

BOOK REVIEWS

Never Too Young to Know: Death in children's lives

**Silverman P.R.,
ISBN 0 19 510954 6**

Oxford

This book is a must for anyone who is involved in working with children, in particular children who experience loss – a parent, sibling, friend etc.. It is very easy to read, full of real life illustrations about children of all ages, a practical approach grounded in theory. The effects of loss on children is clearly explained along with the ways in which children express their grief. The text is written in a matter of fact way that is easy to read and compels you to keep going. It offers practical help with regular references to a theoretical perspective.

As we grow older it is easy to forget what it is like to be a child – children learn and grow through experiences that shape their lives. Experiences of death have a profound effect which can be negative if the adults around fail to understand the needs of the individual child – including encouraging and helping them to understand. Children can also become marginalised by adults who struggle in the face of death to cope with their own feelings. Phyllis Silverman demonstrates this beautifully through illustrations from children she has worked with.

The chapters of this book form a theoretical overview of bereavement including: death issues, why we die, theoretical and historical perspectives and bereavement. 'Never too young to know' is a practical guide, well grounded in theory and a must for the bookshelf.

*Andrea Cail, head of care, Rachael House
Children's Hospice, Kinross*

Colours of Hope and Promise: Personal stories of HIV & AIDS

**Cullen B.
ISBN 1-901557-09-X**

Wild Goose, Glasgow

This book is a collection of transcripts from interviews undertaken by Brid Cullen to ensure that the stories of people with HIV will not be lost. The

HIV virus has transformed those communities which have been most affected and has transformed the lives of those who are both infected and affected. It contains the stories of an exceptionally wide range of people – from the mother of a gay man to the manager of a hospice, from the heterosexually infected young woman to the former drug user who described the agony of waiting for the results of his baby daughters HIV test.

The common thread throughout this book is the positive changes that have come to people as a result of having the most negative diagnosis. It's apparent that many peoples' lives have been enriched – even as they prepared for death, or managed multiple bereavements. The stories of this book really do tell of hope and promise; they are living stories about real people.

The style of the book is relaxed and informal. It is a genuine record of what people said, however they said it. This means that the book has a sense of life and urgency about it. Brid Cullen has resisted the urge to 'tidy up' the interviews in her editing. Although this means that some sections may not read as fluently as they could, it gives a very honest reflection of the lives involved.

This book has much to offer, perhaps especially to those who have had little contact with the HIV field. It gives a 'vox pop' style picture of the way the HIV virus has affected lives and an honest sense of the people who live with HIV. It is not an academic book and therefore not always easily read – it is perhaps best used as a resource to be 'dipped into' for specific perspectives. It would be a useful resource within any professional's library.

*Marion Chatterley, chaplain, Milestone House,
Edinburgh.*

Iona, Poems

**Kenneth C Steven
ISBN 0 7152 0778 4**

Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh

This beautifully produced book of poems is rich in evocation and vivid images. Despite the title of the collection, the focus ranges over different parts of

Scotland; though the poem *Iona* (p.18) is perhaps its spiritual heart: “[...] That is why/ I keep returning, thirsty, to this place/ That is older than my understanding,/ Younger than my broken spirit.”

The triumph and delight of this collection is in the almost invariable newness and accuracy of sparse, luminous images – to the point that the few tired images are unfairly thrown into higher relief. The descriptions of place, nature and action are intensely seen and written to share through the poet’s eyes: “Tiree is a gust of fields and houses/ Low in the water on the world’s rim//[...]//Eigg is one milk tooth biting the sky/ Searching thirstily among sagging clouds.” (*Hebrides*, p.22); “[...] houses like clams crowded round shores/ [...]// Boats spilling fish onto a sunlit pier”(Scalpay, p.8). Even for a stranger to these places, their visual essence is clear.

This intensity of observation of nature makes pre-existent religious concepts in some poems feel artificial, without the sense of the hidden personal and existential complexities found in, say, *Iona*. In the same way that “London” is totemic, a symbol of alien incomprehension, “Christ” seems totemic of a redeemed world we reach by making jumps of analogy (e.g. *The Birth*, p.35, *After the Rain*, p.50). Where the religious imagery is more integral or extended (*The Giver of Life*, p.24, *The Well*, p.39) the ragged edges afford more room for contemplation.

The poems in which religion itself is observed, is part of the landscape, work strongly: “I go into the shadowed sanctuary of the church/ Its air blessed by petals of candles// I see the eyes, waxy in the light, watching,/Waiting, patient with the need for faith.” (*Sabbath*, p.44); “This land is cut to the bone/ Ashamed of a sin it has not committed” (*Highland*, p.31).

The concepts behind the poems feel conventional: location, dislocation, nostalgia, lament, closely observed nature, religious analogy. The almost entirely free form throughout the collection incorrectly imparts a sense of sogginess, of distance, of a lack of the struggle to tame or interact with material; an impression counteracted, with re-reading, by the crispness of diction and richness of metaphor. Poems to savour.

