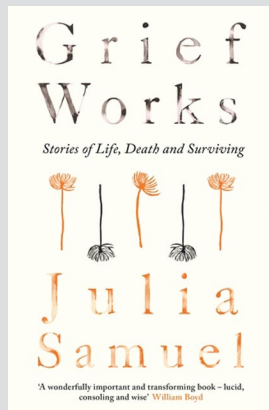


Book Reviews



Grief works: stories of life, death and surviving

Julia Samuel

London: Penguin Random House
2017
292pp
Hb £14.99
ISBN: 978 0 241 27074 5

This is an extraordinary book written by Julia Samuel, a Grief Psychotherapist with 25 years experience, who sometimes sees clients for several years until they resolve their grief. It is shared stories about her clients' journeys through their grief and her insightful reflections on what she has learned. The first section is 'when a partner dies' and moves on to explore the death of a parent, a sibling, a suicide, and a child. In a lively retelling of the stories she shares her analysis of each client's psychological state, as well as noticing the way she personally responds to the client. So when one client comes as an adult, mourning the death of his mother when he was only four, she notices that she herself is feeling motherly towards him and how this impacts on her relationship with him. It is useful to have these personal practice issues aired in the context of the client's material as it enables grief counsellors to become more aware of their own responses in practice, particularly if they are not aware of transference and counter transference.

Each section is concluded with a 'Reflections' in which Samuel draws together the key issues and learning points about people who have experienced that particular loss, and the overall implications for work with clients. This mixture of client story, therapist's personal response and the theoretical reflection makes for a sound basis for others working in the same field, and for those who want to understand more about the psychological and social components of how 'grief works'.

I was particularly struck by her saying 'Death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship and survivors often struggle to resolve what seems like an unresolvable contradiction'. The dilemma of trying to reframe a relationship after death can be an area of acute distress.

Samuel also addresses the needs of people who are facing their own death, an issue that many people find hard to work with. Disagreeing with the idea that patients should be made to face reality when they are in denial, instead she

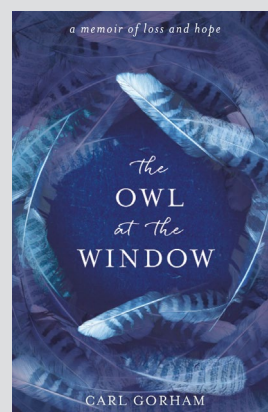
honours the client's way of expressing the delicate topic of their own death. Advocating the use of clients' own words rather than the therapist's, she suggests that, in order to cope with their own impending death, it is important to keep their own defence mechanisms in place. She encourages families to talk open and honestly and to make sure they don't have any regrets.

The final section of the book addresses what helps: the work we all need to do to help us grieve and survive successfully. Samuel introduces her model of the pillars of strength that support us and enable us to rebuild our lives. All of these need attention and time to develop, along with the other elements of society we can draw on - friends and family. Her guidance notes are drawn fully from her experience, fully referenced and relate back to the clients' stories that she has shared.

This is a remarkable book working on several levels, as educator and mentor to those supporting the bereaved, as well as offering a therapist's insight into the process of grieving that suits the client and those supporting them. It is a book that speaks of the humanity and diversity of grief and can be well recommended to both the bereaved and those supporting them. ■

Janet Dowling

Cruse Bereavement Care Volunteer



The Owl at the Window

Carl Gorham

London: Coronet
2017
260pp
£14.99 Paperback
ISBN: 978 1 473 64232 4

This is a memoir of loss and hope that is very different to previous memoirs I have read. Written by Carl Gorham, it tells the love story between himself and his wife, their journey through cancer, her ultimate death and the aftermath. But Carl is no ordinary writer; he has a string of credits for TV and radio comedy and