

Editorial

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A review of the titles for this *Bereavement Care* issue shows the prominence of 'story' as a theme running through most of the articles. Personal stories, including the complex back-stories of women in prison, bereaved parents, a widow's narratives, the story of a national programme on remembrance, the story of a conference, and the censored stories that lead to hidden loss, make up this issue.

Story is timeless – the 'To Absent Friends' project revives strong Celtic storytelling traditions, encouraging people across Scotland to relate their stories of lost loved ones in the contemporary settings of their choice – in local or virtual communities (Patterson, Peacock and Hazelwood). The story of the project is upbeat and celebratory, an emblem of empowerment. The project channels people's instincts, by inviting and giving permission to tell the story of one who died any length of time ago, crucially avoiding any assumption that only recent losses 'count'. Patterson and colleagues also show how stories can be powerfully mediated through art and Georgia's poem about her Uncle Mark has a very strong impact, poignantly revealing at the end that Uncle Mark had died before Georgia was even born. The family unit preserves his meaning through their stories – the story a vehicle for preserving old and building new relationships.

In a personal narrative, peppered with her own poetry, Lesley Morris gives us insight into the *interrupted story*. She describes the lost joint future of not growing old together, a 'mutual dream' for Eddie who died suddenly, and Lesley his widow. And still, as her own individual story continues, Lesley is confirmed that one where she is 'continuing to grow and develop and finding new and fun things' is a script Eddie would want for her.

Stories, not story - it would be deceptively simple to think of story as simply a salve to grief in the face of great loss. An examination of narrative and story uncovers many complexities, not least of which is the competing or conflicting stories identified by Shankar, Nolte and Trickey

in the experiences of bereaved parents as they rear surviving children. The authors draw on the dual process model to illustrate the opposing forces of the 'story of parenting' and the 'story of grieving'. They describe the associated struggle to maintain connection with both surviving child and the dead child, while needing to disconnect from one or other in order to do this. The metaphor of weather, landscapes and cycles of being lost in, and emerging from, fog recur and are linked to the connection/disconnection dynamic.

Stories are neither discrete nor linear; they run on multiple planes, evolve and change in the telling and the sharing. Shankar, Nolte and Trickey highlight their relational and complex nature, particularly within families where there are both shared and individual stories. In the scope of their own study, the perspective of the surviving child remains to be heard.

The wider societal, cultural and family influence on the development of public and private stories is acknowledged throughout this issue. The inputs on travellers/gypsies (Rogers and Greenfields) and on women prisoners' grief experiences (Hageman) offer narratives which stretch way back in time to full life-stories, leaving the distinct impression that these are their first telling; context has conspired up to now to censor. Clearly death is not a leveller, the patterns of death and multiple loss in these two marginalised groups challenge sense-making. These articles turn up the volume on silent suffering.

As this issue goes to press, Debbie Kerslake, CEO of Cruse Bereavement Care, has announced her retirement. News travels faster than the speed of light these days and Debbie herself has embraced social media to let people know of her plans, but also to eloquently tell of her great, abiding love of Cruse. Debbie has been centrally involved with *Bereavement Care* organisationally and editorially and I take this opportunity to wish her the very best for her future and to simply say thank you. ■