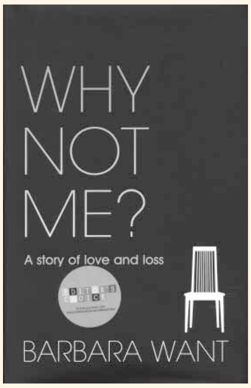
Book Reviews



Why not me? A story of love and loss

Barbara Want

London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010
266pp
£14.99
ISBN 978 0 29785 187 5

My questions, when I come across books where the writer shares their profound personal sadnesses and misfortunes, tend to be: 'Why was this written?' and 'Who is it written for?' For health professionals? Academics? For the increasingly numerous lay readership who enjoy what have come to be known as misery memoirs? Or are these books written as a kind of catharsis for the writer him or herself? The answer is often a mixture of some or all of these.

After reading Barbara Want's searing account of the death from cancer of her husband, Radio 4 presenter and journalist Nick Clarke, I remain baffled as to her purpose.

I have very mixed feelings about the book. The excerpts from Nick Clarke's diary are deeply moving. Beautifully and sensitively written, they offer a window into what it feels like to see your life ebbing away. These excerpts reminded me of another journalist, John Diamond, who chronicled his own death from cancer. There is a need for more research into the experiences of the dying and we are indeed fortunate that there are people like John Diamond and Nick Clarke who can share their experiences in such a way.

But, as a health professional and academic, I learned little from the rest of the book, which covers the time that Barbara Want and Nick Clarke spent together from their meeting right up to his death, and how she has coped with the aftermath.

The aftermath will of course be of most interest to readers of this journal. Support was not there for Barbara Want in the way that she needed or expected, throughout Nick's illness and dying and in her bereavement. Much of the book is an expression of her anger about this – about the services provided (or lack of) and other people's attitudes and behaviour during his illness and after his death.

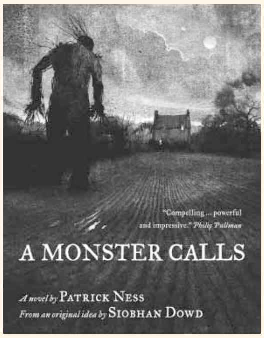
The responses of others after the death of someone close can be disappointing. *Why Not Me* shows that even celebrities and BBC employees – just like the rest of us – can struggle and fail to reach out to the bereaved. Health professionals too can fail – and can also be seen to have failed by someone who is understandably and rightly angry at the fate they have been dealt and struggling to make sense of what has happened – the loss of her partner, her family, her hopes, their future, and all those other things that professionals working in loss and dying know result from the death of someone close.

In my ideal world hospices would have an angry room where people approaching the end of their life can curse and swear and rail against the unfairness of it all. Perhaps this book is Barbara Want's angry room. If so, I hope it has helped.

If this book has a message for health professionals and volunteers working with the dying and bereaved, it is to remind us that things can easily go so very badly wrong and how important it is to reflect constantly on our practice to ensure that the needs being met are those of the client, not our own or those of our organisation.

Judith Hodgson
Lecturer/practitioner in social work, University of Hull

DOI: 10.1080/02682621.2012.710498



A monster calls

Patrick Ness

Illustrations by Jim Kay

London: Walker Books, 2011
215pp
£9.99
ISBN 978 1 40633 490 6

A Monster Calls is based on an idea originally conceived by Siobhan Dowd, who died before she was able to write the novel herself. It is an extremely moving book, suitable for young people aged 13 and upwards. It focuses on Conor, a young boy, and his emotions, thoughts and fears about the expected death of his mother, who is dying of cancer.

The story draws heavily on fairy tale tradition, but this in no way detracts from the seriousness of the content. The monster of the title can be viewed metaphorically or corporeally. Its primary function throughout the book is to embody Conor's darkest, most secret fear – that he wants his mother to die: he cannot bear to watch his mother dying and wants her suffering to end.

