not currently available.

Of eight schools which had experienced a bereavement affecting the whole school, four had sought external assistance; in the case of pupils' private bereavements, 13 schools had sought such assistance. A variety of sources of support had been used, including: Cruse volunteers; education welfare officers; educational psychologists; the local hospice; counsellors and general medical practitioners. It is interesting, perhaps, to compare this with John Holland's[3,4] research in primary schools, in which head teachers were asked what supports they would use (rather than actually had used) and social services were given the top ranking. None of the schools here had sought help from social services. Support had been sought both to help school staff in dealing with pupils' bereavement issues and directly for pupils and/or their families. What emerged from this study is that there is no one avenue of support to which schools usually turn when they need such assistance.

Of those schools which commented on supports which they would like to be available, the majority wanted information and training to enable staff to support pupils. Only four said that they would like access to direct counselling for bereavements affecting the whole school, and only two for private bereavements. Other needs expressed included: policy advice; staff training; contacts for support and advice in the event of need; and some simply wanted to know what is available. This, again, highlights the difficulty which may be faced by schools, in the absence of policy or guidelines, of where to turn when bereavement support is felt to be necessary.

Bereavement and loss in the curriculum

The great majority, 46 (85.2%), of the respondents felt that it was part of the school's role to teach children about death and dying, and seven (12.9%) were not sure. The most striking thing here was that none of them felt that this was *not* part of the school's role. However the topic was included in the curriculum of only 28 (51.9%) of these schools. It was more likely to be approached in secondary than in primary schools, usually as part of personal and social education or religious education. In face-to-face interviews respondents indicated three main difficulties in including this topic: time in a crowded curriculum; the sensibilities of teachers, who may be unwilling to approach the subject; the possibility of upsetting pupils who had experienced a bereavement.

This, again, is an area in which those trained in bereavement issues and in supporting the bereaved, might be able to assist schools, as they could deal with the subject openly and sensitively.

Recommendations

There were two main recommendations arising from this research.

1. Information should be made available to all schools, and to the education authorities, about the ways in which Cruse and other bereavement organisations could assist them, including:
   - assistance to schools and teachers to enable them to support bereaved pupils themselves
   - direct counselling
   - group counselling
   - in-service training
   - talks to school classes about death and loss and the issues surrounding them.

It might be useful if such information could include the possibility of named contacts.

2. Where a bereavement counsellor becomes directly involved in a child or family bereavement, communication between the family and the school should be encouraged and supported by the counsellor.

These strategies are aimed at raising the awareness of local bereavement services in schools so that they would become a natural point of reference in pupil bereavement. BC

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REVIEW

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Studies of grief in adult life (3rd edition)
Colin Murray Parkes.
London, UK: Routledge, 1996. £27.50 hb

In 1972, I was asked by my late professor, T Frey, to review a recently published book by an author whose name at that time was unknown to me. When I first opened this book, *Bereavement*, by Colin Murray Parkes, I gradually realised as I read how important it was for a young psychiatrist to know more about the relationship between grief, bereavement and depression. Dr Parkes postulated:

> 'I know of only one functional psychiatric disorder whose cause is know, whose features are distinctive, and whose course is usually predictable, and that is grief, the reaction to loss. Yet this condition has been so neglected by psychiatrists that it is not even mentioned in the indexes of most of the best-known general textbooks of psychiatry.'

At that time, the interest in grief, as a scientific field, was not very great in my country, Sweden. I had been given the opportunity to work in a psychiatric emergency ward and I found Dr Parkes' book, and the crisis theories of the 1970s, very helpful for understanding my patients. This book was also the starting point for my own research work in the field of traumatic bereavement.

Against this background, it was with great pleasure and interest that I agreed to review the third edition. Much has changed in nearly 30 years and the body of knowledge has greatly increased: the list of references is almost three times as long as it was in the first edition.

One of the more prominent differences – and improvements – in the book is the distinction between pathological/problematic grief and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Today it is well known that the determinants to consider in relation to a possible problematic grief reaction are whether or not the loss has been sudden, unexpected, untimely, and traumatic: a traumatic stress reaction is more a result of traumatic circumstances than of the loss itself.

The contents of the new edition have been organised in the same way as the first with the following main themes – the cost of commitment, the broken heart, alarm; searching, mitigation, anger and guilt, gaining a new identity, atypical grief, determinants of grief, helping the bereaved, and reactions to other types of loss.

The whole text has been accurately updated with references to all the important research contributors of today, making the new edition the most authorative work of its kind. I can strongly recommend it, both for beginners in this field and for experienced veterans.

