

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## GRIEVING DOES NOT STOP

Phyllis Silverman talked about the continuing process of grieving, the importance of remaining connected to the dead rather than striving to let them go. **Children need to construct a relationship with the person who has died which can continue and change** as they grow, and as their understanding develops of who and what they have lost.

## LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES

Danai Papadatou, from Athens, described the **different grieving responses of health care professionals** in Greece and Hong Kong. She presented a model of their grieving process, fluctuating between experiencing grief reactions and containing or avoiding them, similar to the Utrecht dual process model. The grieving process of the study group was found to be affected not only by personal factors, but by the nature of their work and the ethos of their work unit: doctors and teams working in intensive care tended to avoid emotions, distancing themselves by depersonalising patients; nurses and those involved in oncology or palliative care units were much more engaged emotionally with patients and their families and so could experience problems with

boundaries. These different coping strategies affected the needs and the ways in which the health professionals were able to support one another. After discussion, contributions from the rest of the conference included a number of ideas for looking after ourselves, including some more light-hearted suggestions, such as shopping therapy and 'taking the scenic route'.

## WORK TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

This was the topic of Dame Rennie Fritchie's plenary, taken up later by Louise Rowling who spoke about **the Health Promoting School** and how work on death and bereavement can be brought into a whole-school curriculum and Elizabeth Capewell who described ways in which **resistance to bereavement work in school systems can be transformed**, with reference to Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Omagh bomb. Barbara Monroe also focused on this her talk on preparing for a death, emphasising the necessity to involve the family fully in any bereavement work with children. Her message was **children need their families, who will be around long after the professionals have disappeared**.

There were two sessions which seemed to

contradict this. Lady Limerick, former Chairman of British Red Cross, presented data and photographs of **children involved in war**, not just as refugees or the victims of land mines, but as child soldiers. The presentation was bleak: 7-year-olds are brutalised, programmed to carry out atrocities; children are trained to be killers by making them watch other children being killed and then getting them to walk on the bodies. David Southall spoke of the **appalling state of health care in many countries**, with soaring child and maternal death rates. In hundreds of children's hospitals there is no functioning equipment, no medication, no hope, and this in a time when most childhood mortality is easily prevented.

It was pointed out that some children can be rehabilitated, not by in-depth psychotherapy but by trying to give them back a normal life of school and play. There are also hopes that the United Nations will take some action to implement statements about child rights. And there is always the starfish.

I have no doubt that everyone benefited from the time spent at this conference – certainly the feedback at the end supported this notion – and am sure that the next one will be eagerly anticipated. BC

# OBITUARY

## Margaret Torrie OBE 1912-1999

### Founder of Cruse Bereavement Care



**A** dynamic and charismatic lady with wide interests and strong convictions, Margaret Torrie was a Quaker and pacifist who, in her youth, ran lectures and seminars on peace and world affairs in London. She also began and directed an International Arts Centre. When World War II broke out she opened a Dick Sheppard Club in Paddington where she worked to help families in poverty.

In 1959 she founded Cruse Clubs for widows and their children. Margaret was born of a generation in which most women saw it as their main function to marry and rear a family. They chose, or

were chosen by, older men whose role it was to earn a living and 'look after the little woman'. Consequently the 'little women' faced a major crisis when, in the course of time, their children left home and their husbands died. Left with no central purpose to their lives they turned to Cruse for help in discovering new purpose and direction. And this is what Margaret, and the volunteers with whom she worked, were well able to provide.

Margaret was impatient with grief, describing it, in a letter to me, as 'purely personal and selfish. It does no good of any kind and little to those who remain but cripple their courage.' She was against the 'philosophy of death, grief and bereavement so encouraged in our secular society'. For her, death was not an end to be mourned but a transition. Bereavement, she saw as a 'practical situation where we learn to stand free of dependence'.

In keeping with this point of view the Cruse which she created, and the book, *Begin Again: A book for women alone\**, which formulated her viewpoint, provided sound practical advice on how

to live as a widow together with a strong feminist message that 'women themselves are not yet sufficiently articulate and have been too sheltered in marriage and in the home, and too little concerned in continuing education and training for life in the world.'

But with all her suspicion of 'the philosophy of death and grief' she was not unaware of the need for us to understand the psychology of grief and loss. Her husband, Alfred Torrie, was a well-known psychiatrist who had played a part in the inception of the Marriage Guidance movement and his influence, though discreet, enabled counselling to develop as an integral part of the work of Cruse.

When Alfred died, Margaret, whose own health was not good, was ready to pass on the responsibility for running Cruse to a man, Derek Nuttall, who respected the great value of the work which she had done but also recognised that it was time to broaden the base of Cruse to take account of recent developments in the prevention of psychiatric problems in bereavement and to include widowers and others who had suffered losses by death.

Margaret's retirement was not a quiet one. She continued to express her views on developments in Cruse, which were

not always to her liking, and she remained a busy commentator on the problems of the world at large writing long letters to the Prime Minister and Her Majesty the Queen (who, in 1984 had become the patron of Cruse). Her writings in both prose and poetry cover a wide range of contemporary issues and she enjoyed painting in pastels. It is her poems, more than anything else, which reveal the combination of sensitivity, intelligence and compassion that made her worthy of respect. She had a great love of the natural world which she saw as the most convincing and glorious evidence of the goodness of God and her poems are full of the symbolism of the seasons:

'Where nature turns invading pain  
To beauty and delight' (*Selected Poems*)

She is survived by a daughter and two grandchildren. BC

**Colin Murray Parkes**  
President, Cruse Bereavement Care

### Books by Margaret Torrie

**Selected Poems** £1.00 pb

**Poems for Today** £3.50 pb

**New Poems** £1.00 pb

**My Years with Cruse** £2.50 pb

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