

REVIEWS

Death through a child's eyes

What is Death?

Etan Boritzer



Santa Monica, CA, USA/
London: Veronica Lane
Books, 2000, 32pp
\$13.73/£13.99 hb
ISBN 0 96375 978 7
\$7.95/£5.99 pb
ISBN 0 96375 979 5

Delightfully illustrated by Nancy Forrest, this book bravely tries to answer the question in the title, although the list of causes leaves out deaths caused by war or other violence. It deals with decomposition and describes how various religions take care of the dead body. Then the author talks about the 'inside stuff' (feelings, thoughts, ideas and love) and suggests that this is the soul which is eternal although we cannot see it. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam are mentioned (and ancient Egyptians) and the reader is advised to read books and ask leaders and teachers of different religions and cultures what they believe. 'Maybe Death is not a sad or scary thing...it is like moving from one thing to another.' It ends by suggesting we can live on after death by doing good things so we are remembered. It would be a useful book to stimulate questions and discussion among seven- to nine-year-olds at school.

Where did Grandad go?

Catherine House, Honor Ayres



Oxford, UK:
The Bible Reading
Fellowship, 2006, 29pp
£5.99 hb
ISBN 1 85101 502 6

Granny prepares Megan for her (Granny's) eventual death while they both lay flowers on Grandad's grave. There is a lot, as you might expect from this publisher, about God's love and God's house, but I was surprised to learn that 'God cares about every sparrow that falls to the ground [but] He cares even more about you and me'. It is a good idea for grandparents to talk about death with children, especially their own death, and this book would be fine for a religious family to address the subject. It will certainly spark off questions which I hope they will be prepared to answer. The illustrations are pretty.

Milly's Bug-Nut

Jill Janney



Cheltenham, Glos,
UK: Winston's Wish
2002, 34pp
£4.99 pb
ISBN 0 96391 234 6

After her husband died the author could not find a book for her children that talked plainly about the death of a parent, so she wrote this one. I was surprised to read this and looked back at the reviews of children's books in *Bereavement Care* over the last four years and found she was right! The only title I had reviewed during that time specifically about the death of a parent, was about a mother's death and used religious explanations that clearly this author eschewed.

Milly's Bug-Nut (not I think the most attractive of titles) is published by Winston's Wish, that admirable organisation for bereaved children which grows from strength to strength. Jill Janney uses simple words to tackle complicated ideas and is very successful in getting into the mind of a child of primary school age.

Milly remembered the morning mummy had told them that the doctors couldn't make Dad better.

Milly knew that Dad had been cremated. That meant that his body had been burnt as it wasn't needed any more and that the ashes were what was left.

Milly yearns to see her father again but eventually begins to feel happier when she realises that her father is in her heart and will always be there. Highly recommended.

A Tree Fell in Paradise

Julia Kelly



Martin Country, Fl,
USA: Treasure
Coast Hospice/
kelper@bellsouth.net
2006, 17pp
\$10.00 + p&p

This book is available for interested organisations to publish and adopt for their own use or individuals to buy direct from the author (email

above). An old tree speaks in the first person to a growing sapling about the cycle of life and death. I think *The Strong Little Tree* (Peacock, Reed 2001), reviewed in *Bereavement Care* 2004 (23[3]: 46), does this better and with better graphics.

Grandad's Ashes

Walter Smith



London: Jessica
Kingsley, 2007, 32pp
£8.99 hb
ISBN 1 84310 517 6

Grandma and four grandchildren have a great time figuring out what to do with Grandad's ashes. They try to scatter them over the lake because Granddad was in the Navy but it was so choppy in the boat they all got sick; then they thought that since he loved tennis they would sprinkle them over the tennis court, but when they got to the park it had gone! And so on. There is a happy ending when they all go up in a balloon. The book focuses on the good relationship the children have with their grandparents and their ease at accepting death, and the illustrations are delightful. An original way of helping children to accept the death of the elderly without mawkishness.

Always and Forever

Alan Durrant



London: Doubleday
2003, 24pp
£5.99 pb
ISBN 0 55254 877

I loved these illustrations by Debi Gliori. Four animals, a fox, a hare, an otter and a mole, live together in a tree house as a happy family. The old fox dies and the other three bury and grieve for him. They are helped out of their grief when squirrel comes to visit and reminds them of Fox's failings which prompts the mourners to commemorate him by celebrating them. That cheers them up. Apart from the improbability of these animals dwelling together, it is an enjoyable tale and I think young children will like it and might gain some insight into grief and how to cope with it.

