

# Editorial

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Welcome to another thought-provoking and informative issue of Bereavement Care. This is the first occasion for me to write the editorial, and I feel honoured to do so. Some of my personal interests in relation to bereavement care are well served by this issue, including aspects of global and cultural diversity, the experiences of bereaved young people in particular, the common theme of isolation consequent on bereavement, and the significance of time in relation to both bereavement experiences and responses to those experiences.

The articles in this issue thus draw our attention to shared issues of bereavement around the world, from both natural and human causes. Two articles (by Suzuki and Meijburg) have been written by survivors of the recent natural disasters in Japan and New Zealand. These articles highlight common traumas but also material and cultural differences in the responses to these crises. Surviving and coping is clearly still a desperate struggle in the face of continuing aftershocks in New Zealand in particular, blocking opportunities to rebuild lives or do anything more than survive from day to day. In Japan, Suzuki suggests that it is perhaps the nuclear threats that people have found most difficult to accept, possibly because they arise from the work of human hands (or human (mis)-judgement), even though they followed on from the earthquake and tsunami.

Tragedies arising from human actions, and concerning young people, have featured prominently in the news in recent months (although it is notable that such news coverage may be fickle, as with the reporting of the New Zealand earthquakes). In July in the UK we marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deaths of 34 boys and two teachers from the Archbishop Lanfranc school in South London, who died together in a plane crash in Norway in 1961. In July 2011, coincidentally in Norway, we learned of the shocking massacre of at least 92 young people on Utøya island. In August in the UK we were faced with the murders of three young men who were trying to protect their communities from the summer riots that erupted in several cities.

While none of these can be considered to be 'natural' disasters, what these events do share with the recent earthquakes is the fact that these bereavements were experienced by many, interconnected people who were in the public eye (if only temporarily or briefly). By contrast, isolation features hugely in the lives of the people bereaved by suicide participating in Bowden's support groups, and the women bereaved of their mothers in childhood interviewed by Tracey. Isolation is also a significant aspect of the

experiences of the bereaved male offenders who participate in Wilson's bereavement support groups in HMP Everthorpe. The importance of reducing the sense of isolation is apparent in both this programme and Bowden's support programme for suicide bereaved individuals, while Tracey highlights her interviewees' desire to speak of their experiences of maternal bereavement. Nevertheless, Parkes' poignant discussion of van der Weyden's 15<sup>th</sup> century painting of *The Descent from the Cross* points out that all grief can be isolating, even in the midst of support.

The significance of time passing is particularly highlighted by the experiences of those bereaved in the Lanfranc air disaster. Besides the commemorative events held to mark the anniversary, Rosalind Jones, sister of one of the boys who died, has published a book based on contributions from those who were bereaved, many of them siblings of those who died in the crash (Jones, 2011). The continuing depth of feeling among these survivors is very apparent in their stories. In this, their experiences resonate strongly with the women in Tracey's research, for whom the absence of their mothers continues to be a central theme in their lives.

Time features in rather a different way in Meijburg's account of the New Zealand suffering after the earthquake. He describes how some would-be helpers got the timing 'wrong': bereavement experts may have rushed in to offer help too early, while insurers have been too slow to provide money for vital rebuilding and repair work. Meijburg's article highlights the importance of local responses to this shared crisis. Suzuki, on the other hand, points to the possibility of survivor guilt among those Japanese who were not directly affected by the quake and tsunami, expressed in the generous public response to appeals for disaster relief funds, as a way to share the pain and heartache of those directly affected.

Sadly for the bereaved prisoners discussed by Wilson, their sense of reduced isolation and increased support as a result of the intervention programme may be short-lived, since it may not be easily translatable into their social milieu after release from prison. In these ways, then, both time and contexts may be significant elements shaping bereavement experiences, as bereaved individuals seek to find a way to live with the bereavement long after social support and media attention may have moved elsewhere. We hope that the articles in this journal will continue to be useful over a more sustained period of time. ■

Jones R (2011). *The Lanfranc boys*. London: Filament Press.