The novel addresses a catalogue of issues likely to affect young people like Conor, who know a loved one in their life is going to die. Anger, feeling invisible to peers, wanting to be treated normally, facing up to other major losses and changes consequent on the death, being bullied and struggling to understand the ways in which other family members express their grief – all feature here, painted with true strokes.

The daring and engaging narrative is illustrated by Jim Kay's scratchy monochrome pen and ink drawings that reinforce the darkness of Conor's plight and the horror of his unvoiced fear.

A Monster Calls is an exceptional novel that is well paced, emotive and fearless. One of the main reasons I admire this novel is it does not attempt to protect the reader from the very real insecurities with which young people have to contend when facing the death of someone close. It is one of the finest novels for young people about the expected death of a loved one that I have read and should be very popular with young people and bereavement support workers alike.

Alison Thompson
Cruse Children and Young People's Service & Development Manager

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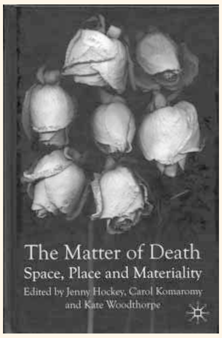

The matter of death: space, place and materiality

Jenny Hockey, Carol Komaromy and Kate Woodthorpe (eds)

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010
270pp
£55
ISBN 978 0 23022 416 2

By engaging with the role of space, place and materiality in experiences of dying, death and bereavement, *The Matter of Death* examines both the meaning of death in human experience and the physical environment in which death is managed. This edited collection, comprising 15 chapters, spans the institutional spaces: hospitals, hospices and care homes, where death occurs, as well as those where bodies are viewed and the dead recollected and encountered, including inquests, funeral homes, cemeteries, crematoria, natural burial grounds and more informal, private and non-material spaces.

Grounded in rich empirical data from recent national and international research, representing a range of disciplinary perspectives, each chapter raises questions, invites reflection and provides theoretical insight on the different ways in which dying and bereaved people interact with their physical surroundings and the 'matter' of death. Chapter 1, '*Materialising absence*' introduces the 'case of the body' to explore the value of different theoretical perspectives, while Chapter 15, '*Recovering presence*', uses 'space' to consider how these perspectives might enable us to think and act in relation to death.

Focusing on contemporary, Western societies, the collection complements the socio-historical perspective of *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Hallam & Hockey, 2001), addressing the way death has been pushed to the margins of society by asking: what is the matter with death? Though providing considerable empirical evidence for death's 'sequestration', it challenges the assumption that such distancing has to do with death being intrinsically and universally fearful. Moving through a range of empirical contexts, it demonstrates that attempts to hide death are only partial and, as such, may invite more direct encounters with human mortality. Thus, experiences such as unscheduled dying, viewing the body, attending the inquest and tending a grave provide powerful reminders of the extent to which death remains present within everyday life.

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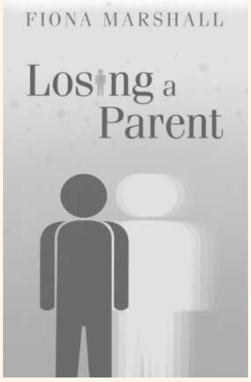
Hallam E, Hockey J (2001). *Death, memory and material culture.* Oxford, New York: Berg.



Losing a parent (2nd ed)

Fiona Marshall

London: Sheldon Press, 2011
114pp
£8.99
ISBN 978 184709 158 1

'No matter what our age, the death of a parent is devastating; nothing else leaves us feeling so abandoned.' (p ix) The first edition of this book, written for bereaved adults, was published in 1993 and I have always used it in training and supervising Cruse volunteers and have recommended it to Cruse clients.

There are ten chapters. In the first , '*Terminal illness: anticipating death, how family members learn of the imminent death and experience a whole range of emotions*' – disbelief, fear, anger, guilt and relief – is sensitively covered.

For those who have never seen someone die or visited a dying relative the second chapter, '*You and your dying parent*' is very helpful: should you try and talk to your mother about death?; how to use the time left; and how to share the care with your siblings.