We Were Gonna Have a Baby, but We Had an Angel Instead

Pat Schwiebert

Portland, OR, USA: Grief Watch, 2003, 20pp
\$8.95/£5.95 pb; ISBN 0 91242 411 3



Written in the first person as if by a toddler trying to make sense of a stillbirth or neonatal death and the adults' reactions, I thought at first this was going to be a bit twee, with a baby angel on every page. In fact it is delightful and would speak directly to a child in this situation. It ends,

People send us flowers and cards, but we still miss our baby. If this just happened to you, I'm sorry you got an angel instead of a baby. I think having a baby would have been more fun.

A two-page article at the end on how to help your children in this situation is full of common sense and good advice. The illustrations by Taylor Bills are simple but poignant. I prefer this book to *A Star for Bobby* (Keenor 2005) on a similar theme, reviewed in *Bereavement Care* 2006 (25[3]: 56).

Get Sad When Somebody Dies

Timony Shinada-Izotov



Milton Keynes, UK:
Author House, 2006
25pp
£5.00 pb
ISBN 1 42591 850 7

Timony is a six-year-old boy whose sister died, aged six months, and he decided to write this story which his mother illustrated. It is about sad feelings when someone you love goes to heaven. The illustrations are cruder than the others in this batch of books and there is a lot about angels. There are instructions for making an origami cat to put next to the picture of the sister, fun to make but a bit irrelevant. The book does not really address causation or the nature of death. It might inspire other children who have lost a sibling to put their feelings down on paper. ●

Dora Black

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

KEENOR H (2005). *A Star for Bobby*. London: Bason Publications.

PEACOCK H, REED N (2001). *The Strong Little Tree*. London: Little Tiger Press.

ARTICLES

Bereaved parents' perspectives on their needs

D'Agostino NM, Berlin-Romalis D, Jovcevska V, Barrera M (2008). *Palliative and Supportive Care*; 6(1): 33-41

This Canadian study examined parents' perspectives on bereavement services after the death of their child in a cancer treatment centre. A questionnaire to 20 parents had 10 returns and seven of these joined a two-hour focus group. Their discussion was recorded.

Parents shared information about themselves, aspects of their bereavement, and services in the hospital and community they would like to receive. All participants liked the idea of a hospital bereavement service. The first reason given for this seemed the most important: the treating hospital had become their community and a bereavement service offering a transition back to the mainstream community felt important. They considered they needed a variety of services depending on individual needs, eg one-to-one or group support. They also liked the idea of networking with others in a similar position as well as having information packages both to prepare for death and in its immediate aftermath.

Parents were also asked what helped in dealing with their loss. Preparing for the death, contact with people who understood the experience of losing a child to cancer, physical activity and humour were considered particularly helpful. After the death, they wanted to continue contact with some of the staff who had cared for their child. Despite some shortcomings, the research does point to improved quality of life for bereaved parents who can access pre- and post-death support within the institution where their child died.

Working with lesbian widows

Whipple V (2007). *Grief Matters*; 10(1): 4-7

This article highlights a group of women who may often experience disenfranchised grief because of their sexual orientation, and explains some of the particular complexities of this. It describes lesbian culture and in particular the various levels at which women 'come out' in their dominant culture. Four levels are identified and each has an impact on the way lesbian women may experience bereavement. Another area of potential difficulty is family support, not only from the family of the person who died but also from that of the surviving partner.

The nature of lesbian relationships, issues of spirituality and legal problems (often exacerbated by disenfranchised grief) are also explored in the light of bereavement. Finally the author points to a

dearth of literature pertaining directly to lesbians.

Although addressed primarily to health professionals, this article will also help lesbian widows as it acknowledges their particular potential difficulties and provides references for further reading.

The poverty of death: social class, urban deprivation, and the criminological consequences of sequestration of death

Allen C (2007). *Mortality*; 12(1):79-93

This article discusses the contention that many individuals have little direct experience of death, dying and bereavement in UK society today and find it difficult to cope with the emotions aroused. The author goes on to say that bereavement counselling and support groups which address this are more frequently used by the middle classes. Working class people tend not to access this type of service and there have been few studies on their experience of bereavement. The studies that have been done suggest that they adopt a stoical 'getting on with things' approach and avoid grieving, but how they deal with unresolved grief has not been examined.

Allen addressed this question by analysing interview data about the criminal careers of 26 heroin addicts living in traditional working class areas. The primary aim of his research had been to find out why these people turn to heroin. An unexpected finding was that 10 of the interviewees had begun to use heroin to help them cope with bereavement. Verbatim interview data powerfully illustrate this.

The literature search reported here found no suggestion that bereavement might be a route into heroin though there is, in fact, evidence of a more general link between risk-taking and bereavement which could be considered relevant. Allen points out that his finding on the repercussions of bereavement was an incidental result of his study: it is not an answer to the way working class people view bereavement, but the beginning of an answer. He suggests that death studies need to have a research focus not only in the sociology of death *per se*, but also in urban sociology and criminology.

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