

many signs of appropriate grieving beginning to take place with the experiencing of grief-related affect. For the first time the subject was discussed openly at home. Reports from school on both behaviour and academic performance were also positive and both clients passed their exams.

The clients' parent also worked hard in treatment, leading to a successful outcome that allowed the family to have a common understanding and recover together. As in any such case, the successes achieved in treatment would not have occurred

without the courage of both of these clients in facing acutely painful issues, and their investment in the therapeutic process. **BC**

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A B E R E A V E M E N T F E D E R A T I O N

Vivre Son Deuil (*Live Your Grief*)

Paris, France

Michael Hanus MD

Président de la Fédération Européenne Vivre Son Deuil

Vivre Son Deuil (VSD) is a European federation now represented in Belgium, Switzerland and in several areas in France. The association was founded in Paris in 1995 by various palliative care and other support organisations. Our charter is based on two fundamental concepts – the value of networking and of voluntary support – and on the importance of competence, respect and confidentiality. All volunteers, no matter what their professional origin, are very carefully chosen, regularly trained and supervised.

The main activities of the various groups within VSD are aimed at helping bereaved people, and providing training on different aspects of grief. Whilst quite a number of the groups have been founded by VSD itself, many other groups, and conferences, have been set up at the request of outside institutions and associations from French-speaking Europe

Initial help for bereaved people is provided by a telephone listening service operated by specially trained teams of volunteers. The possibility of self-help and other support is then discussed with the caller.

This can lead to the caller joining a group. Some of these are self-help groups open to all bereaved people, while others are closed support groups where the members remain the same from beginning to end. The closed groups are particularly for children, teenagers, and those bereaved by suicide and miscarriage.

VSD publishes a newsletter addressed not only to every member but also to all the bereavement associations. This is how the association ensures the publicity of particularly successful initiatives. For example, three videos – of which two are about children – have been produced and widely distributed. We have also

published two booklets. One is for all bereaved people, *Vous êtes en Deuil (You Are Grieving)* and the other is for bereaved children, *Quelqu'un que Tu Aimes Vient de Mourir (Someone You Love Has Just Died)*.

VSD's main sponsors are: La Fondation de France (*The French Foundation*), La Ligue Nationale contre Le Cancer (*The National*

League Against Cancer), many pension funds and Les Pompes Funèbres Générales (*The Funeral Directors' Association*).

The association organises innovative projects and specialist training, for example, in running groups for children and those bereaved by suicide. Soon we intend to begin to make contact and, if possible, form networks with other non-French-speaking European associations with similar goals.

Contact VSD at 7 rue Taylor, 75010 Paris, France; ☎ and fax (0033) 142 081116; email fevsd@vivresondeuil.asso.fr; website www.vivresondeuil.assoc.fr **BC**

B O O K R E V I E W

WHAT FOREVER MEANS AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD Transcending the Trauma, Living with the Loss.

Kay Talbot

London: Brunner-Routledge, 2002, 261 pp. £17.50 pb. ISBN 1 58391 080 8

Talbot's American-based study examines experiences of parents, primarily mothers, after a child dies. She differs in her approach from writers like Klass¹ and Rubin² by making her own experience part of the research, and adds an important dimension to existing literature by exploring loss of the parenting function, or role loss, that inevitably follows the death of an only child.

She distinguishes between two groups of bereaved parents: 'chronic griever' and 'survivors'. Although both are equally devastated by their loss, the latter, she argues, are characterised by their motivation and will to find meaning in life again. This 'meaning-making', she believes, presents a particular challenge to bereaved parents because for them the natural order, of children surviving their parents, has been reversed and the world has become meaningless.

The book includes a review of familiar grief process models and a lesser-known one which refers to the importance of motivation in the healing process. A major part of the book is concerned with the unique and multifarious ways in which bereaved parents deal with their grief and Talbot makes an impassioned plea for greater understanding of their needs and for individualised responses from professionals and lay people alike. She emphasises that for bereaved parents grief resolution is not about grief ending, but about learning to live – or having to live – with it.

Although Talbot's pervasive belief in the transformational potential of suffering to change the bereaved into better beings will not be shared by everyone, hers is a life-affirming view. **BC**

Els Footman

Bereavement Trainer and Therapist

1. Klass D. The deceased child in the psychic and social worlds of bereaved parents during the resolution of grief. In: Klass D, Silverman PR, Nickman SL (eds). *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1996.

