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Cruse Bereavement Care
126 Sheen Road
Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR, UK
Telephone 020 8939 9530
Fax 020 8940 7638
Email
info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

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EDITORIAL

Dora Black

I write this on returning from a visit to a friend of long-standing whose wife died after a short and unexpected illness five months ago. She and I used to meet almost daily in the days when we were walking our children to school. 'I'm feeling low', her husband said. 'I don't know how to live the rest of my life – nothing gives me pleasure. We always meant to get more acquainted with opera, but now there seems no point in it because we can't enjoy it together'. He said he knew for the first time the meaning of the title of the book, *Left-over Life to Kill*, by Dylan Thomas's widow, Cailtin (Putnam, 1957).

Their grandmother had prepared for her demise by leaving something of value to each of her grandchildren, and this had seemed to help

Thinking of Renzenbrink's paper in this issue (p6), I asked how his grandchildren had coped with their grandmother's death. She had been very involved with them and the youngest was only two when she died. For some weeks the little girl had searched for her grandmother every time she visited her grandfather and had some difficulties sleeping. Both she and her six-year-old brother did not want their father to go to work nor their mother to leave them with friends while she comforted her own father. But now the two-year-old seemed to understand the difference between the permanence of her grandmother's disappearance and her father's daily absence at work and his predictable return.

Their grandmother had prepared for her demise by leaving something of value to her granddaughter – to each of her grandchildren in fact – and this had seemed to help. My newly-widowed friend thought that his children had worked hard to help the grandchildren with their loss, and he felt that they had been able to mourn and had coped well because of their parents' openness and willingness to answer questions. They all talked about their grandmother whenever they came to visit and took pleasure in looking at her special possessions there, reminiscing about how they had played together with her.

As Dent shows in her paper, 'Putting bereaved parents in the frame' (p9), it is more difficult for a widowed mother or father to help their bereaved children cope with the death of their father or mother, than for parents of bereaved grandchildren to help them with the loss of their grandparent. After the death of a grandparent, although the child's parent has lost their own mother or father, they have been preparing (perhaps without realising it) for the loss for years as their parent got older and more frail. An anticipated death in old age is less likely to provoke a prolonged or deviant grief reaction than one that is sudden and untimely.