'*When death comes*', chapter three, tells how waiting for your parent to die can be harrowing and often confusing: 'a day can feel like a week'. It helps to know that 'if death is protracted ...your emotions switch off' (p 27). After the death there may be a period of extreme fatigue… ' this is a time when you need to take care of yourself' (p 30).

The effects of 'sudden death' are now well-known since the first edition due to terrorist attacks and other major disasters. It is not easy to grieve when many others have lost loved ones in the same incident. Never seeing the body or having a grave to tend is very hard.

Murder of an elderly parent living alone, especially if the death resulted from an assault during a burglary, could have been given more space as could the suicide of a parent. The anger and guilt experienced by those left often cause headlines. Explaining the cause of death to the victim's grandchildren is almost impossible. Some families never come to terms with the sudden death of a parent.

Adults often regard themselves as orphans when their remaining parent dies : 'The abandoned child: grief' (chapter 5). They say they 'go up a generation'. Grieving is important but if a woman is pregnant when her parent dies, it is almost impossible to grieve until after the birth. Then external grief support will help.

'*Patterns of loss*' (chapter 6) outlines the four main factors that affect reaction to loss: the manner of death; the quality of the relationship; the support received; past experience of loss (p 55). More was said about the nature of loss in the first edition. The death of a divorced parent is covered but not the death of a step-parent. Death after family estrangement and also the death of a parent who has been in prison is included.

I would have liked a section about 'prolonged death': about those who spend many years caring for parents paralysed and speechless from a stroke, or unable to recognise their children due to dementia. It is as though the parent's death happened at the onset of the illness.

'One of the most important effects of losing a parent, in the long term, is that it leads you to find your own centre – the inner home without which you would be rootless', (p 74) reflects the wisdom in the chapter '*Inheritance: new possessions, new ideas?*'

Good advice is given in the chapter '*Help*' about not being afraid to ask for help while '*Getting on with your life*' (chapter 10) counsels not making grief a refuge.

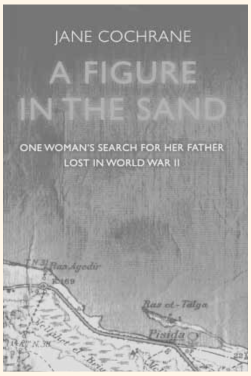
No reference is made to *When Parents Die* by Rebecca Abrams, first published in 1992, a year before the first edition of this book; a shame as it comprehensively covers similar issues.

The text of this edition and the first is the same except for the substitution of 'terrorist attack' in place of 'large-scale disasters' on p 33, the omission of three paragraphs about the nature of loss on p 55 and the inclusion of Wells (2007) and Worden (1983) in the Further Reading. I had hoped this new edition would refer to the ageing population and the growth of carers' organisations such as Carers UK and others in the past 20 years. Nor does it refer to Audrey Jenkinson's study of carers which she wrote after the death of her own parents. The value of Marshall's book would have been increased if she had included material on how adults caring for their dying parents might be better supported.

Joyce Rimmer
Chair, Cruse West Midlands Regional Committee

Abrams R (1992). *When parents die: learning to live with loss of a parent* (2nd edition). London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

Jenkinson A (2004). *Past caring: The beginning not the end* (2nd edition). Polperro: Heritage Press, 248.