David Head, Chaplain,, The Princess Alice Hospice, Esher, Surrey

Finding Hope & Healing through the Bible Roy Lawrence

ISBN 0-281-05281-6

Triangle Books

In this book, which is one of a series, the author sets out to show how the Bible can be a source of guidance and healing throughout life. The book is aimed at a broad range of people, being easily accessible to those with little or no previous exposure to the Bible. The author considers healing in the broadest of senses, in the case of the individual, from physical cure to acceptance of death. When considering humankind as a whole he uses the Bible as a guide to a more wholesome way of life through a more loving and caring approach to all members of society.

In his treatment of the Old Testament, the author puts forward the case that a healthier society would be the result of following the Law. Such obedience would result in a life of God-centred objectives, which in turn would be a force for healing, both spiritual and physical, in the lives of those around us. Turning to the New Testament, Jesus is shown as a person able to be hurt yet both truly human and truly divine; a person in touch with his people. Jesus brings true wholeness and healing of the human spirit, and we in turn can be “infected by Jesus’ healing nature” which will leave us happier, healthier, freer people able to be conduits for Christ’s healing today. It is pointed out that this demands faith on the part of the ministrant not the recipient, as in the case of Jairus’ daughter, whilst recognising that the faith of the woman suffering from haemorrhaging was such that she was cured.

Reading, study and application of the Bible guide the follower to a healthy mind, body and soul, and constitute a form of preventative medicine for the whole person. Rev Lawrence claims that we can be healed of the fear of death allowing us a life unburdened by fear so that we, and the greater Church, may become a healing Church.

Finally a set of readings are offered for study, highlighting different passages for each week of the year having the objective of bringing healing in its many forms.

John Jackson, parish minister, Cleland, Lanarkshire

Child Protection in Primary Care

Polnay J (Ed.)

ISBN 1 85775 224 4

Radcliffe Medical Press

The back cover of this book tells us: "General Practitioners and members of the primary care team will find this book an essential guide to working together effectively". True or false? Unfortunately, because social workers are not really part of that team, the answer is "false".

The editor's professional experience has given her "valuable insight into the interface between medicine and the agencies involved in protecting children". This certainly seems to be true but does it help General Practitioners (for whom the book is primarily written) "understand their own and other professionals' roles in the management of child protection"? For me at least it did help in "understanding" but will it help to draw medicine and social workers closer together? I doubt it. Doctors and nurses, as with most professions, follow their own professions' procedures and guidelines in their day to day work. Not so social workers. Their work controlled very strictly by what *legal statute* either requires them to do or allows them to do. Our aims are the same -to put the interests of our patients/clients first - but sometimes the constraints social workers operate under can be frustrating from the medical viewpoint. Sometimes "common sense" is excluded.

What actually constitutes the "abuse" that children need to be protected from depends a great deal on the attitudes and expectations of the day.

What is clear is that while in the past children were viewed as "possessions", they are now, as clearly emphasised in the Children Act 1989, no longer to be regarded as such. Parents have "responsibilities" not "rights". This legislation from the far off '80s should be so well established that it protects children robustly from being treated as commodities. But does it? It does try to place the interests of the child as paramount and the detailed explanations of its provisions are of great interest. I am not clear however, how the differences in the legal system in the home countries may have practical relevance. Scots law, for example, is not mentioned.

In his foreword the Minister of State for health states: "This book is a valuable addition to the literature on child protection. I hope it has a wide reader-

ship." Will this be fulfilled? Probably not, unless the various Health Departments decide to distribute it freely to health care workers. Overall this is a well written and surprisingly easy to read book about a very important subject. It aims to bring about change for the better by increasing understanding. It does succeed by providing the means to understand.

Ken Mack, GP, Kirkintilloch.

The Dying Soul, spiritual care at the end of life

Cobb M.

ISBN 0 335 20053 2

Open University Press

This book is part of the Facing Death series edited by David Clark. As its title suggests it is grounded in palliative care experience, though realistically so. The author is critical where criticism is due and is under no illusion that the provision of spiritual care in healthcare is patchy at best. What makes this book so readable though is that it is clearly written from a background of experience, and understanding. Its not often you get an in such a detailed exploration of spiritual care written by an experienced chaplain.

The book is really in three sections: the first three chapters considering the theory and concepts of spiritual care, with the following three chapters looking at practice. The final chapter pulls the key themes identified together and offers direction for future development. The author leads us through an in-depth exploration of spirituality, death and dying: how spirituality is understood, expressed, and can be developed, along with a consideration of the issues and rituals involved in facing death. In moving on to the section on practice we are invited to consider who cares for the spirit? Chaplains, nurses, the whole team? Chapter six is particularly interesting: exploring a *professional approach to spiritual care looking at* professional practice, standards of care and knowledge, skills and training.

This is a useful reference book for all chaplains and those interested in a serious look at spirituality. Its not a book you will lift up and read from beginning to end, rather it is a book you need to take time to work through. It will stimulate your mind, and its frank and realistic overview of spiritual care, palliative care, chaplaincy, and the understanding of the issues around dying will strike a chord.

David Mitchell, chaplain Marie Curie Centre,
Hunters Hill, Glasgow

Fragile Lives, Death, dying and care

Beverly McNamara

ISBN 0335 20899 1

Open University Press

The title of this book, 'Fragile lives, Death dying and care', initially indicates to the reader the potential discovery of insightful, anecdotal accounts of people who have experienced a terminal illness. The reality however, is a book very much rooted in the findings of qualitative research with relatively little anecdote. McNamara approaches the subject of death and dying from her academic anthropological standpoint and draws from a wide range of research. She tackles subjects such as euthanasia, the historical development of palliative care, perspectives on the notion of a good death and insights about a cancer diagnosis and dying from cancer.

McNamara's final chapter 'Palliation: masking pain or masking death' provides the reader with a challenging argument which focuses upon the original concepts of hospice and terminal care. Objective propositions are made which state that the current focus in palliative care upon the management of symptoms, optimum activity and quality of life potentially steer the dying person away from preparation and acceptance of death. In combination with increasing medicalisation and dominance from the medical profession in specialist palliative care, the author urges the reader to consider basic values and beliefs about palliative care.

A positive feature of this book includes the palatable use of research which provides the basis for debate and objective reasoning. This is an ideal reference book which requires concentration and consideration on the part of the reader. It is not as the title may indicate a series of anecdotal accounts about death and dying.

Stephen Smith, Clinical Services Manager, Marie Curie Centre Fairmile, Edinburgh

Crucial Decisions at the Beginning of Life: Parents' experiences of treatment withdrawal from infants

Hazel McHaffie

ISBN 1 85775 479 4

Radcliffe Medical Press

This book is the result of research carried out in three Scottish neonatal units: Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh. It addresses the many complex issues which surround withdrawal of treatment from babies. Through a series of in-depth interviews with over 100 parents, Hazel McHaffie gains insight into how decisions are made and into the care which parents receive before, during and after the decision-making period. There is a genuine desire on the author's part to listen to the stories which parents have to tell and to reflect on how practice and care might be improved on.

Inevitably a piece of research like this has to include statistics and analysis. On their own these would make dry reading. However, here they are balanced by parents' honest and open accounts of their experiences.

While the book is perhaps of primary interest to neonatologists, paediatricians, midwives and neonatal nurses, there are valuable insights for others – including chaplains. In her introduction, Hazel McHaffie acknowledges that this is a book which some readers will dip into. To make it easier for such readers, each chapter is an 'entity in itself.' I was certainly drawn more to some chapters (*Support in bereavement; The effect of the death on the family*) than to others (*The study method; The respondent families*).

One whole chapter of the book is devoted to the funeral service and parents were also asked to comment on memorial services. These received very mixed reactions ('we felt it actually set us back quite a bit'). In general, however, the support given by chaplains and ministers was valued.

While decisions about treatment withdrawal were being made, parents looked for frankness and honesty on the part of neonatal staff. This was most appreciated when combined with gentleness and sensitivity. The single greatest need of those parents who subsequently lost a child was to be able to talk about their baby – especially with people who had known him or her.

'*Crucial Decisions*

.....' is probably not a 'must' for a chaplain's bookshelf but those who tackle it will

find it a worthwhile read. It is important to keep reflecting on our role as chaplains and there is much here which can help us in that process. The concluding list of recommendations will challenge not only nursing and medical staff, but all those whose work takes them into neonatal units.

Monica Stewart, assistant chaplain, Grampian University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Representations of Death

Bradbury M.

ISBN 0 415 15022 1

Routledge

Mary Bradbury in researching this book has undertaken a journey which is surprisingly unique. The only other “actors” who follow this particular path are the person who is about to die, and subsequently dies, and the bereaved relatives. Through a series of interviews, visits and observations, the author traces the path of post modern “deathways” through the hands of those she refers to as “deathwork practitioners”. In this category, she includes clinical staff, funeral directors and healthcare chaplains among others. She takes us into the homes of grieving widows, into the inner sanctum of the mortuary, the basement and backroom of the funeral parlour, the embalming room, the cremators, leaving no grave-stone unturned and little left to popular mythology or guesswork. It is a painful journey and Mary Bradbury freely admits her own reactions of shock and fascination but also gratitude to those who are prepared to share their own grief reaction.

Her description of “dying the modern death” where the dying person is depersonalised and becomes an “object” who is subjected to all manner of high-tech interventions is hard hitting. Nevertheless it illustrates a dilemma familiar to many in the healthcare profession where the imperative to save life at all costs conflicts with the notion of a “good death”. The author explores the concept of the “good” and “bad” death from an anthropological perspective. Many cultures tend to believe that “good deaths” have regenerative potential, e.g. the individual is born into the afterlife or the group as a whole benefits through better crops, good weather, or thriving future generations.

She describes the contradictory and confusing contemporary British representation of the “good death”, citing the opportunity for “controlling and manipulating” the process of dying as the single most important factor in influencing the categorisation of a death as “good” or “bad”. Using the psychological theory of “social representations”, the author disputes the theory that death has become individualised to the extent that we no longer have social customs and rituals which support and accompany the bereaved relatives.

If you want a book to read on holiday, this is most definitely not it! It is, however, well worth exploring if you have time to set aside for serious reading.

Isabel Whyte, chaplain, Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline