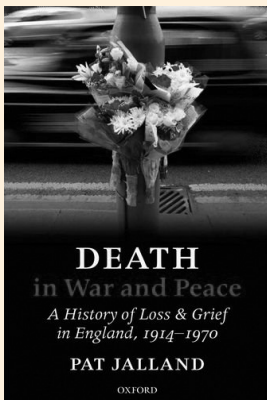


Book Reviews



Death in war and peace: a history of loss and grief in England, 1914 – 1970'

Pat Jalland

2010
Oxford: Oxford University Press
pp 336
£43
ISBN: 978 0199265510

Pat Jalland has written a wonderfully rich, detailed account of how events and developments in the years 1914-1970, in particular two World Wars, influenced the average English person's attitude to the experience of death. Each of the 12 chapters is built on extensive research and contains rich personal memoirs, correspondence and reflections that enhance the book's authenticity and impact – I felt privileged to be allowed access to such intimate and often poignant material.

In the first section, 'War and Peace 1914-1939', we read how an ordinary family's pilgrimages to France over twelve years assisted their ability to come to terms with their son's death on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. How, even in the years between the two World Wars, wives and mothers of miners continued to live with anxiety, dread and the anticipation of further tragedy. And finally how one man, Sir Sydney Cockerill, advocated what he perceived to be the simple yet sacred nature of cremation as a rational alternative to the flamboyance and dreariness of burials.

In the second section, 'The Second World War', the 'myth' of the Blitz years is exposed, illustrating how an overriding need to maintain morale paved the way for years of stoicism and silence in grief, a culture reinforced by media and press censorship. Jalland includes graphic personal narratives and black and white photographs that add depth, poignancy and alternative perspective to the horrors of the Second World War. The final chapter in the section explores individual experiences of wartime grief; two extensive personal accounts illustrating challenges faced by people still restricted by grief conventions of the era, and highlighting gender differences in grief.

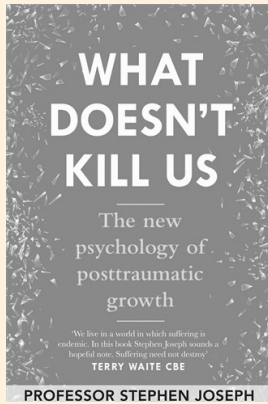
The final section, 'A changing culture of death and loss since 1945', examines developments in medicine, care of the dying, and experiences of grief and bereavement following the War years. Jalland outlines events that not only resulted in growing fears for global and personal safety – nuclear warfare, climate change, the NHS and hospitalisation – but also perpetuated a 'death-denial' accompanied by minimised rituals and continuing reluctance to discuss death or express emotion. A moving chapter is devoted to the experience of grief, old age and widowhood in the twenty years following the Second World War, personal accounts and diary extracts illustrating an unrelenting adherence to the stiff upper lip and cheerful countenance many felt they needed to exhibit. Margaret Torrie's important establishment of Cruse Bereavement Care paved the way for long overdue bereavement support, ultimately becoming 'an entire secular organisation in which knowledge of psychology and popular grief theories had replaced religious faith' (p.209), with supplementary research and publications paving the way for heightened understanding of grief and loss.

The final chapter reflects on further changes since the 1970s, including the role of medicine, the growth of expressive grieving, an increasing need to maintain bonds with the deceased, and reaction against former mourning rituals resulting in the development of 'new' rituals, such as roadside memorials. The latter, along with increasing displays of public grief (Princess Diana; '9-11') have led to ongoing debate regarding appropriateness and relevance to the grief process.

Any knowledge of generational exposure, and changing attitudes to death is surely useful to someone working in this field, and reading it offered me unexpected insight into the worlds and beliefs of my relatives, and of older bereaved clients I have worked with. I am uncertain about its general usefulness for the majority of people who support bereaved individuals but highly recommend this book to those interested in socio-historical attitudes to death and grief. ■

Trish Staples

Bereavement Volunteer



What doesn't kill us: the new psychology of posttraumatic growth

Professor Stephen Joseph

London: Piatkus
2012

317pp

pb £13.99

ISBN: 978 0 415 893947

Professor Joseph began his interest in posttraumatic growth, although he would not then have conceptualised it in that way, as a child in Dublin living with 'the Troubles', loving Spiderman and the idea that tragedy could be the springboard for transformation. As a psychology graduate student his department was asked by the lawyers of the bereaved survivors of the ferry, Harold of Free Enterprise in which 193 of 580 passengers died, to interview the survivors. His thesis investigated the survivors, and the roadblocks to recovering they experienced.

