

network of support groups.

Some people may benefit from help and advice provided through reading material. Several useful books are now available on the topic, of which *A Special Scar* is particularly valuable in the UK context¹¹. A *Bereavement Information Pack*, developed at the Centre for Suicide Research and published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, provides information on experiences of bereavement from suicide, recommended reading, and contact details for sources of support¹³.

Information and support are also available through many internet sites, which may be particularly useful to people who are geographically isolated or prefer anonymity.

Clearly much can be done to help people who are bereaved by suicide. Although clinical trials are not easy to conduct, given the special circumstances of suicide bereavement, they are nonetheless required to show whether specific types of care are effective. Other factors which might help reduce distress include specialised training for professionals who have contact with people bereaved by suicide, modifications to those aspects of coroners' inquest procedures that the bereaved report finding most stressful, and more sensitive media coverage of suicides. **BC**

Contact details for support organisations

Cruse Bereavement Care:

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends – Shadow of Suicide (for parents who have lost a child, and siblings):

www.tcf.org.uk

PAPYRUS (committed to the prevention of youth suicide) will help bereaved parents and carers make contact with appropriate sources of support:

www.papyrus-uk.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS):

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Winston's Wish supports bereaved children and their families, and produces a booklet, *Beyond the Rough Rock*, which is specifically designed for children bereaved by suicide:

www.winstonswish.org.uk

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BEREAVEMENT IN THE ARTS

THE LOVELY BONES

Alice Sebold

London: Picador, 2002, 336pp, £6.99 pb. ISBN: 0 33041 316 3



This novel tells the story of the murder of a young girl, and the way in which this devastates her family. Unlike anything else I have read, it is told from the point of view of the dead victim who observes the grief and pain of her loved ones from heaven. The description of the murder is harrowing, and the account of the family's grief is at times distressing. It is charmingly written, and moved me to tears on more than one occasion – including twice on the number 68 bus.

He left the room and went down the two doors to my bedroom. The hallway was tiny, my door like all the others, hollow enough to easily punch a fist through. He was about to smash the mirror over my dresser, rip the wallpaper down with his nails, but instead he fell against my bed, sobbing, and balled the lavender sheets up in his hands.

'Daddy?' Buckley said. My little brother held the doorknob with his hand.

My father turned but was unable to stop his tears. He slid to the floor with the sheets still in his fists, and then he opened up his arms. He had to ask my brother twice, which he had never had to do before, but Buckley came to him.

My father wrapped my brother inside the sheets that smelled of me. He remembered the day I'd begged him to paint and paper my room purple. Remembered moving in the old *National Geographics* to the bottom shelves of

my bookcases. Remembered when there was just one child in the house for the briefest of time until Lindsey arrived.

'You are so special to me, little man,' my father said, clinging to him.

Buckley drew back and stared at my father's creased face, the fine bright spots of tears at the corners of his eyes. He nodded seriously and kissed my father's cheek. Something so divine that no one up in heaven could have made it up; the care a child took with an adult.

The book describes how the victim's parents and siblings deal with their bereavement in very different ways, and recounts how such a devastating event impacts upon parents' ability to parent, and the children's ability to be children and to grow up. I was surprised at how closely the reaction of the various family members resembled some of the families with whom I have worked, who have experienced similar losses. The family obviously does not return to normal. However they do eventually move on, but tragically in different directions. The resolution is more complete for the siblings than for the parents, and it reminded me of a friend once saying, 'You never get over these things, but with time you can learn to live alongside them'.

Because the story is told from the point of view of the deceased, including details of her heaven, I found myself curiously comforted; possibly because I was able to avoid the reality of her death – a denial which the victim's family were only able to hold temporarily. I was also struck by how helpless the victim feels, as she is unable to intervene and bring her family's suffering to an end.

I would hope that this novel, which is both critically-acclaimed and popular, might raise awareness of the desperate and complicated grief experienced by families bereaved in this way. **BC**

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