Tom Lundin
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Shared experiences – seven books and a film which may help bereaved children

OLD PIG*
***Margaret Wild, Ron Brooks**. London, UK: Viking, 1995. £4.99 pb*

REMEMBERING MICHAEL
***Anita Harper, Helen Averley**. London, UK: Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society, 1994. £0.99 pb*

REMEMBERING MY BROTHER*
***Ginny Perkins, Leon Morris**. London, UK: A&C Black, 1996. £7.99 hb*

THE CHRISTMAS MIRACLE OF JONATHAN TOOMEY
***Susan Wojciechowski, P J Lynch**. London, UK: Walker, 1995. £9.99 hb, £5.99 pb*

WATER WINGS
***Maurice Gleitzman**. London, UK: Macmillan, 1996. £9.99 hb, £3.99 pb*

FLIP FLOP GIRL
***Katherine Paterson**. London, UK: Puffin, 1996. £3.99 pb*

CHASING REDBIRD
***Sharon Creech**. London, UK: Macmillan, 1997. £3.99 pb*

FLY AWAY HOME
***Carroll Ballard** (director). Columbia Pictures, 1996. Video, £10.98*

Children who have suffered bereavement, the loss of a parent through marriage break-up or other traumas such as disablement or hospitalisation, may feel profoundly lonely despite the presence of loving relatives or friends. They often feel that they are the only ones for whom nightmares have become reality. However, they can be helped by reading books whose heroes or heroines have similar problems with which they can identify. Knowing that they are not lone victims, that they share their experiences, encourages them to begin to talk through their own unhappiness, which is of course the first step towards recovery.

The books and film reviewed here have appeared in the last few years and touch on death in interestingly varied ways, together amounting to a useful contribution to the range of therapeutic literature and cinema for bereaved children. One hopes that the best of these will also reach children who are not bereaved, so that they can understand and empathise with the complicated emotions and difficulties experienced by their contemporaries who have lost someone they love.

Most of the books are about the feelings of the protagonists after a death in the family, and the problems they have adjusting, often to vastly changed patterns of life. Only one of them even contemplates the actual process of dying, *Old Pig*, with its enchanting illustrations and a subtly poetic text, is a gentle way into discussing with the family the subject of death.

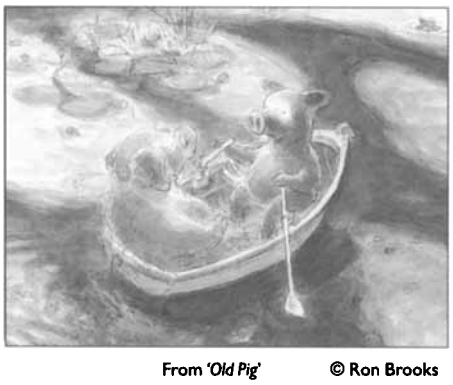
The fantasy takes us with Old Pig through the first bout of her illness, her last lingering look at the beauty of the landscape as well as more pragmatic matters such as paying the grocery and electricity bills, before she drifts off to the sound of her granddaughter's cello, then dies, lovingly encircled in her arms.

A hauntingly successful book, it is intended for, say, three to nine-year-olds. But it should be read and shared by all age groups in the family, even before illness or the death of a beloved grandparent clouds a child's horizon, and would be invaluable for a child experiencing the decline of an elderly relative or friend.

Unfortunately none of the books tackles the question that the normally curious child always deep down wants to ask: what it is really like to die? Perhaps such a book would be too painful, but children are grateful for books which give a satisfactory answer to their questions when no-one at home can handle a discussion, and their knowledge is almost invariably warped by seeing violence on television.

Remembering Michael describes the shock of a whole family when the new baby dies at birth. There are some specially good ideas, particularly the visit to their mother in hospital, where each of them holds the tiny, still baby wrapped in a white shawl, and together they choose a name so that they can 'remember Michael' as a tangible person for ever after. The excellent illustrations show the children crying, the parents too, without emphasising their grief too clumsily in words. Meanwhile there is a lot of helpful conversation in the book, excellent detail touching on many aspects of the emotional difficulties of acceptance. For instance grandfather mentions his mother who also lost a baby, so suddenly the children feel they are not the only ones this has happened to.

Young readers in a similar situation will identify with the little brother's awkwardness on returning to school, and be soothed by the understanding teacher who knows just how to draw him gently back in. We see the sharing of pain, even anger, with a school fellow who has had a similar experience.



