

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Celebrating the life lived

### The Long Pale Corridor

Judi Benson, Agnetta Falk  
Northumberland: Bloodaxe  
Books, 1996, 304pp. £8.95 pb  
ISBN 1 85224 317 1

### In Loving Memory

Sally Emerson  
London: Little Brown  
2005, 221pp. £10.99 pb  
ISBN 0 31672 599 4

### Poems and Readings for Funerals

Julia Watson  
London: Penguin, 2004  
104pp. £7.99 pb  
ISBN 9 0 14101 496 8



### Time to Go

Jean Francis  
New York: iUniverse, 2004  
162pp. £9.95  
ISBN 0 59531 859 2

### Remember

Robert Atwell  
London: Canterbury Press  
2005, 110pp. £9.99 pb  
ISBN 1 85311 641 6

### Do Not Go Gentle

Neil Astley  
Northumberland: Bloodaxe  
Books, 2004, 91pp. £6.99 pb.  
ISBN 1 85224 635 9

### IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING

**WORLD**, funerals – whether secular or religious – are increasingly expected to comprise a personal celebration of the deceased's life. Jean Francis' *Time to Go* outlines 32 highly individualised funerals and, although not all funerals are as individual as these, few funerals in Britain, north America and Australia can now escape the demand for personalisation.

The reaction against the 'production line' funeral means that each funeral is expected to be uniquely constructed. This in turn has led to a demand for anthologies of poems and readings for use by families, ministers and celebrants.

Whereas twenty years ago, Agnes Whittaker's anthology *All in the End is Harvest*<sup>1</sup> was compiled for bereaved individuals, the growth market today in the UK is for anthologies which either can double as a funeral resource, such as *Remember* and *In Loving Memory*, or are intended primarily for funerals, like *Do Not Go Gentle* and *Poems and Readings for Funerals*. The books reviewed here represent only some of those recently produced in the UK for this purpose: grief is becoming more public. Only Benson and Falk's rather older anthology, *The Long Pale Corridor*, is intended purely for personal use.

Compiled in most instances by editors from a literary background, these collections offer a range of perspectives on personal grief and public mourning that complement the scientific and clinical studies that increasingly inform bereavement work. Confucius, for example, wrote (Emerson, p96): 'If we treat the dead as

if they were wholly dead it shows want of affection; if we treat them as wholly alive it shows want of sense. Neither should be done.' That puts contemporary debates about letting go versus continuing bonds into perspective!

Benson and Falk's anthology, which I read first, is dedicated to recent poetry, and I was struck by the bleakness of much of it. As Astley notes (p45): '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.'

The other anthologies are different in that they cover writing from three millennia, and a fair amount of this older literature is infused with religious hope. Astley's *Do Not Go Gentle* includes inspiring material hundreds of years old from the Middle and Far East and from Islam that was entirely new to me. He also includes one of the few modern poets to combine pain and spiritual hope, Jane Kenyon, an American. I wonder if the USA, a far

more religious country than Britain, is producing modern bereavement poetry of a kind not reflected in these anthologies, compiled by Britons for Britons. On the one hand, a secular society that is trying to give grief words struggles to find words that both express the pain of grief yet also tap into those resources that have given humans hope even in the worst of times. On the other hand, profound contemporary religious poetry on death, grief and suffering is largely absent from these collections – though it does exist elsewhere (see Kathy Keay's anthology *Laughter, Silence and Shouting*<sup>2</sup>).

Jean Francis' *Time to Go* demonstrates the spirituality inherent in several of today's tailor-made funerals. Yet the new spirituality that is increasingly embodied in woodland burial and 'creative new rituals' has not yet, to my knowledge, generated a decent poetry anthology.

The funeral anthologies reviewed here do, nevertheless, contain much that is celebratory and even witty,

which of course is what is needed for today's celebratory funerals. But, if these collections are anything to go by, the happy funeral may be followed by some pretty bleak grief. The contemporary funeral looks back to celebrate the life lived, but may struggle with the present reality of death and grief.

