"THE LAST TABOO (Video)

Dr. Lester Sireling & Dr. Sheila Hollins.

Mental handicap and bereavement.

From Mrs. F. Macey, Psychiatry of Mental Handicap, St. George's Hospital Medical School, Cranmer Terrace, London SW17 0RE.

£25. (incl. postage).

Length: 25 mins.

"The Last Taboo" is a video programme about death and mental handicap made by two psychiatrists specialising in the psychiatry of mental handicap at St. George's Hospital, London.

This is a sensitive and very valuable short film which opens with a young man, Anthony, mentally and physically handicapped, buying a present for his friend who is dying on the ward where both of them live. Some time after Patrick's death Anthony is shown refusing to get out of bed, injuring himself, refusing food in a "disruptive" way. We see the nurses discussing what they should do. Should they "ask the doctor to prescribe something"? One of them relates Anthony's behaviour to his recent bereavement, but they are not sure how grief is experienced by mentally handicapped people or how they may be helped.

Later we are shown some simple and practical ways in which Anthony could have been helped to understand his friend's death and to grieve in a healthy way. We see the nurses talking to him about Patrick, helping him to take part in the funeral and to say goodbye to his friend.

In the final sequence a group of mentally handicapped people are seen returning to a crematorium six months after the death of a friend to "celebrate" him by dedicating a rose-tree to his memory.

I have seen this video twice—once with a group of professional people concerned with the care of the mentally handicapped, and again at the Cruse Annual Conference, and I found that my own considerably different reactions mirrored those of the groups I was with. On the first occasion a good discussion soon got going on the lines of "people still don't realise that mentally handicapped people have feelings the same as anyone else". The Cruse group found the film intensely moving, and most of us were in tears by the end. Reflecting on this difference in response I found myself speculating that Cruse members would be more open to their own grief feelings, and were identifying with the bereaved people in the film. Then I realised that the film had as much to say about the normal process of mourning as it had about mental handicap. I think this is one of its great strengths, particularly valuable if it is being shown to people who are not used to thinking about bereavement at all. The suggestions for helping Anthony would be useful in helping any bereaved person so that it has a wider usefulness in basic training. The specific difficulties of mentally handicapped people in sharing their feelings and communicating their bewilderment, distress and anger are demonstrated well, and can stimulate a very productive discussion on how to help them and their families.

The video is not made by actors but by the "real people" involved, and is not as smooth and polished as a "professional" film would be, but it is the more telling for that.

MARY PARRILLA
Social Worker
Counselling Coordinator for
Cruse Twickenham & Richmond Branch

LOSS & GRIEF Part II (Video)

Interview with Dr. Colin Murray Parkes by Professor Malcolm Brown, Queen's University, Belfast.

£97.75p (inc. VAT). Tavistock Publications, 1986.

Length: 48 mins.

This is the third video-tape in a series on terminal illness and death, the first two having been reviewed in the last issue of Bereavement Care. It is good to have the distillation of Dr. Parkes' extensive clinical and research experience captured on tape for those who take in facts better by ear than by reading. There is no doubt, however, that the second edition of Dr. Parkes' classic text (see review this issue) represents better value for money and has the advantage of being able to be scanned, skimmed and read on the train! Video-taped interviews tend to be somewhat tedious—there is little visual variety, and apart from enabling a group to have a shared experience which can then be discussed, there seems little advantage to be gained in viewing this tape, rather than reading the book.

DORA BLACK
Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist

"I'M SORRY YOUR BABY IS DEAD" (video)

Foundation for the Study of Infant Death, 15 Belgrave Square, London SW1Y 8PS. VHS & Beta.

£25 (incl. postage).

Length: 20 mins.

This is a tape outlining the needs of families bereaved by a 'cot death' and showing how everyone who comes into contact with them can provide support.

It does this by listening to some parents who have lost babies telling their own stories and thus indicating what they found helpful, and—more particularly—what they remembered as just adding to their misery, anger and guilt. There is also a brief, but necessary, reminder that the father is hurt equally by the death of his baby as the mother but that society can make it very difficult for him to reveal and deal with his grief. The need of other children in the family for more support than their bereaved parents alone are able to give, is mentioned. On a happier note, several mothers talk about their methods of coming to terms with their own loss and how this enables them to help others, similarly bereaved, either by group support or on a one-to-one basis. These items are linked by a commentary by Lady Limerick of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Death.

The tape does not deal with theories regarding the possible causation or prevention of cot death, mentioning only that these deaths are the commonest cause of death in babies between one week and one year of age. This makes it a very significant problem especially in an age when babies are no longer expected to die.

A cot death involves the emergency services, the carers, the immediate and more distant relatives, friends and neighbours. The wide range, from the professional to the general public, makes it difficult to know to whom this very helpful tape is aimed, although everyone will learn something from it. It encourages us all not to be frightened and ashamed of our own feelings of distress, inadequacy and even guilt, to be able to share in the anguish of the bereaved parents, and to say "I'm sorry your baby is dead."

AUDREY KING-DAVIES
General Practitioner



From:

BETTY McCRUM

Care Co-ordinator, The Ulster Cancer Foundation

I read with interest in the Summer 1986 issue, your comments on the video "Loss and Grief" Part 1 (Experiences Shared). This video consists of interviews by Professor Malcolm Brown with people who have suffered various forms of loss.

Amongst those interviewed was a lady with breast cancer and breast surgery, who is a volunteer with the Mastectomy Advisory Service in Northern Ireland, and two laryngectomy patients who are in fact the Chairman and one of the officers of the N.I. Laryngectomee Club, as well as being volunteers.

I should like to just explain that the reason for having two laryngectomees was not only to give an understanding of the experiences of the laryngectomy patient, but also to allow the viewer to see, hear and understand two different types of speech produced by laryngectomees—oesophageal, and artificial speech aid.

May I take the liberty of congratulating you on producing a very interesting magazine, and all good wishes for its continuing success.

THE THIRD DAY

On 14th November, 1985 a volcano erupted in Columbia obliterating a village and burying 33,000 in a sea of mud. 10,000 were saved.

Out of the mud
they drew me
gently
With loving hands
outstretched
time held
at bay
From living death
they washed me
till the soul shone again
in my brown flesh

Under the warm mud
I have seen
strange things
broken into knowledge
beyond the tainted life
of men in cities
battling for freedom
from the suffocation
of self
I have felt my soul
returning
to the beginning
of God's first breath
in me

It will take time
to live again
in this body
and know
its cleansing

MARGARET TORRIE
November, 1985

Cover picture: 'Autumn Midnight' by Eric Gill, courtesy Victoria & Albert Museum

This picture was chosen for the cover of the new edition of 'Bereavement: studies of grief in adult life' by C. M. Parkes, reviewed in this issue.