Joseph writes both as a scientific researcher and a therapist, and describes the book as being about how trauma can transform the course of one's life so that our way of being is completely and radically dismantled such that we step into a new world. Often, it is only through recognising adversity as a fact of life and stepping into it that we begin to look deeply into ourselves and reappraise what really matters, leading some people into new and more meaningful lives. From this perspective *What Doesn't Kill Us* can be compared with Dr. Mark Epstein's new book *The Trauma of Everyday Life*. Epstein, a psychiatrist and Buddhist scholar, starts with an analysis of the life of the Buddha, whose mother's death when he was a newborn, informed his path and teachings.

Using the metaphor of a beautiful shattered vase, Joseph questions whether one glues it back together, tosses the pieces, or makes a mosaic. He discusses the emotional toll and biology of trauma, how it can lead to transformation, the paths to posttraumatic growth, how it can be nurtured and the six signposts to facilitating posttraumatic growth in his THRIVE model: taking stock; harvesting hope; re-authoring (not seeing one's self as a victim, but thinking of one's self as a survivor, and then a thriver); identifying change; valuing change; and expressing change in action.

The book is well written, with lots of practical tips. I found myself quickly integrating some of its concepts into my clinical practice. *What Doesn't Kill Us* is comparable to Bonanno's, *The Other Side of Sadness* in its discussions of resilience and posttraumatic growth. Clinicians and researchers interested in similar concepts in physicians

would also find Shakespeare-Finch's chapter *Promoting Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth in Physicians* to be relevant. ■

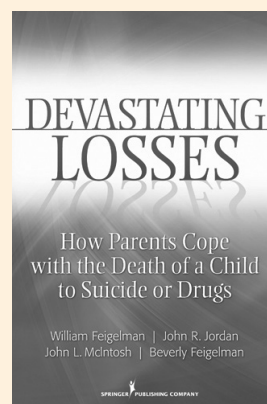
Mary LS Vachon

Psychotherapist in Private Practice, Professor of Psychiatry

Epstein M (2013). *The trauma of everyday life*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Bonanno G (2009). *The other side of sadness*. New York: Basic Books.

Shakespeare-Finch J (2013). Promoting resilience and posttraumatic growth in physicians. In: C Figley, P Huggard, C E Rees (eds). *First do no self-harm*. Oxford University Press.



Devastating losses: how parents cope with the death of a child to suicide or drugs

Feigelman W, Jordan JR, McIntosh JL, Feigelman B

New York: Springer Publishing Company

2012

338pp

ISBN:978 0 8216 0747 3

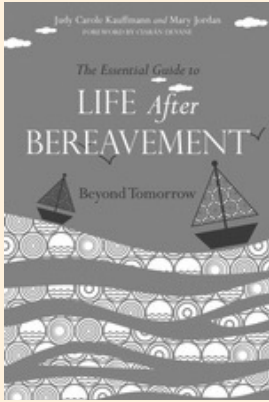
£47.50

This valuable book, two of whose authors suffered this extreme loss, opens a rich hitherto almost unexplored field of research while illustrating that the taking part, for grieving parents, can be an enriching, indeed cathartic, experience. Survivors find their voice, sometimes describing the superimposed blame and stigmatisation which accompany and intensify community responses to such tragedies.

