Derek Nuttall writes

inviting all those bereaved in their teens to send in an account of their recollected feelings. It might produce something very useful for Cruse's Silver Jubilee in 1984.

PROMPTED BY DR. SUSAN HENLEY'S letter (see page 8) and her appeal for information about teenage bereavement, I sat and relived my experiences as an 18-year-old when my father died.

The memory is crystal clear in some parts...the crash as my father fell from the bed with the heart attack that killed him...around midnight it was... my halfclad dash for a neighbour, then the cycle ride for the doctor and my brother two miles away...my mother's unnerving sobbing.

I recall, too, being the last from the room - the parlour used only for special occasions - before the lid was placed on the coffin. If my memory is accurate it was, at the time, to make sure everything was done right.

The funeral service and committal are very hazy memories, except for two things. I found it hard to cope with my mother's crying as we drove to the church and I was afraid she might fall or throw herself into the grave. I remember my tears at the graveside; the remainder, not many, I think, were shed privately.

A FOREIGN WORLD

I felt useless back at the house. I have a vivid memory, still, of the departures. Practically everyone shook hands with my brother, twelve years older than I, but no one shook hands with me. That hurt.

My mother and I slept downstairs for several nights after the death and, after the funeral, I slept in her room before returning to my own. Both of us were unnerved, I think, by the death and foreign world we were now in. I remember feeling gratitude on returning to work and to my youth club when somebody acknowledged why I'd been away.

DEFENCELESSNESS

I remember, just once, rounding on someone during an argument at work with the words, "I haven't got a father now"; a distinct feeling of defencelessness.

I remember my mother's stock response when asked how she was - "Not so bad". This was probably the only thing she found she could say when questioned outside a shop or on the street corner. I felt embarrassed, usually, then.

Looking back now, from my priviledged vantage point I feel for that uninitiated 18-year-old. Overnight, he became the new man of the house; trying to be as others seemed to want him to be; caught at times between doing what he wanted and being with his mother.

My reminiscence finally led to a feeling of gratitude for the sacrifices, now so obvious, that my mother made, the struggle she undoubtedly had, and to relive some of the doubt I had when leaving home for college six years later.

People sometimes say "What a pity we wait until we're dying before we fully appreciate the richness of life". Equally, it seems a pity we have to wait so long before we can understand the consequences of events we experienced years before.

FILL THE GAP

But can it be otherwise? Can we put old heads on young shoulders and start early enough in life to help teenagers cope with their bereavements?

Is anything stirring out there? Perhaps the gap in the literature on bereaved teenagers can begin to be filled by readers who were bereaved in their teens.

SINCE OUR LAST ISSUE

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