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'A shared experience' – books for bereaved people

LIBERATING LOSSES When Death Brings Relief

Jennifer Elison, Chris McGonigle
Cambridge, MA, USA: Perseus Publishing, 2003, 214pp.
\$26.00 hb, ISBN 0 73820 637 7; \$15.95 pb, ISBN 0 73820 948 1

This is a welcome book on a subject not often mentioned because there is, still, a general belief that death necessarily brings sadness to the friends and relations of the deceased. The idea that there could be relief as part of the mourning process is somehow taboo, or what the authors term 'the disenfranchised component of grief'.

The assumption that everyone bereaved must necessarily be feeling bereft can, the authors suggest, be a useful separating-off device for a society that does not want to think overmuch about mortality. The dead are reassuringly sanctified, and maybe this tunnel vision is a natural human tendency in the immediate shock of bereavement, a vision that sees only the good that is lost. The problem is that this can isolate bereaved people terribly if they are not listened to or allowed to express fully what is, and what is not, real for them.

Elison and McGonigle tell, with great honesty and courage, their own relief-through-death stories and these are interwoven throughout the book with moving accounts of others who have also suffered and been similarly liberated. Chapters such as 'Altruistic relief', 'Speaking ill of the dead', 'Relationship relief' and 'Unfinished business' illustrate facets of the experience of feeling profound relief when someone dies.

This is a well-written, well-produced and edited book (a relief in itself in an era of increasing editorial sloppiness). Much more than that, however, the authors' holistic, tolerant and compassionate approach allows them to tackle this difficult subject with great understanding and generosity of spirit.

HOW TO LOVE AGAIN Moving from Grief to Growth

John Monbourquette
London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001, 166pp.
£9.95 pb. ISBN 0 23252 451 3.

John Monbourquette is both a psychotherapist and a Roman Catholic and his book is an extraordinary and highly individual mixture of the philosophical, the psychological, the poetic and the practical. It can take a while to adapt to the style, but this is a reflection of the author's intentions 'to try...to follow the movement of the heart and its unpredictable patterns'. It is a reflection, too, of the nature of grief itself that this book includes, as equal but different, loss

through divorce and separation as well as death.

The chapters enclose different and complex emotional places, from 'I do not want to lose my love', 'I am waiting', and 'How long must I suffer?', to 'I go on living', 'I allow myself to heal', and 'I am growing'. Monbourquette asks questions which the bereaved may not have thought to ask themselves, suggests needs and fears which they may not have considered or wanted to acknowledge, and sources of strength and healing it may not have occurred to them to encompass. Forgiveness (of ones self, of the one lost) is given great importance, as a necessary stage.

The main energy of the book, as indicated by its title, is in what may happen when the process of grief is complete. It looks forward to a time when completion may be celebrated and energy, the life-force, is renewed; and to reclaiming the knowledge that one has the ability to survive and grow and the understanding of where deep peace may lie.

BEREAVEMENT A Shared Experience (3rd edn)

Helen Alexander
Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 2002, 192pp. £7.99 pb.
ISBN 0 74595 117 1

Helen Alexander was editor of the BBC's worship programmes and series producer of 'Living with Dying'. Her book, now in its third edition, is a clear reflection of this experience, written from a standpoint of deep faith, something that may or may not sit well with the reader. Nonetheless, it is a most allowing book, in the sense of including accounts of very diverse experiences of loss written in the first person and with great intensity and immediacy. Allowing, also, because from the outset we are assured 'Should this book ever hint of "knowing it all" or seemingly easy answers, ignore them: there are times when there can be none.'

In the personal accounts of grief there are crucial lessons, not only for the bereaved but for everyone, that have been learned in the hardest of ways. Among the most painful is the tragedy that is 'Gerald's story' in which he recounts his deep sorrow that he never ever told his wife how much he loved her: 'Why did I have to wait till she died before I could tell her how much she meant to me?'

There is much allowing wisdom throughout the book: 'Grief takes as many forms as there are people who are grieving.' The content covers sudden death, 'hidden' bereavements (this is a valuable section on neo-natal death, termination and cot death), 'taboo' deaths, eg suicide, and AIDS-related deaths. A chapter on 'excluded'

mourners listens to the experience of the small child and the adult with learning difficulties. This book is about loss and bereavement but much more than that, it is an exploration and celebration of what it is to be human and to love.