A figure in the sand: one woman's search for her father lost in WW II

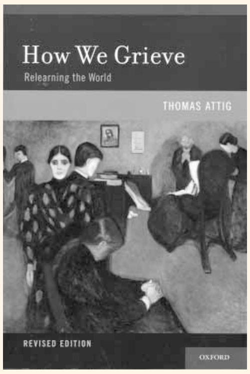
Jane Cochrane

Eastbourne: Antony Rowe Publishing, 2011
£11.99
366pp
ISBN 978 1 90757 102 2

As the daughter of an American fighter pilot killed in World War II, Jane Cochrane's exquisite homage to her father brought me comfort and deep connection. Hers is a story of father-loss overlooked in the literature and rarely acknowledged for its mysterious and powerful impact. Her exacting historical research, gathered and pieced together to create a picture of her father in life and in death, defines the lived-experience of countless others who have experienced the war death of a parent. The careful mapping of her father's journey into the battle that killed him begins with the 'deeply regret to inform you' telegram received by her paternal grandparents. With the announcement of their son's death, the author, barely two months old, was swept into a vortex of grief. Grief amidst war is without resolution when survival is primary. Instead, her legacy is a mystery surrounding her father's death accompanied by 45 years of mandated silent wondering. The book illuminates the life of a child, adolescent, and adult woman as she seeks resolution. In the process she must deconstruct the mythology and silence that surrounds her father's life and death by defining her place as his daughter.

Cochrane's writing style is not only engaging and compelling but includes the adept touch of a fine weaver – interlocking her father's life story, his military family history which dictates the certainty of patriotism and a birthright to serve, with her parents emerging love story – all cut short by a landmine. It is a rare book that provides a place in time on a personal and historical level, with the unspoken truths of war, and a daughter's mission and tenacity to know her father. Jane Cochrane's story moves elegantly between these levels, seeking to include the reader on an incredible adventure. While *Figure in the Sand* is autobiographical, biographical, historical, and reflective, it manages to plumb the depth and breadth of father-loss in war. The subsequent emotional loss of mother; the replacement father deemed necessary for post-WWII women in order to maintain their children's legitimacy; the ever-present unspoken sorrow; the forbidden questions; the absence of information, result in disenfranchised grief. This book profoundly contributes to the literature of grief and loss while addressing the trauma of war-loss as it impacts even the youngest child. This is childhood bereavement understood and healed. Jane Cochrane's brilliant and beautiful book draws a 'figure in the sand' as a map for us to follow as we accompany or experience grief. While this book is meaningful for the professional, it captivates even a casual reader seeking a tale of yearning, mystery, renewal, discovery, and recovery, that defines the power of the father-daughter bond, even in death.
www.myphantomfather.com

Sharon Taylor
Professor of Psychology; Relational Therapist



How we grieve: relearning the world (2nd edition)

Thomas Attig

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
202pp
£17.99
ISBN 978 0 19539 769 7

The revised addition of this book differs only from the first in its extensive introductory chapter (35 pages). In this prelude to the original text, Attig sets out developments in his own thinking, and reflects on current grief perspectives. He extends his own way of looking at the 'relearning' process by reconsidering the emotions of grief. He proposes and names three dimensions – 'ego emotion', generated by a need to be effective; 'soul emotion' related to the deep needs for connection and love; and 'spirit emotion', resulting from the need for courage, meaning and adventure. No doubt this reframing of the emotions of grief will be the basis for much future discussion. Attig also asserts the need to distinguish between passive, and active elements of grief. **Grief reaction**, the dimension of grief triggered reflexively by a loss and characterised by a sense of powerlessness, and **grief response**, the dimension of grief characterised by active engagement with the challenge to rediscover oneself and ones place in the world. Attig locates notions of revisions of the assumptive world, disenfranchised grief and continuing bonds, firmly within his own conceptual frame. He is less convinced of the place of oscillation within the dual process model of grief and challenges the moves to include complicated or prolonged grief within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

Attig writes, 'Personal stories are "the heart of the matter," both in responding to the bereaved and in developing thinking about grieving.' (p xxiv). Exploring the phenomenon of grief through the lens of individual case studies provides a powerful counterpoint to mainstream theoretical writing. The six chapters of the book work progressively from recognising the importance of individual grief stories through to the processes of relearning new ways of understanding the taken for granted realities of life and the revisions in functioning within it. The guidance for caregivers uses the insights from the case studies to provide a care agenda based on encouragement and support in travelling the journey of grief.

For students and practitioners, the case study approach will have wide appeal, although there are times when the story details obscure the conceptual perspectives. Nevertheless, this book provides a powerfully hopeful exposition of relearning the world in grief and the wider reflections of this second edition provide an update to an already well regarded text.