Any of these books would be useful resources, both in planning funerals

and in grief. As is to be expected, there are many overlaps. Astley's *Time to Go* was my personal favourite: just 91 pages, contains a wide range of sources, and a number of modern writers. Atwell is the most clearly Christian (significantly almost all of it pre-twentieth century). In purely quantitative terms of poems per pound, Benson and Falk is the best value. Both

Watson and Emerson have reasonably wide-ranging sources, and Watson has a good extract on friendship from Pooh, but not the one I was looking for! ●

#### Tony Walter

*Reader in Sociology, University of Reading*

1. Whittaker A. *All in the End is Harvest*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984.
2. Keay K. *Laughter, Silence and Shouting*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.



## WEBWATCH

### Reconnecting with the dead

Amanda Aitken BA PGCE DipCouns

*Counsellor, Torbay Social Services, Devon, UK*

**IN DEVONSHIRE 80 YEARS AGO**, my mother as a child often accompanied her own mother when called upon to 'lay out' the bodies of the recently departed. Then, in the developed world at least, dying gradually became something hidden away behind hospital walls and bodies were handed over to professionals. Over the last few years, however, people have started to reclaim their right to make their own informed choices not only about funeral rites but also the disposal of their loved ones.

Anyone interested in planning an unusual, environmentally sensitive or DIY funeral in the UK will find **The Natural Death Centre** at [www.naturaldeath.co.uk](http://www.naturaldeath.co.uk) a sound starting point, together with its publication *The Natural Death Handbook*. This charitable organisation acts as a funeral watchdog, monitoring a code of practice for natural burial grounds. The site has links to organisations with similar aims in other parts of Europe, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

For the USA, **Final Passages** at [www.finalpassages.org](http://www.finalpassages.org) aims to reintroduce the concept of home funerals as part of family life and to de-institutionalise death. Providing educational materials, seminars and in-services, the organisation supports those dying at home and anyone wishing to carry out a home or family-directed funeral.

The growing popularity of 'green' burial grounds, where only fully biodegradable coffins and shrouds are accepted and bodies must not have been embalmed or cremated, is reflected in a number of websites offering such services throughout the UK and in Europe (though not in the USA where this sort

of arrangement is rare). These are mainly in forests, eg those managed by The Woodland Trust<sup>1</sup>, or other rural settings.

About 50 burials take place at sea in British waters each year and good information on this is to found at [www.bathnes.gov.uk](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk), hosted by Bath and North East Somerset Council. On the homepage, click on B from the green A-Z and then scroll down to Sea Burials to access both a brief overview and a more in-depth document which includes details of how to prepare the body for burial, suitable coffins and how to obtain the correct legal documentation to comply with official regulations (the UK government does not encourage sea burials). The site also provides details of useful contacts.

Across the Atlantic, **Sea Services** claims to be the oldest and largest provider of sea burials and ash-scattering funerals in the USA, operating coast to coast. Its website at [www.seaservices.com](http://www.seaservices.com) has a section on religious traditions, which gives an interesting overview of differing religious attitudes towards sea burials, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Christian concepts, with useful links to more information. There is an extensive FAQ section and a pre-plan option for anyone who would like to make their own arrangements. With the provision of its own telephone counsellors and openness about fees, this seems a reputable company keen to provide a good service.

**Sea Burials Australia** has a surprisingly brief site at [www.seaburialsaustralia.com.au](http://www.seaburialsaustralia.com.au) but a little more information about the company is available at [www.forpeaceofmind.com.au](http://www.forpeaceofmind.com.au) together with

an overview of Australian regulations.

**Space burial** is perhaps one of the most unusual types of funeral on offer. The first was preformed in Houston, USA in 1997 by a forerunner of **Space Services** which now holds the monopoly on this extremely expensive memorial service. Clients must first pay for a cremation, and then to launch a 'symbolic portion of created remains' at \$995 for 1g of human ashes or \$5,300 for 7g! Clients are posted a 'sampling kit' and the website at [www.spaceservicesinc.com](http://www.spaceservicesinc.com) gives a list of global distributors so this form of 'burial' is accessible to any willing and able to pay the fees. Family and friends can attend the launch, receive an 'exciting' DVD recording and have a permanent virtual memorial on the internet for the deceased.