On a pre-publication recheck, this book is currently out of print so we apologise if copies are hard to source – Eds

Mary Smith
Bereavement Helpline Co-ordinator

DO NOT GO GENTLE

Neil Astley (ed)
Tarset, Northumberland, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2003,
96pp. £6.99 pb. ISBN 1 86224 635 9



The poems in this anthology were chosen specifically for reading at funerals and memorial services, both religious and secular. They are grouped under headings which signpost the common pathways of grief, each preceded by a short introduction. Some might find the title of the book (from a poem by Dylan Thomas) off-putting, but this would be a pity because Neil Astley has gathered here a wonderfully rich and diverse collection relating to individual losses and various concepts of death, extinction, afterlife and renewal.

In some respects this anthology is similar to others, such as *All in the End is Harvest* and *Seasons of Life*². Its strength is that it includes more 20th century works, more from writers from eastern faiths, and more from agnostic and atheist writers. On the latter the author writes: 'Many modern poets write as agnostics or unbelievers, and in trying to make sense of death they are confronting not only loss but fear of extinction...but however various and contradictory these poems, their message chimes with Larkin's famous words...

Our almost-instinct almost true:

What will survive of us is love.'

Though chosen to be read aloud to others, the poems could offer insight, solace and hope to someone reading them alone, whether poetry is part of their life already or they are coming to it afresh. Even those who do not normally engage much with words are likely to find something here.

HOW TO SURVIVE BEREAVEMENT

Andrea Kon

London: Hodder and Staughton, 2002, 194pp. £7.99 pb. ISBN 0 34078 624 8

Andrea Kon, a journalist, wrote this self-help book as 'a practical guide not only for those who have been bereaved but for those around them who want to offer their help but don't know how.' It is based on her experiences of her own major bereavements, which she says she writes about 'only because I now know that mine were entirely normal reactions, although at the time, I felt like a freak'.

About half the book deals with grief associated with different types of relationship, a mixture of other people's stories and the author's comments and suggestions. These can be perceptive and helpful but at other times rough and ready, and dismissive. For example, one woman who had unprotected sex soon after the death of her partner is described as 'not the only idiot on the block...'

There are also sections on bereavement counselling, complementary therapies and the value of having a religious or other belief system, again a mixture of anecdote, comment and advice. One chapter deals exclusively with the practical tasks that follow a death, but unfortunately much of this information relates specifically to the UK and is either incomplete or inaccurate, or both. UK readers would do better to consult their local Department for Work and Pensions or the government website, www.ukonline.gov.uk

This book has flaws. It does not have the emotional or intellectual depth, or the professional skills evident in *The Courage to Grieve*³, *Through Grief*⁴ or *Healing Grief*⁵, and in places it is inaccurate. However, its mixture of anecdote, certain insights and practical suggestions could be helpful to many an adult reader who wants fairly prescriptive yet companionable guidelines for understanding and coping with some aspects of a bereavement. **BC**

Christabel Hilliard

Bereavement Welfare Adviser

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3. Tattelbaum J. London: Ebury Press/Randon House, 1997
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All books in these references are available from Cruse Bereavement Care, tel: 020 8939 9530, email: info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Finding spiritual meaning in death

MAKING SENSE OF DEATH

Spiritual, Pastoral, and Personal Aspects of Death, Dying and Bereavement

Gerry Cox, Robert Bendiksen, Robert Stevenson

Amityville, New York: Baywood, 2003, 260pp. \$44.95 hb. ISBN: 0 89503 249 X

Death may be seen as the backdrop against which the meaning of human life can be evaluated.

In this task, the role of spirituality is prominent as that aspect of our make-up which moulds our identity and sense of purpose, as well as our relatedness.

The contributors to this book are academics and practitioners from disciplines that include psychiatry, psychology, sociology, palliative care, practical theology and philosophy. They write on a wide range of topics concerned, as the title suggests, with understanding life and death. Their articles are arranged in five sections: confronting the death of a loved one; meaning-making in the face of death; extraordinary death and loss; professional care-givers and spirituality; and, finally, nursing and spiritual care of the dying and loss as an opportunity for growth.

Spiritual aspects of a bereaved person can also be a resource for the caregiver, and there are a number of contributions on this from a variety of secular and

religious perspectives and contexts, including traumatic bereavement as an individual and a corporate experience.