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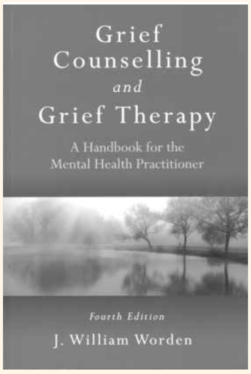

Grief counselling and grief therapy: a handbook for the mental health practitioner (4th edition)

J. William Worden

London/New York: Routledge, 2010
314pp
£18.99
ISBN 978 0 415 55999 7

William Worden has been deeply involved with the field of bereavement for many years, having been part of the Harvard Studies in the early 1970s, and when he produced his first two editions of *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy* they were very much seen as required reading for psychological therapists who worked with bereaved people, either within physical or mental health settings.

This current edition is explicitly aimed at mental health professionals, and as such pays particular attention to complicated grief, defining, assessing and treating it. There is a well written chapter on attachment theory and its presumed relationship to grief and loss. This chapter also explores something of the difference between grief and depression and, while it is a very brief run through the key issues, Worden doesn't ignore the possibility that a bereaved person may have both a complicated bereavement reaction and also a clinical depression, and as such could benefit from a psychiatric assessment and treatment with antidepressants.

There is also a chapter on the mediators of mourning, with particular reference to personal and social factors. The section '*When is mourning finished?*' is particularly helpful, in that it offers both the therapist and the bereaved person hope that there is a time which the bereaved person is able to assimilate and accommodate to the loss, however unending and intolerable the process may have appeared at times.

Similarly chapters on assessment, how to discern whether the bereaved person is grieving 'normally' or has a complicated mourning process are helpful in that they outline the key factors that one needs to be aware of, and dovetail well with the chapters on resolving complicated mourning and the importance of being mindful of potentially disenfranchised bereavements as a result of sudden infant death, abortion, suicide and other less 'socially sanctioned' losses.

My main difficulty with this book is that, while it covers all of the above in a clear and comprehensive way, it does not address times when orthodox 'bereavement therapy' or counselling may not meet a person's needs. For example, people who ruminate excessively about their loss may find a cognitive behavioural or mindfulness approach more useful, and the recent third wave CBT approaches have a great deal to tell us about finding compassion for self and making a commitment to change, facets of therapy that are often very hard to address with bereaved people in my experience (Gilbert, 2009; Kumar, 2005; Sage *et al*, 2008; Kabat-Zin, 1990; Hayes *et al*, 2004). Also a recent book by Irvin Yalom seeks to address the personal terror that those facing death and grief often experience through developing an understanding from an existential perspective (Yalom, 2008)

While I would not seek to dismiss the very important contribution that Worden has made and continues to make to the field of bereavement therapy over the past 40 years, I do find it disappointing that he has not sought to look at other models of understanding and helping people who are suffering, either through facing their own death or grieving the loss of someone who was of significance in their life. Many of the therapeutic modalities that I mention above have a great deal to offer those of us who work with dying and bereaved people.

The content of this book, while paying attention to many of the developments within the field of bereavement and loss, fails to demonstrate any fundamental change in Worden's thinking. I feel readers might have been better served if it had done so.

Despite these reservations, I believe that this revised edition remains a useful bench book for psychological practitioners who do not work with bereaved people on a regular basis, as it continues to provide a basic 'route map' thorough the difficult terrain of bereavement.

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Gilbert P (2009). *The compassionate mind.* London: Constable & Robinson.

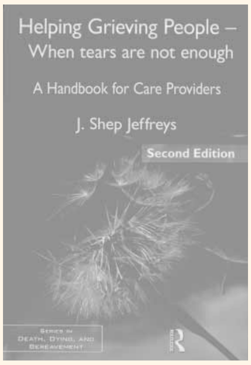
Hayes S, Follette VM, Linehan MM (2004). *Mindfulness and acceptance. expanding the cognitive behavoural tradition.* Guildford: Guildford Press.

