

## [Recently: Losing and gaining through death and life](#)

Apr 25, 2008 [Community](#), [Recently](#) [Jump to Comments](#)

The Carrboro Citizen.

*By Valarie Schwartz*  
*Columnist*

Our first loss of a close loved one provides a reference that changes our perception of death forever.

Life provides a unique journey for each of us as we inhabit our bodies, and Mary Bea Sullivan will be the first to say that hers has been no more special than another's, only that the path she took following the death of her best friend, Rhonda, led her to write a book about it.

Dancing Naked Under the Moon explores Sullivan's pain of loss — death, divorce and finances, along with the attendant helplessness brought by each circumstance — and the discernment that comes while trying to find her way beyond each. She will read from and sign books from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday at United Church of Chapel Hill and sign books from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 29 at Market Street Books in Southern Village.

Since release of the book on April 1, Sullivan, who is a life coach, has been sharing it at book signings and retreats.

“I was in Augusta [Georgia] for a retreat and was asked to come the night before and do a facilitated reading,” Sullivan said. Some in attendance had already read the book after ordering it online. While telling them, “This is my unique expression of the journey, but it's really a universal journey,” Sullivan saw a woman tearing up as her head nodded in agreement.

It's a book with chapters that reach out to people at particular stages along the path.

“One person will say, ‘The chapter on forgiveness grabbed me and gave me the impetus to work on forgiving my mother,’” Sullivan said.

“Another said, ‘The chapter on sabbatical made me realize how busy I've been.’ For others, it's the part on grief.”

She shared the story of a woman in her 50s who had had a brother and sister both die very quickly within a three-year period.

“She said, ‘It felt so good to cry with you on losing Rhonda.’”

The book includes a search for God, which many people experience during a period of tremendous loss.

“For me, God was in my neighbors who showed up with a pot of soup and a loaf of bread,” Sullivan said. “God was not in the taking away, but in the receiving.”

The neighbors of whom she speaks were in Chapel Hill, where Sullivan lived before moving to Alabama in 2005. Many may know Sullivan for the nonprofit she started as a result of her searching through grief. Project Compassion ([www.project-compassion.org](http://www.project-compassion.org)) continues under executive director James Brooks, who helps provide care teams and trainings for people dealing with the end stages of life, and those left to grieve. A portion of funds raised from books sold at the United Church reception will go toward Project Compassion.

“I’m always happy when I have a chance to come back to Chapel Hill,” Sullivan said from the home on Smith Lake she shares with her two children and the husband readers come to know in the book. “Chapel Hill is probably one of the places that felt like home right away — and one of the hardest places to leave, because I loved it and the people so much.”

Sullivan’s book is gutsy and sometimes stark — with a search for the Divine followed prominently in the next paragraph with a curse — so like life as we teeter-totter back and forth between the edges while wrapped in our pain.

“The point of this book is for hearts to be moved,” Sullivan said. “I hope that by hearing my story, other hearts are moved on their journey, in some shape and form.”

See: [www.marybeasullivan.com](http://www.marybeasullivan.com) for more.