The website is rather vague as to the length of time remains will stay in orbit before being burned up in the atmosphere. Some may well argue that this type of memorial is a form of space pollution and although it is a service that obviously appeals to some, one cannot escape the feeling that this is very much a big business enterprise.

As yet there is no evidence to confirm that an alternative burial helps bereaved people in their grieving process, but it is not hard to imagine that this is so. Those involved in such funerals appear to gain from the feeling of being intimately involved in proceedings rather than being passive onlookers and there is a strong sense that these events are true celebrations of the lives that have passed. ●

1. Reviewed in *Bereavement Care* 2004; 23(3): 44.
2. Reed-Aspley I. The Woodland Trust. *Bereavement Care* 2006; 25(1): 15.

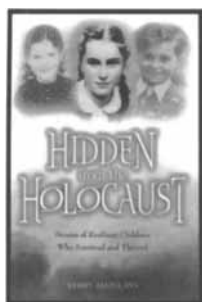
## BOOK REVIEWS

# Survivors of forced migration

## Hidden from the Holocaust

Stories of Resilient Children who Survived and Thrived

Kerry Bluglass



Westport, CT, USA  
Praeger Publishers,  
2003  
263pp  
\$55.00/£31.99 hb  
ISBN 0 275 97486 3

At the heart of this book are 14 edited transcripts, each engrossing in its own terms. Adults hidden as children, in their 60s and 70s at the time of interviewing, describe the disruption of their childhoods when, torn from their families, they were hidden with strangers and acquaintances while seeking escape from being deported and killed by the occupying Nazi forces. Each story ends with a brief description of their lives since liberation, often too brief for any conclusion about their post-liberation struggles.

The life stories are taken from three west European countries occupied by the German army (Belgium, Holland and France), and from Poland. The marvel of survival makes these stories heart-rending. Some of the narratives are bland and appear purely factual, others are fragmentary and discontinuous; some indicate a conversation with the author, some a sense of rehearsal and repetition giving a sense of predetermined ending.

As a reader I felt drawn into these stories, particularly the details and the absences. I wanted to talk with each person. Most of all I wanted to hear from the absent voices, others in the family who may have survived, those who became part of the family they later joined or founded. The author points out that the stories, like Anne Frank's diary, must provide a lesson to history. What the lesson is, besides the difficult-to-describe cruelty of genocidal

wars for children, got lost as I read the book. The book focuses on the positives: why did these children survive and go on to lead full lives?

Kerry Bluglass introduces this material within a loosely defined concept of 'resilience', but soon gets trapped into a self-justifying circle. The children survived, and adapted afterwards, because of their resilience and this resilience allowed them to survive and flourish. She shows the complexities of the concept of resilience, seeing the answer with the personal, the internal, rather than the social or external. However, Bluglass acknowledges the self-selection of the sample and the limitations of her method. She follows the stories with a four-page chapter on 'The role of oral history', implying that as time goes on in these 'hidden children's' lives their stories may change and develop, but we are left to surmise as to how. For years after liberation, many of the children had not talked about their past, possibly remaining silent for longer than adult survivors, as adult stories take precedence over children's. Some told adult confidants at the time of their marriage, but often remained publicly silent until the 1960s or much later. Again, individual factors are seen as important whereas historical factors, such as the processes of migration and adjustment, the creation of the state of Israel, the coinage of the term 'holocaust', continuing anti-semitic campaigns in Poland and the fall of the Iron Curtain, are neglected.

The individual oral histories of wartime survival are replete with social factors: names and organisations or the social positions of those who provided physical shelter and affective warmth. In contrast, details of post-war survival and adaptation, eg education and careers, migration and marriage, are too brief to draw conclusions about the importance of social factors. Also missing is the effect of these distorted childhoods on subsequent generations, and the consequences of initial silence and then published histories on the wider politics of survival and the Israeli justification of statehood.