From '*Old Pig*' © Ron Brooks

The funeral 'ceremony' with the tiny coffin is shown as the reading of a poem over the hole in the ground (no comforting religious ritual, a compromise to satisfy all but the most religious families). At home the children 'play out' the experience with an imaginary funeral for a doll, and they go through another crisis when their mother, locked into herself with grief, appears to the children not to love them any more. Though the main child is only about eight, this slim but subtle book is useful for a much wider age range, and is a must for any family facing a similar tragedy.

Remembering my Brother is less successful, but would be helpful in a family where a sibling has died. The sequences take place some time after the loss of the middle brother, Chris. The (often disconnected) photographs provide settings in various situations to talk about how the smallest child, Greg, 'can't stop thinking about Chris'. We see Greg sad at the zoo, then with his eldest brother trying on his lost brother's school uniform, then at school where the teacher cheers him with memories about Chris's amusing mischief. The family put flowers on the grave. Each sequence is accompanied by a perhaps over-constant refrain about how much they miss Chris. This is helpful in that the family are encouraged to talk about Chris in any and every situation and not bottle up their distress. But the sequences often appear contrived, especially the section around Paul Gascoigne and a Gazza football. The parents' grief only merits half a sentence: 'Greg... thinks that his mum and dad are feeling sad'. The book is primarily about 'missing' and 'remembering' and no deeper understanding of feelings or pain emerge, nor is a child's natural curiosity salved in any way at all. It is useful mainly as a vehicle for discussion.

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey is a romantic Christmas tale of a crotchety and grieving widower, a woodcarver, who is angry and unpleasant to everyone he meets. Then along comes a kindly widow who bakes beautiful biscuits, interests her son in the unhappy carver's wonderful creations and commissions from him a group of Nativity figures. It all ends happily ever after.

Not a perfect story for up-to-date feminist mothers, but as beautifully told as any fairy tale, tear-jerking even, with superb illustration. Though the background and costumes are nineteenth century it is a good read for anyone, bereaved or not, and it carries the comforting suggestion that people can live happily ever after, even in the wake of the saddest experiences.

Water Wings, for children of about nine through to early teens, described in the blurb as a 'funny and moving' novel, poses tough questions. Tackling the various knotty and fascinating problems of deprivation of love, and a grandparent with a haunting past, the human observation and wit of the writing is delicious and the book has real charm.

The first 'bereavement' is the disappearance of Pearl's father, with no address or way of contacting him. Her young mother (like all too many of us widows) becomes hyperactive in her work. She also brings home an increasingly time-consuming lover, a vet, and Pearl becomes almost completely excluded; mother's neglectfulness verges on cruelty.

The death of Winston the guinea pig, Pearl's dearest, constant companion, is a total disaster. The lonely child keeps the small corpse behind the peas in the deep freeze, brings him out as an inanimate listener whenever she is desperate to have someone to talk to, and puts him back when he starts to melt and drip.

Winston had to be 'put down' by the vet boyfriend after a crippling accident. Later in the novel, in parallel, a beloved, newly-adopted grandmother, in agony with cancer, is given horse-tranquilliser stolen from the vet by Pearl and another child (the genuine grandson). Then they help the old lady to swim to the middle of a lake so that she can sink peacefully to her death in the water. Euthanasia was still legal in the Northern Territories of Australia in 1996 when this book was first published there (though the law has now changed). However, the ethics involved and the future problems of the two children, as they are left at the end of the story swimming back towards an angry group of adults on the shore, leave the adult reader's mind boggling. The romanticisation of voluntary euthanasia without any indication, let alone lucid explanation, of its illegality unfortunately makes a brilliantly written book questionable.

Flip-Flop Girl, for 11 to 14-year-olds, also deals with the loneliness and disorientation of a girl who has lost her father. Vinnie and her family have to move to her grandmother's dreary home. She has left behind her dearest friend, and has to start straight into a new school. Life is made much harder by a small brother who, since their bereavement, makes a business of attracting all the sympathy by totally ceasing to speak or to eat properly. Vinnie is expected to look after him at school, and frets about his unhappiness, while no-one seems to be bothered by her own agonising but silent grief.

She is befriended by an unusual girl, Lupe, also not accepted by the inner clique at school. The author cleverly shows Vinnie, the outsider, fearing to get mixed up with another outsider in case this perpetuates her non-acceptance by the inner quorum of more obviously impressive friends. Gradually Vinnie and Lupe understand each other better. Meanwhile Vinnie, in deep inner anger, suddenly commits an uncharacteristic act of vandalism, and the calm, wise Lupe takes the blame for her. The author is too 'pc' to state that this new friend is from an ethnic minority, which is a pity because this important point is almost lost in the mists of subtlety. This book is a good read and deals well with a girl's emotions, her tribulations with her impossible brother, her learning process, and her mistakes, in making new relationships.

