Barbara and George Bush, focused on the loss of a daughter of one future president, who was the sister of the current president.

There is nothing worse than seeing your

child become ill, suffer, and die. When in February, 1953, the Bushes heard the terrible news of Robin's almost certainly fatal, advanced leukemia, they refused to believe this was the case. Half a continent away they searched in vain for a medical miracle at the Sloan-Kettering Medical Center. The cost to Barbara, George, "Little George" at six years old, and John Ellis (Jeb) at several weeks, was enormous. Barbara stayed with Robin in New York. George, who started his new oil business the very same month as the diagnosis, was in New York on the weekends and home in Midland, Texas during the week. Their eldest son was in the hands of neighbors and other caretakers for extended periods. At times when Robin and Barbara were back in Midland, Little George was sternly warned not to roughhouse with his sister, lest that might worsen her condition. Though the little boy was not told his sister was dying, the unusual behavior of the adults had to have alerted him to it being a serious situation. Unbeknownst to him, she died on October 11, 1953. George specifically remembers the situation when his parents came to tell him the sad news. He was carrying a phonograph with another boy when he saw their green Oldsmobile. He writes: "To this day, I am certain I saw her, her small head rising barely above the backseat." He reports, "The instant I saw the car, I put it [the record player] down, and took off running…" The shock of Robin not being there and of her death was considerable: he "was sad and stunned." The incident remains "the starkest memory of my childhood" (G.W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep* [1999], p. 14).

There are various indications that the family talked only intermittently about what was happening, their fears, and the subsequent grief they felt. George Herbert Walker Bush (born, July 12, 1924 and called "Poppy" within the family) was raised not to talk much about his feelings and accomplishments. Several examples of this tendency are his titling his campaign autobiography, *Looking Forward*, even though an autobiography is about looking backwards, and his mother calling him when he was running for President, telling him that he was speaking too much about himself. A tendency to formality discouraged speaking about feelings: Poppy sometimes followed his father in using the old-fashioned "Dear Lads," in writing to his sons, and even ended his own letters to his father and father-in-law, "Ever devotedly" or "Devoted" (G.H.W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush* [1999]). Speaking deeply about feeling was not something he was comfortable with. This was indicated by his inclination to say to reporters who inquired much about his childhood or personality, "Don't put me on the couch!" His son Jeb said that "it's not natural for us…I think I can speak on behalf of all the family, to get into, to be, to turn on this reflective mode and somehow spill our guts" (Minutaglio, *First Son* [1999], p. 23). During his years in Washington, Poppy would acknowledge, "I am not too good at the emotional side" of life and "I am just not an emotional kind of guy" (The Editors of the New Republic, *Bushisms*, p. 14).

Barbara Pierce Bush (born June 8, 1925) was much more outspoken than her husband, even acerbic in her comments, but not comfortable about probing the emotions and the psyche. This was reflected in her telling a family member, who like George had lost a sibling, not to "over exaggerate" when she spoke about the feelings involved in such a tragic loss.

Barbara Bush had been living a mother's worse nightmare, torn between her daughter in New York City and her sons and husband in Texas. Traveling to New York would normally have been a nice reprieve, because she had been raising three young children far from her family support system in an area where some people were "Eastern prejudiced" (Minutaglio, *First Son*, p. 28). The hair of this twenty-eight-year old woman started turning white during this crisis as her body expressed some of the strain, as she struggled to control her emotions. A certain hardness in Barbara Bush's face may be a residue of this terrible period of her life.

Despite her own overwhelming emotional needs, she forced herself to be a good caretaker to her dying daughter and a devoted mother, wife, and daughter.

When Robin died, Barbara was emotionally numb. The day after their daughter's death the bereaved Bushes played golf at Barbara's father's request. He thought this would help them take their minds off Robin's death. She had trouble facing people at the wake. Only a small group was invited to the memorial service (B. Bush, *Memoir* [1994], p. 48). According to Minutaglio, Robin's

body was donated to science, while Barbara reports her mother and a friend laying the child's body to rest after George and Barbara had left for Texas. Because of his isolation from the events in New York, "Georgie" was denied an opportunity to mourn his sister. Back in Texas, the father mourned his daughter and did what he could to console his wife. Barbara, who had allowed herself no tears before the death, "fell apart," and time after time during the next six months, "George would put me back together again." She reports, "We awakened night after night in great physical pain—it hurt that much" (B. Bush, *Memoir*, p. 49). Many times her husband held her in his arms as she wept herself to sleep. George threw himself into his thriving business in the dynamic and cut-throat West Texas oil industry. It was a business requiring lots of travel that would leave him with a bleeding ulcer in his early thirties (Bush with Gold, *Looking Forward* [1987], pp. 11-12).

Most of the time, this left grieving Barbara alone with her two sons. Her friends didn't want to bring up a subject as painful as the death of a child. They even made inappropriate comments such as, "at least it wasn't your first born and a boy at that." Her grief partly took the form of anger, as illustrated by her recollection that "I just needed someone to blame." Mentioning Robin was painful, but not mentioning her daughter left Barbara with the terrible feeling "as if she had never been" (B. Bush, *Memoir*, pp. 49-50).