Kabat-Zin J (1990). *Full catastrophe living. How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation.* London: Paitkus.

Kumar SM (2005). *Grieving mindfully*. Oakland. CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Sage N, Sowden M, Chorlton E, Edeleanu A (2008). *CBT for chronic illness and palliative care: a workbook and toolkit. Chichester: Wiley.*

Yalom I (2008). *Staring at the sun: overcoming the dread of death.* London: Piatkus.



Helping grieving people- when tears are not enough

J Shep Jeffreys

New York/Hove: Routledge, 2011
397pp
£24.95
ISBN 978 0 415 87701 5

The sub-title of this book describes it as 'A handbook for care providers'. The audience for whom this book is intended is later further described as 'professional care providers, trained volunteers, family caregivers and caring friends'. But this needs further clarity. What does 'care providers'mean? Who are care providers? Surely all of us involved in work with the dying and bereaved could give ourselves the description of 'care providers'. Greater precision about who might benefit from this book is needed.

For example, a professional health care worker, a nurse or a social worker, might be forgiven for picking up this book and assuming that it would inform their practice but I do not believe that it would. *Helping Grieving People* is not a classic piece of writing bringing us new insights into loss and dying. It could be something a beginning health professional might dip into or refer to and hopefully be guided towards more detailed reading, but that is all. A health professional with all the training and background reading knowledge that being a health professional entails would know about and go immediately to the more detailed and specific books relating to specific subjects.

I do believe, however, that *Helping Grieving People* could be of use to the many unprofessional care providers in our society, the unsung often unpaid heroes who save the Exchequer a lot of money. It may give those many individuals, who do not have a huge array of academic texts to inform what they do, a hint of the theories and models of working that are otherwise available.

Nevertheless *Helping Grieving People* is not a straightforward read – there are too many stops and starts, too many short unconnected sub-headed paragraphs and too many times when you think 'I would like to know more about this...' Whoever the reader, whether a care provider or a health care professional, he or she is jolted from one subject to the next, instead of being guided effortlessly through delightful flowing prose.

The book looks at grief from a number of perspectives, it has exercises and practice examples and it looks at the impact of all this on the practitioner or 'exquisite witness grief care provider'. The theme or pathway running through the book is the 'heart' (self-awareness), 'head' (understanding the grief response) and 'hand' (supportive interventions) experiences of the 'exquisite witness – all of which might appeal to the non-professional reader. The book looks briefly at theory, but we are given snapshots of the theory which are, to my mind, not helpful, even to a care giver who is unfamiliar with the theory that informs work with the dying and bereaved. The snapshots are short, descriptive and do not relate the theory to practice.

As a matter of urgency I would also suggest re-editing; for example Colin Murray Parkes is referenced as Colin Parkes (page 72). This is careless and such inaccuracies do not give confidence for the rest of the contents.

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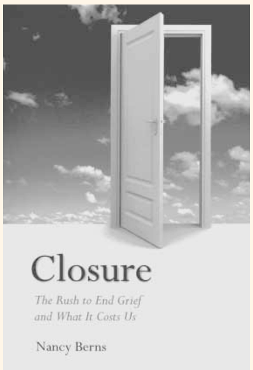


Closure: the rush to end grief and what it costs

Nancy Berns

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011
213pp
$24.95
ISBN 978 1 43990 577 7

Authored by a US sociologist, this text exploring the concept of 'closure' in relation to grief is a well written and accessible book that provides a wealth of examples of the way in which managing loss is currently commercialised, marketed and consumed. Not exclusively focusing on death *per se*, the book covers topics as diverse as victims' rights movements, pet grief, divorce parties and executions. With the vast majority of the book focused on the USA, as a UK-based sociologist I was particularly interested to learn of the implications of the growing popularity of 'direct cremations' for funeral directors who want to ensure they retain their profit margins and the growing trend for 'death midwives' (both in chapter 4).