In *Chasing Redbird*, the main character, Zinny, has passed on whooping-cough and innocently caused the death of a younger cousin, Rose. The memory of little Rose seems to have been almost totally erased by the beloved aunt and uncle who, living in a large, extended family group, virtually adopt Zinny as theirs. Later, when this aunt also suddenly dies, Zinny feels again responsible and that she is 'an agent of doom'. These painful sensations of guilt and memory run throughout the story, when Zinny sets herself an arduous and lonely task of clearing an overgrown trail through quite dangerous terrain. Memories of little Rose and the beloved aunt return often as Zinny in her solitude works through her feelings. This is a valuable novel as well as a good, exciting read, not only dealing with the pain of unnecessary guilt, but also of a girl finding herself and understanding who she is within her complicated family. And it describes sympathetically and amusingly the early dawning of a not totally straightforward boy-girl friendship.

Fly Away Home, available as a video, with Anna Paquin as the tormented, recently bereaved teenager Amy, deals cleverly with the reforging of broken family relationships. Amy survives the car crash which kills her mother. She then has to get to know her father after nine years of hardly ever seeing him. Returning to live in Canada, she is full of resentment as well as desperately missing her mother. It is not easy to adjust to a more solitary life, way out in the wide open country. Her eccentric, chaotic though well-meaning, inventor Dad has bits of his uncompleted inventions lying all over the house including in her bedroom.

When the marshland near their house is



From *Fly Away Home* © Columbia Pictures

suddenly destroyed by bulldozers, the geese fly off. Amy finds some deserted eggs and manages to incubate them. The hatching goslings, as happens in real life, bond with the first animate creature they see, and suddenly she finds she is mother to 16 baby birds. The dramatic story line centres on how she and her father bond too as the goslings grow. Using a small plane, they have a thrilling adventure in the air, helping the growing goslings at the crucial point in the year to ride on the wind and migrate southwards to avoid the harsh Canadian winter. The bird sequences are enchanting, and father and daughter are convincing in this touching film about the struggle to create a family life for Amy after her devastating loss. As a study of nature and of human relationships,it is a must for all teenagers who are interested in wild life or who enjoy adventure

A curious pattern emerges through the books: those for younger children all are written round boys, while those for slightly older children and teenagers cater exclusively for girls. Publishers know that girls of under 11 will read about boys but sometimes not *vice versa*, whereas a greater number of teenage girls devour novels in general. This imbalance of resources needs to be redressed because boys often crush their inner feelings even more painfully, sometimes resorting to aggression to ease their pain. Absorbing novels for older boys around this subject would be most welcome. There is plenty of scope for more books from many different tangents to underpin the understanding of bereaved and non-bereaved children in all these age groups. BC

Camilla Jessel Panufnik
Photographer and children's author

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors

A review in your journal (17(2): 28) by Colin Murray Parkes of *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief** which I co-edited with Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman needs correction and comment. I am pleased at the critical tone of the review. We said, 'If this book leads to further discussion and conversations on the subject, then we have succeeded' (p23). Parkes' comments are sure to provoke conversation, but I think the conversation will be more profitable if we clear up a few points in his review.

First, Parkes says 'the inclusion of a psychiatrist among the authors' might have helped us to better recognise pathology. As it says on the book's back cover, one of the editors, Steven Nickman, is a psychiatrist who has been on the clinical faculty of Harvard Medical School and on the staff of Massachusetts General Hospital for many years. In addition to normal editorial duties, Nickman was a major contributor to the commentary and the concluding thoughts. He wrote one chapter and co-authored two others. The book has a psychiatrist not only among its authors, but also among its editors.

Second, Parkes says that in the first chapter Silverman and I 'claim to have discovered a new paradigm for grief'. Although the word 'paradigm' did slip into one subhead, we write in the chapter about a new 'model of grief', not a paradigm. A model is not a Kuhnian paradigm that sets the groundwork for normal science. A new computer model to track storms is not a new paradigm of meteorology. Rather, a model is 'an ideal set of interactions or processes' (p3) that helps us to make sense of complex, multi-faceted data. A model is a clinical as well as a scholarly tool. We simply claim that a model based on continuing bonds better describes how people resolve their grief than a model based on severing bonds. We do not even say that we can fully articulate the new model, much less discover a new paradigm. Rather we said, 'We are not certain about the shape of the new model, though we think it is implicit in the contributions to this book' (p23). So, we did not set the grandiose goal for ourselves that Parkes says we fail to achieve.