In summary, the transcripts in *Hidden from the Holocaust* talk movingly of the forces of specific individual histories and past xenophobic politics, but

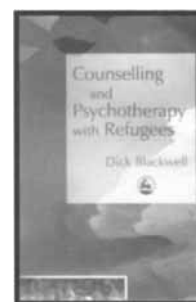
the book is muted on the continued dynamics of survival politics. It failed to convince me of the primacy of the concept of individual resilience when understanding the oral histories of these survivors.

David Goldberg

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

## Counselling and Psychotherapy with Refugees

Dick Blackwell



London: Jessica  
Kingsley, 2005  
128pp  
£14.95/\$24.95  
ISBN 1 84318 316 8

Dick Blackwell's book provides a framework for thinking about some of the less familiar issues which forced migration entails, such as the political dimension. This is not a 'how to' book but one that, in putting the refugee's experiences in context, will help anyone working with this group to understand better how to proceed with their work.

Blackwell looks at the role of political conflict in creating refugees and introduces us to the vital importance of politics in the therapeutic context. In his discussion of forced migration and cultural transitions, he describes some of the essentials of working cross-culturally, and attunes the therapist to the influence of their own political and cultural context. Though not a book about loss, the author considers the interpersonal issues of separation and bereavement for refugees, reminding us that their losses are often traumatic, guilt-laden and conflicted. We should be aware of the impact of witnessing extreme trauma, and of the influence of our own reactions in the therapeutic setting.

This is a concise book with many complex issues introduced succinctly and outlined clearly. It ends with chapters on working with interpreters, advocacy and welfare issues, supervision, and a comprehensive list of references and resources. While it will be most helpful for people who are new to working with refugee clients, it also has some interesting ideas to offer more experienced therapists. ●

Dr Pennie Blackburn

Clinical Psychologist, Traumatic Stress Clinic, London

### Forgotten Grievors

Cruse Bereavement Care's 2006 conference

14-16 September 2006  
University of Leicester, UK  
Featuring Peter White

with Sue Read, Debbie Kerslake and Yunus Dudhwala

conference@cruse.org.uk

Colin Murray Parkes

will be signing copies of his new book  
**Love and Loss**

Copies available at the conference and from Cruse

tel: [0]20 8939 9530

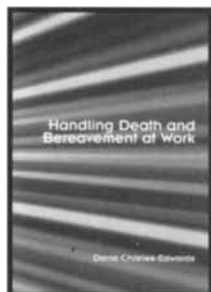
info@cruse.org.uk

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Bereavement in the workplace

## Handling Death and Bereavement at Work

David Charles-Edwards



Abingdon, Oxon,  
UK/New York  
Routledge, 2005  
245pp

£70.00 hb  
ISBN 0 41534 724 6  
£18.99 pb  
ISBN 0 41534 725 4

David Charles-Edwards' work explores the impacts of death and bereavement on a group of people often not associated with this subject, our colleagues at work. It is easy to forget that we typically spend five-sevenths of our working life with what is essentially an extended family, but this book highlights that link.

When a colleague dies, the feeling of loss is often just as great as for that of a relative but, unlike a relative who can never be replaced, new staff are appointed. Charles-Edwards describes the reactions and experiences of both existing staff and the person who replaces the deceased. A death at work can also trigger a return of grief felt for an unrelated death, possibly years earlier, and this can affect the performance of staff and managers who were not necessarily close to the team member who died.

The second half of the book explores how organisations can help staff deal with their grief. It suggests that people in various roles within an organisation can provide support, eg a line manager, human resources team or union representative. Case studies bring the theory to life, as do the quotes and anecdotes used throughout.

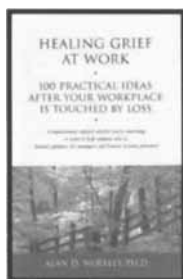
Despite its academic look, this is not a dry, technical read. The style and layout enable the reader to dip into a chapter without any loss of context. Overall, this book will be helpful to the human resources policy maker and general manager as well as the student or researcher.

### Papers in the Abstracts section

These may be available from your local public or institutional library. Alternatively, apply direct to the British Library Document Supply Centre, Wetherby, West Yorks LS23 7BQ, tel 01937 546060 or St Christopher's Hospice Library, tel 020 8768 4660 email d.brady@stchristophers.org.uk. Normally there is a charge for these services.

