

BARBARA KENNEDY, M.P.H. '96, Takes a Personal Look at CARE GIVING

By Kimberly Gaudin de Gonzalez

Accomplished artist, writer, social worker, mediator and retired investment advisor, Barbara Kennedy, M.P.H. '96, said she drew from all aspects of her education, professional and personal life when she wrote her book, *Second Chance Ranch*, about the journey of a caregiver who is tending to her dying husband.

Although her book is not autobiographical, Ms. Kennedy said she based much of it on firsthand knowledge after losing her husband, Paul Smith, to lung cancer in 1999. Profits from the sale of the book are being donated to a local hospice. She also plans to donate part of future proceeds to the Make-A-Wish-Foundation, a cause that she and her late husband supported.

Lauded by one hospice administrator as a poignant look at the exhausting, emotional roller-coaster ride that characterizes the daily experiences of caregivers, *Second Chance Ranch* emphasizes the need for empathy and forgiveness.

"From my long-term hospice work and personal experience and also from my own caregiving experiences, I can say that Ms. Kennedy has captured 'our stories' and also poignantly conveyed the way to heal ourselves...to forgive, forgive, forgive," wrote Fred McDaniel, executive director of HospiceCare, Inc. in Park Hills, Mo., who reviewed the book on Amazon. "Most hospice workers tend to see the beginning of a situation as the moment they step into it, but the truth is, hospice patients and their families had a whole life before the hospice worker arrived on the scene. The book helps us to see the bigger picture. It will energize or

reenergize empathy for these courageous people, the caretakers, and emphasize why it is so important for us to do our work with excellence and compassion. We only have one chance to get things right," he concluded.



Barbara Kennedy, M.P.H. '96

Ms. Kennedy, however, believes in second, third and maybe even fourth chances in life. She continues to add to her knowledge base, and to build upon her career. She had been a bond trader on Wall Street for more than 20 years when she became interested in behavioral science and health promotion. She decided to enter the master of public health program at New York Medical College, in what was then known as the Graduate School of Health Sciences. It is now the School of Public Health. This year, she completed her M.S.W. at Arizona State University. She is working as a cognitive behavioral therapist and mediator when she is not writing and lecturing.

"My M.P.H. degree helped prepare me for my time as a caregiver to Paul," she said. "I understood the healthcare system, and was able to dialogue with physicians more effectively and to navigate the extensive medical research—

and perhaps this knowledge helped to extend his life and provide a quality end of life."

And if her other accomplishments were not enough, Ms. Kennedy began making papier mache bowls in her kitchen, working with her hands. After her husband died, she made one bowl each day for two months, and has 60 in all. She refers to them as vessels of grieving. Several were featured recently in *PaperWorks Magazine*, and this fall the bowls will go on display as part of a Cultural Arts Commission Forum at Arizona State University. Ms. Kennedy will be panel moderator for a community discussion on the role art plays in healing and wellness.

Believing that every aspect of her life has value, Ms. Kennedy quotes writer Lillian Smith: "I went on this journey to find an image of the human being I could be proud of. I had to find what I believe, what is meaningful in human experience, for me; what is the creative meaning of ordeal?"

For Ms. Kennedy, art and writing are the creative means she uses to help her understand her personal journey and how it has transformed her into the person she is today. She uses creativity and expression in her therapeutic process with clients, especially when loss and grieving are complicated and confounded.

"Narrative Therapy [a model of clinical therapy] can be an effective method of grieving," she said. "I've learned to go to the events that formed my character, go to the disappointments that shaped my personality, and to speak my story."

"Where do I begin?" her clients have asked. "Anywhere you like," she encourages them. ♦