The first section of the book covers factors associated with the loss experience, and includes chapters on suicide circumstances, multiple losses and drug-overdose death. The second section looks at forms of bereavement assistance, including how to identify needs, and how support groups can help, both in person and on the internet. A shorter third section looks at the impact of a child's traumatic death on married couples, and the book finishes with suggestions for future research

This timely book will be essential reading for those providing and evaluating bereavement services, blending as it does original research and accounts of therapeutic initiatives illustrated by intense case studies, carefully made anonymous yet vivid and requiring empathic thoughtfulness. ■

Jean Brodrick



The essential guide to life after bereavement

Judy Carole Kauffman and Mary Jordan

London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley
2013
pp 176
£12.99
ISBN: 978 1 84905 335 8

This book is written by two people with experience of working at end of life and bereavement care. It brings together information about the process of bereavement, and different issues that arise, from the process of breaking bad news, acknowledging guilt and grief, issues that can arise from families in conflict to more practical matters such as dealing with personal effects, and coping strategies when dealing with anniversaries.

Its strength lies in covering a range of issues, and thus for the newly bereaved, or those supporting them, it alerts the reader to the potential issues that might need to be addressed and ways that they may be handled.

However, some of the material is handled unevenly. Some of the anecdotes were not clarified and I was left with the unfortunate impression that nurses and doctors do not give the news of someone's death in a gentle and compassionate way (p20). The language is sometimes strange – several times they refer to 'firing a warning shot' (p 28, 40) when telling someone of a death. It seems an unnecessarily violent metaphor in this context, although I understand what they are trying to convey.

Sometimes it reads more like an etiquette guide to breaking bad news for example with email being acceptable 'only [sic] after the news itself has been given by word of mouth' (p23) rather than acknowledging that different people communicate in different ways and that while for some email would be unacceptable, for others it would seem more natural. The chapter on breaking the news to children, people with intellectual disabilities and people with dementia on the one hand highlights some of the issues, myths and misguided beliefs that arise and how they can be addressed. But on the other hand, it lacks discussion of a cohesive principle (for example respect and dignity for the individual) which would offer some guidance to enable people to find their way through the pitfalls. They cite Irene Tuffrey-Wijne's comprehensive list of factors to consider when working with people with intellectual disabilities, without giving more detail of some of the crucial points that Tuffrey-Wijne makes (eg. 'Can they be harmed by receiving this chunk of information, at this point of time?') or relating them to their earlier comments and case studies.

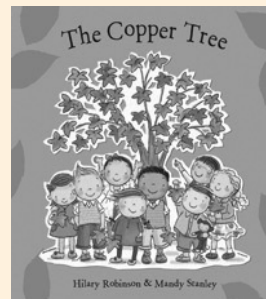
The foreword by Ciarán Devane of Macmillan Cancer Support gives the best advice on this book – 'Please read

it and take from it what is helpful.' It is full of thought-provoking material, and draws attention to different issues and scenarios but the reader needs to select what is useful for them and their circumstances, and consider its recommendations carefully rather than adopting them wholesale. ■

Janet Dowling

Bereavement Volunteer

Tuffrey-Wijne I (2013). *How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.



The copper tree

Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

Strauss House Productions
2012
pp 32
£6.99
ISBN: 0957124503

This delightful book for 4-7 year olds tells how a class of children cope with the death of their teacher. It is in turns touching, funny, sad and very real.

We are introduced to Miss Evans and her illness by the children singing her favourite song and making a giant Get Well card. The way the children keep in touch with her and ask her back for school events prepares us for what is inevitably going to happen. Her death is relayed to the class in a matter of fact way, yet very sensitively. Each of the children is encouraged to think of how they would like to remember Miss Evans and what she taught them. These memories and skills are then inscribed onto copper leaves and hung on a copper tree in the school entrance hall.

This book is beautifully illustrated and full of interesting detail for young children to explore and comment on. The wording is short and simple. The message is that although death is sad, it is not necessarily the end – love and memories provide a lasting legacy.

This is not an activity book like *Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine* but is more along the lines of *Badger's Parting Gifts* where the life of the one who has gone is celebrated and everyone reminisces about what that 'person' meant to them. The illustrations are similar in vein to those of *Sad Isn't Bad* but *The Copper Tree* is definitely a story rather than a guidebook to grief. It feels very personal as it develops characters that we can believe in and care about. ■

Heather Price

Cruse Bereavement Volunteer

Crossley D, Sheppard K (2000). *Muddles, puddles and sunshine*. Winston's Wish.

Varley, S (2002). *Badger's parting gifts*. Collins Picture Books

Mundy M, Alley RW (1998). *Sad isn't bad*. Abbey Press.