This mixture of case studies, research findings, and narrative resources (eg poetry and prayers) is presented in an accessible and readable way. I found, for example, the chapter on meeting the spiritual needs of the bereaved in a health care setting particularly helpful in clarifying the various complementary roles of medical, nursing, social services and chaplaincy team members.

Much of the material refers specifically to the North American context, and some may find that a limitation. However, the diversity of the content ensures that there is much of value for both an academic student and a trainee in bereavement care.

REFLECTIONS ON DEATH, DYING AND BEREAVEMENT

William Smith

Amityville, NY, USA: Baywood, 2003, 112pp. \$29.95. ISBN 0 89503 270 8

The arrival of the book on my desk was timely. That morning I had been asked by a young man to say prayers with him for his sister who had recently given birth to a stillborn child. Within *Reflections* a suitable text was found to speak to the situation and the feelings with which he was struggling. This is one example of what is on offer in this

compilation of discussion and readings on the meaning of life and death.

The wide-ranging collection of material is intended to be a resource for ministers of religion, counsellors and others who support people with issues of death and bereavement. The writer, a Christian minister, approaches the subject from a philosophical perspective, intended to complement insights derived from religious faith. Each chapter begins with a discussion of a specific topic – for example human immortality, or the problem of evil and human suffering – and concludes with a selection of supplementary texts. For these he uses a broad spectrum of authorities spanning the centuries from the classical to the modern era, including writers such as Epicurus, Augustine, Nietzsche, Donne, Hemmingway, Frankl and Kübler-Ross.

The final chapter deals with bereavement in a number of contexts (death of young or elderly parents, spouses, children, and siblings). The appendices include information on death by suicide, euthanasia, care of the dying in the hospice setting, and funerals. Much of this subject matter will be familiar to those who support bereaved people and are accustomed to enhancing others' understanding of bereavement, but there is also much in the manual which will be of value to counsellors and bereavement supporters, as well as clergy. **BC**

Peter Hammersley

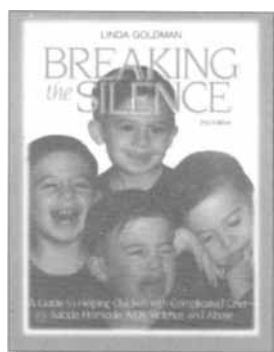
Prison Chaplain

BOOKS

BREAKING THE SILENCE (2nd edn)

Linda Goldman

New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001. \$17.50 pb ISBN 1 58391 312 2



This is a guide to helping children with complicated grief after events such as suicide, homicide, AIDS, violence and abuse. After giving an account of 'normal

grief', Linda Goldman describes what she terms 'complicated grief'. By this she means a situation in which a child may not be in touch with his or her feelings or when the grief process appears to be on hold or non-existent, possibly overwhelmed by ambivalent or conflicting feelings.

The book is easy to read, well illustrated, and packed full of practical tips, including suggestions for activities, questions, and how to identify children who may need additional help and support. All the resources listed are in North America.

Designed for teachers and parents as well as mental health professionals, the useful advice in *Breaking the Silence* may give those who work with or care for children the confidence to believe that there are things they can do after a traumatic bereavement.

Martin Newman

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

DEATH, DYING AND BEREAVEMENT 02/03 Annual Editions series

George Dickinson, Michael Leming (eds) Guildford, CT, USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002, 214pp. \$19.38. ISBN 0 07247 990 6

Although readers of *Bereavement Care* are primarily involved with helping people after death, I feel it is important that we have an insight into the trauma of the dying process itself. This book offers a variety of interesting material which could provide a useful introduction into areas with which the reader may not be familiar. However, it does not cover any particular topic in great depth.

The 'Annual Editions' are collections of reprinted articles selected by an academic advisory board from (mainly American) books, magazines and journals. In this 6th edition of the *Dying, Death and Bereavement* series, 40 articles cover a wide range of material grouped by subject into six units, on such topics

BOOKS

as the process of dying, death rituals including funerals, and ethical issues and suicide. Several of the articles deal with the same subject from different perspectives. Some are formal and academic; others represent a more personal viewpoint, as in Eddy's 'A conversation with my mother', a poignant description of his mother's death. The contributions come from a great variety of sources, some from well-known thinkers such as Doka, Corr, Rando and Goldman.

This edition looks beyond the conventional family unit to include homosexual partnerships and split families, and also considers grieving children, cot deaths, families bereaved by a traumatic incident and death in other cultures. In a compassionate article, 'Doctor: I want to die. Will you help me?', Quill discusses euthanasia and clinical intervention.

