

pertinent themes, so scientifically our findings are not rigorous. However, the discussion was rich with information, and does support the findings of much more rigorous studies in the literature. These people have spoken clearly about what they need; our job is surely to listen and to try and bring about changes. ☛

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MEMORIAL SERVICE

The Woodland Trust

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Every culture, from ancient to modern, has developed unique ways to pay tribute to its dead. Some believe that these rituals give special benefits to the deceased, but most simply see the funeral and memorial arrangements as a powerful source of comfort and support for the living. Indeed, for many people the best way to deal with the pain and loss immediately after a death is by doing something positive that reflects the interests of the person who has died.

Where the body or ashes are buried or scattered is particularly important for many, offering a specific place where family and friends can visit and remember the person who has died. The most common arrangement in our culture is a grave, or plaque or plant in a crematorium, though of course many other forms of memorial exist. Recently, however, families have been finding different ways of disposing ashes which are meaningful to them and, even if the body or ashes are elsewhere, they may want to establish a spiritual link by creating a place where they can feel close to the person they loved.

Traditional funeral flowers last only a few hours, and even a shrub in a crematorium is there for a relatively short time. There is a strong desire to link a loved one with a special place forever, but graveyards and gardens of remembrance can feel too public and impersonal. For many, woodland is a uniquely peaceful and spiritual place and trees offer a permanent, living memorial. The Woodland Trust, a charity set up more than 30 years ago to protect the UK native woodland heritage, now owns over 1,000 sites. It runs a tree dedication service for individuals and groups to dedicate either a single tree in one of 20 recently planted woods, or a larger area of woodland from a choice of hundreds of woods around the country. Trees are dedicated for many reasons, as a present or to mark an occasion but,

increasingly, as a memorial after a death. In 2005, there were over 30,000 dedications of trees and woodland. A map is provided so that families and friends can locate their wood, and ashes may be scattered there. Although generally no marker or formal ceremony is allowed, plaques are available for those dedicating an acre or more with bench or post.

Dedicated woodland offers a peaceful place where people can reunite with the natural world, think about those they loved and events that were special to them. From ancient times, trees have had great symbolic value: touching wood for luck is a throw back to tree worship in pagan times. Yews, especially sacred to our ancestors, are often found in churchyards, planted to sanctify burial sites. Both Druids, believing in reincarnation, and later Christians, teaching of the resurrection, regarded the yew as a natural emblem of immortality and rebirth because of its longevity and capacity for renewal by layering, growing saplings from its trailing branches. Other trees also have symbolic meanings for us - the oak for



Joy and Kurt Larsen who have dedicated new planting and stone benches to the memory of family members at this Woodland Trust site in Glen Finglas, Scotland.

Photo by Jane Begg

strength and endurance, the willow for flexibility, for example – and woods are still seen as atmospheric, almost sacred places today.

Both individuals and groups come to the Woodland Trust to seek special ways of commemorating and celebrating the lives of loved ones. In fact the vast majority of larger woodland dedications – stands of trees, whole acres, benches or posts in groves – are for memorial purposes. One group, Fragile Angels, donated a one-acre grove of ancient woodland as a memorial to babies and children who died or were brain damaged as a result of negligent surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary between 1988 and 1995. Many of the families attended the unveiling of a memorial plaque at the grove. One mother said: 'The memorial is about regaining control of our children's memories. It is not about apportioning blame. It helps us, the families, to have public closure. We can honour and value our children peacefully from this beautiful place of reflection which will always be here.' Another group, the Human BSE Foundation dedicated two acres of woodland to all of the victims of Human BSE (vCJD) past, present and future, and installed two benches to provide places of contemplation and remembrance.

Recently the parents of a teenager killed in a cycling accident organised a sponsored walk to raise money and made a donation for a special bench, sculpted out of an oak log, to be placed in the woods where their son had walked his dog and served as a volunteer with the Trust. A widower planted two oak saplings at his wife's favourite spot in a Trust wood near their home. The growing natural monuments symbolise the couple's love of nature and will pay tribute to their lives and memories of this special place for many centuries to come.

When a death has happened many miles from home or the body is irretrievable, a living memorial can help with the grieving process. In 2003 the UK Bali Bombing Victims Group planted a woodland grove and names of the victims were carved on a memorial stone. ●

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www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/dedications

BOOK REVIEWS

Helping Bereaved Parents A Clinician's Guide

Richard Tedeschi, Lawrence Calhoun



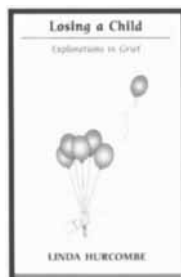
Hove, E Sussex, UK:
Brunner Routledge,
2004
£52.50 hb
ISBN 0 41594 796 0
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This book intends to provide 'ways that will help clinicians to understand, and constructively engage bereaved parents'. The authors begin with the grieving parents, giving plenty of quotes and illustrations from their clinical practice. If the reader is familiar with this work this may feel a little unnecessary, but for others it would act as an orientation to this particular field. An overview of grief models follows – again, too brief for academics or experienced professionals, but very suitable for newcomers. I was particularly struck by the authors' balance between acknowledging what research can tell us whilst accepting the individual differences which might be encountered in practice. When the authors suggest the actual words that clinicians might use, initially I thought this was too prescriptive, but in fact this is valuable guidance in an area where practitioners often do not know what to say. They recommend a stance which they call 'expert companionship' which blends human compassion with a degree of expertise that may not be available from friends and relatives: 'expertise is woven into your interactions, rather than revealed through knowledge'.

David Trickey
Chartered Clinical Psychologist

Losing a Child Explorations in grief

Linda Hurcombe



London, Sheldon Press
2004
179pp
£7.99 pb
ISBN 0 85969 886 6

In this book Linda Hurcombe, whose daughter Caitlin died by suicide aged 19, aims to address what follows for parents when a child dies.

Running through the book is the author's own experience of loss, which provides valuable insight and leaves the reader with a strong sense of Caitlin. The strength of the book lies in the author's ability to truly share what this daughter meant to her and the grief that she felt in dealing with a very difficult death. Clearly she gained comfort from her Christian faith although this is not an overwhelming aspect of the book.

The author also covers the loss of a baby, siblings' grief, and murder. While the author's story is very powerful, these aspects are dealt with more factually and although illustrated with case studies, do not make nearly such compelling reading. Perhaps those who have lost a baby or whose child has been murdered would find more connection in a book specifically on this subject.

The practical aspects highlighted will help not only bereaved parents, but also the professionals who endeavour to understand what might be helpful; however, the contacts section could be more comprehensive. A significant omission is that the impact of losing a child on the parental relationship is not addressed, and the male perspective is unfortunately missing. I was left with a quest to understand what happened in the key relationships in the author's family, not least with her female partner.

Jenni Thomas
President, The Child Bereavement Trust, UK

When Your Child Dies

Theresa Huntley



Minneapolis, MN,
USA: Augsburg/
Edinburgh, UK:
Alban Books, 2001
47pp
\$3.99/£2.99 pb
ISBN 0 80664 261 0

This is another attractive pocket-sized book in Augsburg's 'Hope and Healing' series. It explains to bereaved parents how grief is an ongoing process, with psychological, spiritual and, often, physical effects. The grieving of men, women and siblings is considered as is the effect of grief on relationships within the family, including with other children and with the child's grandparents, as well as with relationships with friends and colleagues. Since the book is clear and concise, it is accessible to parents who are mourning the death of a child and can be recommended to them and their advisors. ●

Dr Martin Newman
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