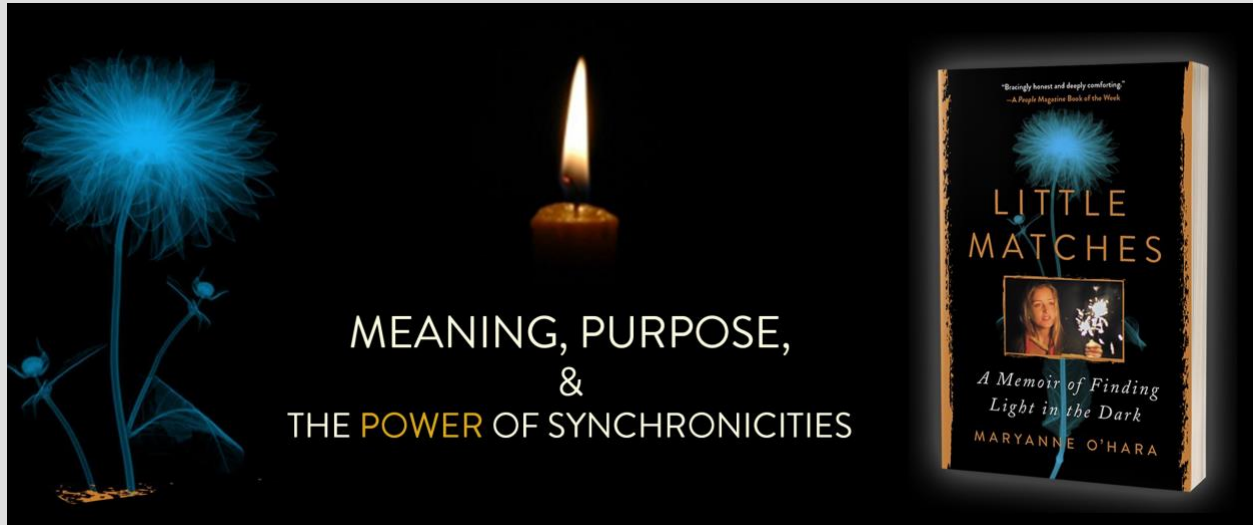


LITTLE MATCHES: MEANING, PURPOSE, & THE POWER OF SYNCHRONICITIES

Speaker: Maryanne O'Hara



Description: A 30-minute presentation, rich with 150 visuals. Maryanne O'Hara recounts how she lost her beloved only child and set out to look for answers to life's hard questions. *Where is she? Is she? Is there more to life than this life? Does my existence have any real purpose?* She reveals how she came to understand the power of synchronicities to help people find purpose and meaning in the everyday moments that make up their lives and shape their legacies. As a grieving mother, author, and certified end-of-life doula, Maryanne offers opportunities for poignant self-reflection as well as a range of coping strategies for surviving life during chronic illness, end-of-life, and bereavement.

Mini-workshop: After the presentation, Maryanne leads attendees through writing exercises that will help them craft a template for legacy interviews that they can conduct with a loved one or themselves. Life interviews offer an opportunity for people to reflect on their lives and shape of their life stories, regardless of age or current health. By creating and responding to legacy interview questions, participants will leave better equipped to develop similar exercises to facilitate effective connection with others during times of extreme stress.

“What is the meaning of life? That was all — a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.”

-Virginia Woolf

Feedback:

“Maryanne is a gifted speaker and thinker who has achieved the rare feat of alchemizing her pain into something rich and beautiful. Through sharing the story of Caitlin's life and death, and her own experience as Caitlin's mother, caregiver, and companion, Maryanne invites us as listeners into an intimate space—one in which we are each called to mine the meaning from our own lives and consider the ways in which we can most fully inhabit our fleeting time here on Earth.

**–Janet Arida, PhD, RN, LCSW, Outreach & Education Coordinator
Highmark Caring Place, Pennsylvania**

“Little Matches has transformed the learning of my Narrative Medicine students. Uncertainty, suffering, and grief empowers hope and heroism in each of the living characters—Caitlin, her mother Maryanne, her physicians, and her many friends. Anyone considering a career in medicine or healthcare will find expanded purpose in these pages.”

**–Christine Flanagan, Professor of English,
University of the Sciences, Philadelphia**

“Maryanne O’Hara thoughtfully articulates new ways of thinking about loss while also sharing some of the incredible insights that her daughter Caitlin had about living a meaningful life in the face of significant health challenges.”

**–Michelle LaBonte
Harvard University, Countway Library Author Series moderator**

“I have been to many lectures and seminars over the years, mostly in education, and have never seen a more polished and powerful presentation. I was blown away. Maryanne’s stories, her voice, the photos, Caitlin’s wisdom and light, all had an incredible impact. But for me, it was Maryanne’s story, the lessons she was meant to learn that moved me the most. This should be a BBC documentary. It’s an incredible gift that she is sharing with the world, and people need to see it.”

**–Audience feedback,
Harvard Medical School Countway Library Author Series**

“Little Matches is an example of brilliantly fearless writing. It takes us inside a world of transforming illness, and deep grief, without ever eclipsing the characters at the heart of the story. A great book to teach, not just in courses aimed at pre-med students, but in non-fiction writing classes where students will be inspired both by a mother and daughter’s bravery and ferocious love, and by Maryanne O’Hara’s craft and artistry as a writer.”

**–Jane McCafferty, Professor of English,
Director of Creative Writing Program,
Carnegie Mellon University**

“Little Matches is the most important reading that I have read in all of college to prepare me for medical school, and to help me fully realize why I want to be a physician.”

**–Dayna Smerina, medical student
Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine**

“Maryanne provide us with a renewed sense of what it means to live fully, to love fully, and to honor the memories and teachings of those who are no longer physically with us but whose presence long remains.”

**–Alijah Jade Marquez, Community Education Manager,
Mission Hospice, California**

“Your talk on your experiences through Caitlin’s medical journey and life was hugely moving. The storytelling is so vital to how we practice medicine. Thank you for contributing to our education and growth.”

**–Robert Patton, M.D.
Chief Medical Resident
Inova Fairfax Hospital**



Maryanne O'Hara

Maryanne O'Hara is the author, most recently, of *Little Matches, A Memoir of Finding Light in the Dark*, published by HarperCollins. *Little Matches* is inspired by a blog that Maryanne O'Hara kept while her daughter Caitlin was waiting for a lung transplant. Maryanne and Caitlin's story has been featured in *The New York Times*, *TIME Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, *Psychology Today*, and *Little Matches* is a *People Magazine* Book of the Week. She is also the author of *Cascade*, a novel (Viking/Penguin Random House) which was the Boston Globe Book Club's inaugural pick, a winner of Fiction Honors from the Massachusetts Book Awards, and a *People Magazine* Book of the Week. Her story collection was a finalist for the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. She holds an MFA in creative writing, has taught creative writing at the college level, and was a longtime editor at the literary journal, *Ploughshares*.

After volunteering as an end-of-life volunteer at care facilities in Boston and Pittsburgh, she trained as a certified end-of-life doula at the University of Vermont's Larner College of Medicine in 2019. She lectures on topics including chronic illness, bereavement, and secular spirituality. She is the developer of a successful legacy writing workshop that facilitates personal and communal reflective creative practices across identity, age, and health status.