The reprints are clearly presented with suggestions for links to websites and other literature. A topic guide makes it easy to find articles of particular interest. Readers outside the USA will find some sections, such as hospice care and funeral arrangements, less relevant.

However, this publication provides plenty of material for professional discussion and would be useful as a basis for group work. There is also a wealth of insight on offer for individuals who are themselves coping with death and bereavement.

Shirley Hill
Bereavement Supporter

ABSTRACTS

Relationships between grief and family system characteristics: a cross-lagged longitudinal analysis

Traylor ES, Hayslip B, Jr, Kamionski PL, York C. *Death Studies* 2003; 27(7): 575-601

Few of our readers will doubt the importance of family systems in the reaction of members to a death in the family, yet little worthwhile research has been carried out to develop appropriate research instruments. In recent years multivariate statistical techniques have made this possible but their interpretation challenges the experts.

This paper reports the results of postal questionnaires which were completed by 61 bereaved people

4-5 weeks after bereavement and again six months later. It showed that measures of family cohesion, communication and expressed grief at 4-5 weeks predicted lower grief at six months. Apart from confirming the value of cohesion and communication, these findings contradict Wortman and Silver's claims that 'grief work' does not work.

Colin Murray Parkes

To have and have not: adaptive bereavement by transforming mental ties to the deceased

Boerner K, Heckhausen J. *Death Studies* 2003; 27(3): 199-226

Over the past decade there has been a shift in the field of bereavement from the traditional view that emphasises the necessity to disengage, towards a position that puts forward the need for a continuing connection. The authors of this article seek to move beyond the dichotomy between the two models and conceive of them as setting in train a process of transformation involving both disengagement and connection. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of control and adaptation, they suggest that the relationship with the deceased may be transformed to mental representations which the bereaved find helpful in enabling them to cope with their grief and to carry on with their lives.

Parental death in the lives of people with serious mental illness

Jones D, Harvey J, Giza D, Rodican C, Barreira PJ, Macias C. *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 2003; 8(4): 307-322

The population of people with serious disabilities is growing older, and these people are being brought face-to-face with the complications characteristic of middle age. The most universal and inevitable loss experience of this age is the death of a parent, a traumatic experience that is made infinitely worse if the bereaved person suffers from severe mental illness. The loss may have catastrophic consequences, such as financial hardship and homelessness. A study based on 148 such individuals showed that they had been given no preparation for the parental death of either a practical or a counselling nature. The authors of this article suggest that mental health agencies serving people with serious mental illness should incorporate financial and emotional preparation to help people in this situation. The article does not offer much practical

help, but it does highlight a problem that rarely comes to the fore in discussions about bereavement – the special difficulties which people with severe mental illness face when a parent dies.

Meaning making in the aftermath of homicide

Armour M. *Death Studies* 2003; 27(6): 519-540

Few events are more traumatising than the death of a loved one at the hands of a murderer. Apart from the loss itself, survivors may be marginalised by the police, the media and the community, and left to face their grief and anger alone. (At least this has been the case until recently, but now much more effort is being made, in the UK certainly, where the inception of police Family Liaison Officers has brought about a great improvement in family support following homicide. This may be true of other countries too.)

From a study of 14 families in Texas, the author of this article describes strategies which can be used by the survivors: the important point is 'the intense pursuit of what matters', in order to transcend the senselessness of the loved one's death. Fighting for what is right generally occurs in response to a feeling of powerlessness; by 'asserting their needs the survivors of homicide make who they are visible to others', and are given a sense of coherence and self-continuity.

Listen's story: the healing

Patricola-McNiff B. *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 2003; 8(3): 169-174

A charming little fable about bereavement is written through the medium of a beagle pup, the newly-adopted pet of a woman who has lost her husband. The dog has also suffered bereavement, first by separation from his mother and siblings, and secondly by the death of the man who first owned him. After he has been with his new owner for a while, he accompanies her to 'human' counselling sessions which of course, from his doggy point of view, are incomprehensible. But the happiest day of his life comes when, after one of the sessions, his 'human' laughs for the first time since she adopted him, and picks him up and hugs him, telling him she loves him. The author comments how the affection of animals can help the bereaved, by giving unconditional love and empathy and by providing perspective and safety, all of which are necessary for the healing process.

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

The 7th International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society

Kings College, 12-15 July 2005
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