

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
London, UK

hosted by Cruse Bereavement Care



CALL FOR PAPERS

Speakers include: Colin Murray Parkes, William Worden, Henk Schut, Robert Neimeyer, Holly Prigerson, Leila Gupta, David Kissane

For further information and to submit papers:
email info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk
or write to Cruse Bereavement Care
126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR

Deadline for papers: 31st December 2004