Seven-year-old Georgie had terrifying nightmares—the details of which are unknown—related to the death of Robin. He did not understand why his parents had never told him his little sister was dying. There are several indications that he identified strongly with her, even in death. When he was with his father and some friends at a baseball game, he shocked the adults by wishing he were Robin. To his father's query of "why?", he answered, because "I bet she can see the game better up there than we can here." On another occasion, after he learned that the earth rotated, he asked his father if his dead sister was standing on her head—an idea that bemused him. It is noteworthy that in both of these examples cited by Barbara, it is to his father that the boy speaks about the lost love one; the subject of Robin may simply have been too painful for the mother or upsetting to the son. Whether or not they spoke about their great loss, there is no question about the degree of their closeness.

A turning point in the mourning process was when the mother overheard her little boy tell his friends, "I can't come over to play because I have to play with my mother…She's lonely" (Minutaglio, *First Son*, p. 46). This spurred Barbara to action. For the Junior Service League she started a woman's exchange store and worked at it "night and day." It served the purpose of drawing her out of the mourning that might have turned to melancholy. When she had her next child, the fourth of six, she gave up the shop. The family moved to a nicer house, as well. Barbara joined lots of organizations, smoked, enjoyed a cocktail, became known for her sharp tongue, and was the typical Little League mom cheering her sons' athletic efforts.

George W. may have followed in his father's footsteps to Andover, Yale, the oil business, politics, the presidency, and war with Saddam Hussein, but his personality is most like that of his mother, with whom he spent an enormous amount of time. Anna Williams, a maid who moved in with them whenever the family was back in Connecticut or New York, described mother and son as "exactly alike, even their humor was alike." They would also, "squabble a lot. You know how kids and parents that are just alike will get?" (Minutaglio, *First Son,* p. 48). Mother and son were quite close, as part of the legacy of the most intense part of the mourning of Robin's death occurring at a time the family breadwinner was absorbed in building his business.

The death of Robin was a major emotional crisis for the family. The Bushes suffered, but held their family together amidst the pain. George found an outlet for his energies in his business. Barbara became more attached to her oldest son, threw herself into volunteer work, turned her attention to a new house, and had more children until she had a girl to replace the one the family had lost. Therapy does not appear to have been an option in West Texas in 1953. The enormous grief, suppressed and repressed within the family, took its toll on young George, who continued in the role of family clown, just getting by in school, right through college where he drank and partied a lot.

He seemed fated for a life of failure when at age forty he gave up alcohol and turned his life around. One might argue that his bellicosity and a sense of entitlement in his public life is in part a reflection of his unresolved mourning. His drive to go to war against Saddam Hussein was directly related to his conviction that the Iraqi dictator had tried to kill his father in 1993, a loss that would have been even more devastating than the death of his little sister. George W Bush is a man who lives in denial regarding many of his feelings, choosing action over contemplation, which predisposed him to wage two ill-considered and ill-planned wars in his administration.

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The Pedagogy of Mourning and Death Education

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Catherine, a former student, recently e-mailed me about how the eulogy I wrote for my beloved wife gave her the courage to write her father's eulogy. Catherine was a member of an Expository Writing course I taught at SUNY-Albany in the spring of 2004, the semester when my wife Barbara lay gravely ill from pancreatic cancer. In early March, when the doctors told us she was close to death, I informed my students about her condition. The news stunned everyone, for I had not shared this information with them earlier in the semester. Nor could they have known from my demeanor—I am usually playful and high-spirited in the classroom—that Barbara was ill. Barbara did not want to read the eulogy—she said it would make her too sad—but she allowed me to read it to the class. Before beginning, I announced that it would take me about twenty minutes to read the eulogy, and that class would end when I finished. Anyone who wished to leave early, I added, could do so. Finally, in a quiet, measured voice, I began the reading. I struggled to maintain my composure, and when I finished, everyone filed slowly out of the room, shaken by the words of my eulogy for my dying wife.

Barbara died on April 5, and I immediately began writing a book about our life together after her diagnosis on August 12, 2002, one day after our thirty-fourth wedding anniversary. I wanted the book to have a pedagogical focus—a writing teacher sharing the most wrenching experience of his life with his undergraduates, many of whom were sharing painful experiences with him. How did my students feel about hearing me read the eulogy? The week after the reading, I asked them to describe, in a brief, anonymous in-class assignment, how they felt about hearing a teacher eulogize his wife in class. Their responses, which I then photocopied and shared with them, became a chapter in the book. Before the semester ended, I promised my students that I would send each of them a copy of the completed manuscript. I told them that if they shared with me their impressions of reading the entire work, I would include their letters in the appendix of the book.

Dying to Teach: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Learning was published by SUNY Press in 2007. The appendix contains letters from sixteen of the twenty-four students who were in the class. In her letter, Catherine spoke about reading the book on the way to work each morning: "On the Long Island Railroad, miles away from Albany and you, Barbara came alive to this twenty-two-year-old postgraduate. Upon arriving at Penn Station I would stuff the draft back into my bag and wonder if you knew how your words, your life, were floating around in my mind. Looking back, I guess I felt such relief because you had managed to keep a part of your beloved wife alive to others."

After completing *Dying to Teach*, I created and taught a new undergraduate course, Love and Loss in Literature and Life, in the spring of 2006. Within a few days, registration for the course closed at its maximum, sixty students. We read several eulogies, elegies, poems, and stories focusing on the literature of bereavement, including Anna Quindlen's *One True Thing* (1996), which was eerily relevant to my family's experience. Shortly before she lapsed into a coma, Barbara asked me, in a barely audible voice, whether I could give her "all the medication"—meaning a fatal dose of morphine. This remains the most un-