## Healing Grief at Work

Alan Wolfelt



Fort Collins, Colorado,  
USA

Companion Press,  
2005, 100pp

\$11.95 pb  
ISBN 1 87965 145 9

Unlike David Charles-Edwards' book, this publication is much more focused on providing the individual with practical ideas on how to cope with grief. Each page, 100 in all, provides a suggested activity to aid the grieving process. Many are aimed at encouraging bereaved people to think positively

or carry out activities that will help. For example, Idea 48 suggests that the bereaved person 'surfs the web' to find articles on managing grief. At the bottom of each page is a related tip such as visiting the local library to gain access to a PC if one is not available at home, or seek agreement from a manager to do the search at work.

The style of having one idea per page enables readers to choose a page at random and see what amounts to a 'tip for the day'. If that tip doesn't suit, simply choose another! Although this may sound similar to one of the many 'improve your lifestyle' books available, the expanded text beneath each idea provides more for readers to consider. Many of these pointers will help bereaved people realise that over time they will feel better and that some form of normality, albeit a new one, will return. ●

Andy Carroll

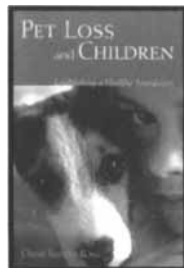
Project Leader, UK Pension Service Bereavement Project

# Death of a child's pet

## Pet Loss and Children

Establishing a healthy foundation

Cheri Barton Ross



New York/Hove,  
E Sussex, UK: Brunner  
Routledge, 2005,  
191pp

£15.99/\$23.95 pb  
ISBN 0 41594 919 X

Every parent I have talked to about this book has been dismissive: surely with a modicum of common sense and compassion a parent should be able to help their child through pet loss without recourse to books. And yet the UK Pet Bereavement Support Service (PBSS) receives a steady stream of calls from parents wanting advice on how to help their children. The tendency is to protect one's children from death and grief through denying the importance and impact of the loss, minimising involvement and replacing the pet.

Cheri Barton Ross argues that for a successful resolution, and in order to establish a healthy foundation for subsequent losses, children need to be supported through the grieving process. This involves understanding the nature of the relation-

ship, acknowledging the depth of the loss and validating the grief. Ross further explains how children's experience and understanding of death, the outward manifestation of their grief and the ways in which they can be educated and supported, are dependent upon their age and cognitive understanding. When children mourn, they are not only grieving for a tangible loss, but also assimilating the concepts of death and loss.

In addition to examining special types of pet losses (eg accidental killing) and compound losses (eg divorce), an entire chapter is devoted to euthanasia. The child's role in the process of decision-making and euthanasia creates a frank and thought-provoking chapter. However, readers should be aware that Ross is writing from a USA perspective and my personal experience of working in the UK would suggest a more cautious approach to children being present at euthanasia, because a relatively high number of euthanasias here are perceived by owners as being traumatic.

Further chapters are devoted to funerary rites, remembering, memorialisation, and to the question of acquiring a new pet. The final quarter of the book is really a resource for therapists, in that it explores the multiple or compound losses that may trigger unusual and complicated grief responses and their associated therapies.

As a parent or educator, you could use your

## B O O K S

common sense. Or you could use the opportunity to draw upon the author's 15 years' experience in pet-related grief counselling to help you guide your children through the terrain of grief and prepare them for adult bereavement. ●

**Tania Woods**

*Psychologist and researcher for the PBSS*

**Paddy's Peace**

**Stephanie Raubitschek**



Twickenham,  
Surrey, UK: Athena  
Press, 2004, 52pp

£5.99 pb.  
ISBN 1 84401 204 2

This is a simple story about Ben, who acquires an old donkey called Paddy. Paddy is in a sorry state but is brought back to health and he and Ben live happily as friends for some years, and then Paddy sickens and dies. Ben's reactions and his mother's care of him are well shown and his grief is not glossed over – described as a great wave sweeping over him. He is helped by his talks with his mother and finally by a happy dream about Paddy. This is an attractive book with pastel illustrations.

I have one reservation. Ben went off to school one day, having seen a very sick donkey. When he came home the donkey had died and the vet had taken Paddy away to be buried. It would have been 'good practice' for Ben to be shown the dead Paddy who probably looked better than he had alive that morning; but this is a story. It is perhaps suitable to be read to children, say four to six, as there are some rather adult words and phrases. Older children reading it themselves might find the material a bit young. However, it could be a good talking point for any younger primary age children who have lost a pet or possibly a person.

**The Great Blue Yonder**

**Alex Shearer**



London: Macmillan  
Children's Books,  
2001, 192pp

£4.99 pb  
ISBN 0 33039 700 1

Twelve-year-old Harry was killed when he and his bike collided with a lorry. Just before he left home

he and his sister had angry words: 'You'll be sorry when I'm dead', and 'No, I won't, I'll be glad'. Any other book about bereavement would be about his sister coming to terms with this situation. Not Alex Shearer's!

This is the tale of Harry's experience in the 'other lands' after he is dead. It is Harry who is going through the stages of adjustment to being dead! He and a new friend who died of a fever 150 years ago do a spot of haunting. They return to the world to see how life is progressing without him. Unheard and unseen, Harry visits his school to find another boy has his peg, his place in the football team, and his desk where he expected a plaque and a shrine in his memory. How could the football team be managing without him?

Then his disappointment is lessened when he sees a display of work on the wall about 'Our Friend Harry', and finds his sworn enemy has suggested a tree be planted in his memory. He visits his home and finds his parents and sister missing him and, by a process of thought transference, manages to make peace with his sister. This is perhaps the least convincing part of the story. Finally he realises life has moved on without him, and he comes to terms with no longer being alive. Having done this he can move on to 'the great blue yonder' for those who have dealt with their unfinished business.

It is hard to do justice to this subtle and sensitive story in a brief summary. It is certainly valuable for the general education of children about death. It would need to be used with caution with bereaved children, but they are often more resilient than we think, and it really does speak the language of children of about Harry's age. It is a very good read and it made me laugh but, like all the best comedy, it deals well with a serious theme. ●

**Mary Bending**

*Teacher and Bereavement Counsellor*

## V I D E O

**In the Same Breath**

**Elsbeth Penny, Paul Wells**



Holbrook, Ipswich  
UK Alpha Films,  
2003

11 mins  
£19.95

In this short video, a widower, Quentin, whose wife has taken her own life, gives us a gentle master

class of his experience. He describes his thoughts, emotions and actions with a simple clarity that will allow those working with the bereaved, and the bereft themselves, to hear and recognise echoes of their own feelings. We follow his experiences and self-development on his journey through grief.

Quentin talks of being powerless, helpless, filled with guilt, self-blame and self-judgement. He explains how he tackles life day by day, recognising the value of support systems and trying to accept his situation, sometimes unsuccessfully. A friend tells us about the breathing techniques Quentin has taught him to achieve calmness and balance, and yet Quentin himself, in the grip of grief, describes sometimes being tight-chested and unable to breathe.

This video is not only a useful tool for training counsellors and bereavement support workers but also for many other agencies, eg the police, education, health and social care professionals. It raises awareness of the issues, so that such agencies can be more informed in their responses to bereaved people. ●

**Alan Casselden**

*Counsellor, Supervisor and Trainer*

## A B S T R A C T S

**Working systemically with grief**

Moloney B. *Grief Matters* 2005; 8(2): 26-29

**Psychodynamic therapeutic approaches with people who are grieving**

Chandler R. *Grief Matters* 2005; 8(2): 30-34

**Contemporary Gestalt: the application of key principles to grief work**

O'Shea L. *Grief Matters* 2005; 8(2): 35-39

It is not often one reads about three distinct theoretical ways of working with bereaved people, as happens in this issue of *Grief Matters*. All describe the essential core components of their theoretical perspective in relation to a variety of themes.

The article by Moloney on systemic theory emphasises working with the varying and conflicting needs of individual members of a family. In a case study she describes how she listened to the concerns of each family member, across and within generations, while also suggesting how they could support one other. In describing psychodynamic approaches to grief work, Chandler considers the