

EDITORIAL

The International Congress on Grief and Bereavement which took place in London last July was outstandingly successful. A major feature of the conference was the linking of personal experience with professional and voluntary activity. Researchers and the bereaved shared their unique experiences and benefited from each other. Over the next year, *Bereavement Care* will be publishing many of the papers.

We begin with the two personal accounts that moved the participants so deeply. Professor Sen asks whether a parent with a more distant relationship can help his children when the closer parent dies and finds that the development of the bond brings something positive when all else seems bleak. He is clear how important it is that we begin our counselling *before* someone dies.

Susan Hill is a novelist who spoke to us with great honesty and poignancy about three personal bereavements, all different, all painful and all teaching her and us something immensely important about living.

Also in this issue is a paper from one of the research workers who spoke at the Conference. Dr. Jones gives us an account of the value of the funeral of children in the mourning process and illustrates different facets of Australian culture.

Supplement to the International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society, London 1988

Cruse—Bereavement Care has received many requests for the text of the plenary papers given at the International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society held in London in July 1988.

Cruse is pleased to announce the proposed publication, later this year, of a Supplement to the International Conference. The Supplement is expected to include the Plenary Addresses by Dr. Colin Murray Parkes, Professor Peter Marris on Adult Grief and Bereavement, Professor Robert Pynoos on Children and Bereavement, and the First Professor Shamai Davidson Memorial Lecture delivered by Professor Gerald Caplan on Loss, Stress and Mental Health.

Anyone interested in reserving a copy of the Supplement should write to the **Publications Editor, Cruse—Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR, England.** Bereavement Care subscribers will be able to purchase the Supplement at a special price. Further details will appear in the next issue.

Bereavement and the Family: Some Personal Experiences

by

Professor Amartya Sen

Lamont University Professor
Harvard University

I feel very honoured by the invitation to speak to the International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society. However, I also feel rather unequal to the task. Insofar as I have any qualification at all to say anything in this area, it arises from a terrible tragedy that hit my family and me a little over three years ago. My wife, Eva Colorni, died of cancer, at the age of 44, on the 3rd of July 1985. Our two children were then eight and ten. What had been an exceptionally happy family was suddenly plunged into misery, anguish, chaos and confusion.

The transformation was rapid. In the early days of December 1984 we were making plans for the Christmas vacation. The diagnosis confirming the worst possibility—a very extensive case of the most virulent type of stomach cancer—came through quite suddenly on 5th December. Eva was operated on three days later, with further bad news about the extent of spread, and the nearly terminal nature of the ailment. Despite the unfavourable odds that were explained to us, Eva was full of fighting spirit, and chose the route of radical confrontation rather than that of quiet submission. Aside from consulting the front-line experts for this kind of cancer in London, we also went, helped by friends, to seek the best advice we could get in the leading medical centres in the States and in Japan, particularly to find out whether anything experimental was showing promise. The only strategy for encountering the disease which seemed at all promising and which was, in fact, chosen, involved a lot of suffering, with only a slim chance of its working out, but Eva was still in great fighting spirit.



Eva's fight and influence

Despite the medical judgments and probability statistics, there was not yet any sense of doom—not even great gloom—in the family. The children knew that cancer can be a fatal disease, but at that stage took their mother to be going through a bad patch rather than going irreversibly downhill. Even though I proceeded to read almost everything that can be read on the subject of stomach cancer, and knew fairly clearly where we stood, Eva's optimism was infectious, and I fluctuated between buoyant hope and reasoned despair from one day to another. Our friends and relations (Eva's sisters, parents and aunt, and others) were a source of great comfort and confidence. Looking back at the first four months of her life after her operation, I recollect a strange mixture of faith in the future along with a fundamental sense of fragility. But Eva's ability to fight on despite the physical suffering and well-grounded worries kept us all going smoothly, without laughter deserting the lives of the children.

And then matters took a terrible turn. With an early recurrence, followed by a couple more operations and the trying out of another experimental chemotherapy, Eva died, on the 3rd of July, after weeks of enormous suffering. It was a sunny, balmy afternoon, and her frail but brilliantly beautiful face was shining in the glowing light.