

tions of earlier plans, assumptions or hopes, or something completely new. Ronald Valdiserri, working at a centre for disease control, wrote this at a time when his twin brother was battling with, and dying from AIDS:

It would be easy to assume that the AIDS epidemic, so often associated with loss, generates nothing but sorrow in those it touches, that the personal adjustments we make are all negative. I find, on the contrary, that AIDS has helped me to clarify just what does and does not matter during our brief time in this world. The epidemic has not taken hope away from me, but it has taught me the inadequacy of looking toward the future as a means of rescue from the present. AIDS has shown me that hope is strongest in us when we seek our fulfilment in the circumstances of the present, when we refuse to defer our dreams or to accept defeat¹⁹.

For many, like Valdiserri, coming to grips with a death results in the realisation of what is truly important. Tragedy shakes many from what was a more casual appreciation of who and what was of value to them to a new clarity. Assumptions and meanings that were disrupted by death cause a reconsideration of ways of behaving and dreaming. As for Valdiserri, it can cause some to live more in the present, even with their hopes and dreams, rather than far in the future.

Mary Oliver expressed a yearning that when death came, she would approach it with a curiosity and zest, as she had lived her life.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder if I have made of my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,

or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world²⁰.

Sogyal Rinpoche in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* described such appreciation for life and death this way:

Perhaps it is only those who understand how fragile life is who know how precious it is.²¹

CONCLUSION

Bereavement, then, can be associated with shattered dreams. Those who provide care and presence to the bereaved are often told to meet the person where they are, so if bereavement is accompanied by a shattering of dreams, attention must be paid to that loss also. Acknowledgement of connections such as these is an important act of bereavement care and, when done

well, bereavement becomes a habitable grief. For bereavement care, at its best, emphasises listening, not fixing; social support, not advising. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a grieving father, pointedly spoke to bereavement carers when he wrote:

What I need to hear from you is that you recognise how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench²².

So, you are asked to listen. When you do, listen for the connections between bereavement and shattered dreams. **BC**

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* Available from Roxburgh House, Dartmouth Road, Strete, nr Dartmouth TQ6 0RW, £3.00.

† Available from the author at 8 Miles Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2JN, UK.

‡ Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond TW9 1UR, UK.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND COURSES

Life, grief and continuity. 6th International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society. 9-14 July 2000. Jerusalem, Israel. Booking through Peltours-Te'um Congress Organisers, PO 52047, Jerusalem 91520. email: grief@teumcong.co.il.

Bereavement and loss: professional and personal issues. Manchester Area Bereavement Forum 7th Annual Conference. 16 September 2000. Manchester, UK. Application forms available from MABF, 362 Manchester Road, Droylsden M43 6QX, UK. email: grief@mabf.org.uk.

Building bridges for the future. 11th International Conference on Cancer Nursing. 30 July-3 August 2000. Oslo, Norway. Advance programme from Emap Healthcare, Greater London House, Hampstead Road, London NW1 7EJ, UK. email: ICCN2000@healthcare.emap.co.uk.

Opportunities and challenges in the 21st century. 6th Annual Counselling Research Conference of the British Association of Counselling. 20 May 2000. Manchester, UK.

Further details from Angela Couchman, 1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2PJ, UK. email: angelac@bac.co.uk.

Speaking about the unspeakable: our own mortality. London Bereavement Network training event for bereavement service co-ordinators and other LBN members. 13 May 2000. London, UK. Led by Hymie Wise. Apply, with sae, to the London Bereavement Network, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA, UK. email: lbn@bereavement.demon.co.uk.

Living with dying. Workshop led by Christianne Heal. 17 June 2000. Cambridge, UK. Details from Christianne Heal, 1 Petersfield, Cambridge CB1 1BB, UK. ☎ 01223 314620.

Mole Conferences events. One day conferences. London, UK, 2000.

Suicide. 20 June. With Trish Thomas of Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS).
Domestic violence. 18 October. Contact Mole Conferences, 26 Church Road, Brighton BN41 1LA, UK. email: pweitz@compuserve.com.