Third, Parkes presumes to know what is good for populations he has never studied. For example, in his comments on my chapter about a self-help group of bereaved parents, he says that 'by collusively emphasising the importance of the dead children in the lives of the surviving parents', the group may make it harder for parents to 'let go and move on.' That they *should* let go is a beginning assumption in Parkes' work, not a reasoned conclusion. He has never presented any data that show that maintaining bonds leads to pathology. The bereaved parents about whom I write are very aware that in Parkes' model they should let go. Many of them have read Parkes' books. They are emphatic that they do not find Parkes directing them toward healthy resolution of their grief. They hold on and move on, and in *Continuing Bonds* we see many other people doing the same.

There is a great deal in this book about which Parkes might legitimately disagree and I am pleased that he has begun to take his part in the scholarly dialogue the book invites. Parkes will play a more useful role in the discussions, however, if he will focus on what is in our book and not on what he imagines to be there.

DENNIS KLASS
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St Louis, Missouri 63119-3194, USA

Dr Parkes replies:

I am glad that Klass now acknowledges that his claim to have discovered a new 'paradigm' was a slip but cannot see how he can reconcile this with his suggestion that I imagined it. In turn I apologise for our slip in misspelling Silverman's name. This was a typographical error. I am glad that I was wrong in failing to realise that Dr Nickman is a psychiatrist, but can hardly be blamed since he is not included in the list of contributors which appears inside the book.

As to 'letting go' and 'moving on', these terms are ambiguous. In speaking of the need for bereaved people to accept the fact of loss and 'let go', I certainly never implied that we should forget the dead and I do not know of any other researcher in the field who has. As I see it, the work of grieving involves us in a painful process of teasing out from our memories and assumptions about the world those that we can carry forward and those which we must let go. There is a very real sense in which the dead 'live on' in our memory and Klass and his colleagues are quite right to draw our attention to that fact. But it often seems necessary to 'let go' of the person 'out there' in order to become open to the person 'in here'. This, I think, is what most bereaved people mean when they say 'I am beginning to accept his death'.

The death of a child, in our society, may well be a more difficult thing to accept than that of an adult and only well-conducted research will tell us whether my fears about the long-term value of self-help groups for bereaved parents are justified. I truly hope that they are not.

COLIN MURRAY PARKES

*Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR, UK.

REVIEWS

BOOK

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING
Understanding and dealing with trauma

Frank Parkinson

London, UK: Souvenir Press, 1997. £12.99

Anything written by Frank Parkinson is readable, and this is no exception. There is no similar book on the market, but though this one is interesting, it is ultimately unsatisfying.

Part of the problem is the intended audience. Whilst I agree with Parkinson that 'debriefing is not the exclusive prerogative of medical personnel', he does not make it clear what level of qualification is required to do what with whom. Debriefing is a simple technique that requires great skill – a knowledge of post-traumatic stress, anxiety reactions, and approaches to the treatment of anxiety, as well as a good grip of group dynamics. Those taking on the debriefing of people who have experienced severe trauma should have a generic qualification in a mental health profession. However, such individuals will find some of the content discouragingly simple and over-prescriptive. If a reader really requires all the information in the first 86 pages, they should not be involved in debriefing without extensive further training. Badly handled debriefing can make matters worse by disrupting existing coping mechanisms.

Parkinson recognises that the Mitchell/Dyregrov models are unwieldy, and shortens them, as other recent authors have done. Yet his model for debriefing is atheoretical and lacks a cogent principle. Many pages are devoted to the sensory impact of traumatic events, seemingly based upon a Pavlovian conditioning model that similar smells and sounds will elicit traumatic symptoms; this is true, but it receives far too much prominence. The author later describes debriefing as 'cognitive reframing', but does not take this further, and calls his third stage 'The feelings'. The emphasis in debriefing has to be on identifying cognitions that lead to reactions, rather than feelings themselves which are secondary to cognitions. A counsellor may be comfortable with the elicitation of feelings over a series of sessions, but this is not the goal of debriefing, and its time scale prohibits it.

The description of the organising of debriefings is good, but the discussion of what might follow is poor and this is a central failing. The research to date, which is not considered in this book, indicates that debriefings are helpful, largely, if they are part of an overall intervention process rather than as a stand-alone technique.

This book will not serve as a main text for training. It has its good points, however, and could be read in conjunction with other material on debriefing. BC

Peter Hodgkinson
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