Reminiscent in tone of *Vigor Mortis* (Berridge, 2001), *Stiff* (Roach, 2004) and *Remember Me* (Takeuchi Cullen, 2006), I found the content of this book both welcoming and challenging. On the one hand it is highly readable and informative, full of anecdotes to illustrate the author's points. At the same time however, the anecdotal nature of the supporting evidence is the text's limitation. It is written by a university-based academic, and I was expecting the book to include more reference to scholarly insight, preferably drawing on both US and international work. For example, in examining what people do with ashes – while enlightening in terms of learning about the options for ash disposal services available to purchase in the US – the author made no reference to the seminal research on the destination of ashes led by Professor Jenny Hockey at the University of Sheffield (see Kellaher, 2010). This lack of academic rigour leads me to question whether this is a fundamental weakness of the book, or a product of a different publishing culture in the US. I suspect it is the latter. As a result, as long as a potential reader does not opt for this book seeking theoretical discussion and it is read at face value – as an engaging and edifying text most likely suited to the interested general public – I would recommend it.

Berridge K (2001). *Vigor mortis: the end of the death taboo*. London: Profile Books.

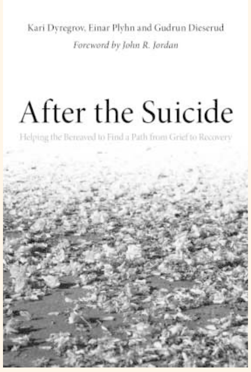
Kellaher L, Hockey J, Prendergast D (2010). Wandering lines and cul-de-sacs: trajectories of ashes in the United Kingdom. In J Hockey, C Komaromy, K Woodthorpe (eds) *The matter of death: space, place and materiality.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 133-147.

Roach N (2004). *Stiff: the curious lives of human cadavers.* London: Penguin Books.

Takeuchi Cullen L (2006). *Remember me: a lively tour of the new American way of death.* New York: HarperCollins.

Kate Woodthorpe

Lecturer in sociology, University of Bath



After the suicide

Kari Dyregrov, Einar Plyhn and Gudrun Dieserud

Jessica Kingsley, 2012
192pp
£17.99
ISBN 978 1 849 05211 5

This is an excellent book written principally by the renowned Norwegian suicidologist Kari Dyregrov assisted by Einar Plyhn, who has been personally bereaved by suicide, and Gudrun Dieserud.

In the foreword John Jordon says 'the book is eminently readable, clear, simple and comprehensive in its coverage of the experience of losing a loved one'. I would certainly concur.

Dyregov shows that there are many unique aspects of suicide as the death is self-inflicted and a rejection which causes the bereaved to search endlessly for answers to the question 'why', and for some self-reproach and guilt.

As we might expect from the previous work of Atle and Kari Dyrigrov there is an excellent chapter about the particular problems of children bereaved by suicide, showing that the relationship that the child had to the deceased has a great significance to the effect on the child. Dyregrov highlights the dilemma of protection of the child that is a natural reaction by the parent, particularly the mother. Over-protection of the child, especially the reluctance of the parents to tell the truth, can have unfortunate effects on the child in later life. Dyregrov takes this point further in advocating openness as the most important coping strategy. Openness also contributes to breaking down stigma and preventing the spreading of falsehoods.

The importance of the variety of forms of support is well described – network support (the support of friends, family and other organisations), peer support and professional support. Dyregrov summarises this very clearly. 'As long as they have sufficient information about the possibilities available it is important to respect that the bereaved will chose the type of peer support best suited to them individually, or alternatively turn it down.' To enable this to happen it is essential that bereaved people have quick access to information.

The survivor in the UK may be dismayed to compare the support that is offered by the police and the clergy immediately following a suicide. In Norway the clergy are charged with the duty of taking the news of the suicide to the bereaved and the police are trained in the psycho-social care of the bereaved in their initial training.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book which must be one of the best books recently written for the suicide survivor as well as for the professional. Kari Dyregrov is able to successfully combine her academic knowledge together with the contact she has had with suicide support groups in Norway.

John Peters

Volunteer/survivor with Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide