

Resources Addressing Ambiguous Loss and Related Losses

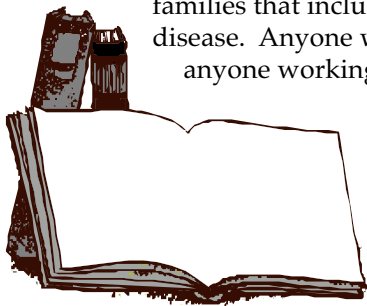
By Ted Bowman

As a complement to the lead article of this issue of Family Forum, here are three volumes addressing themes of ambiguous and related losses. Each has a Minnesota connection as well. With the exception of one of the editors of The Healing Fountain, all the authors are colleagues here in our state. And two of the volumes were published by Minnesota presses. Home-grown does not mean any reduction in quality. To the contrary, colleagues like these keep holding the quality banner high, inviting those of us working with families to also do quality work. Their insights and practical thoughts will make that easier.

Alzheimer's Disease: The Family Journey (2000)

by Wayne Caron, James Pattee, and Orlo Otteson. Plymouth, MN: North Ridge Press, paper \$22.00

As the title suggests, the authors of this practical and haunting volume address the personal challenges of families that include someone with Alzheimer's disease. Anyone with a relative or friend, anyone working with elders, and all others - especially given the public implications of this disease in costs and impact - will benefit from reading this book.



The book is caringly organized to be easily usable for families living with ambiguity and confusion. Early chapters emphasize that Alzheimer's disease is a family condition. Drawing on family systems and related theories, the authors discuss the impact for families, especially the uniqueness of this painfully confusing condition. Causes and effects are discussed in detail. Following these overview sections, stages of the disease and the implications for patients and families follow.

For me, this volume has both personal and professional use. Add a name here and there, personalize a few details, and the result could be a Bowman memoir. That's the power of this important book. While clearly connected to research and best practice, it is evident the authors have intimate knowledge of their subject.

Parent Grief: Narratives of Loss and Relationship (2000)

by Paul Rosenblatt. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, paper \$24.95

Paul Rosenblatt invites his readers to listen to the voices of parents grieving the death of a child. Be prepared as the

Minnesota Council on Family Relations

reader for stories of pain, resiliency, deep grief, and impressive family coping. Even as one working in the field, I found the breadth of subjects addressed, especially through the recorded words of bereft parents, both moving and, at times, overwhelming. I repeatedly put the book down only to reach for it later to read more.

Rosenblatt has the rare ability to weave the interviews with families with the growing literature on grief and bereavement. Covering subjects ranging from parent metaphors for their grief to the impact on couples' relationships to experiences of support, he weaves the stories of parents with commentary and linkage to research and theory.

The Healing Fountain: Poetry Therapy for Life's Journey (2003)

edited by Geri Giebel Chavis and Lila Lizabeth Weisberger. St. Cloud: North Star Press, paper \$19.95

Speaking to the 2003 graduates of Emory University, Nobel Prize winning author Seamus Heaney reminded his audience that most true and necessary poems arose from places of suffering and decision. When written well, they speak to the realities of our lives in ways that are often accessible and insightful. The editors of this significant volume took Heaney's words further by linking quality poetry with skilled poetry therapists. The result is a wonderfully practical volume for family educators and therapists who want to integrate literary resources into their work.

The Healing Fountain is organized in such a way as to be immediately useful to practitioners working with families. Each section addresses common themes of family work. Coping with anger and fear, encountering life's choices, and the parent-child connection are but three of the chapter headings. In each, poems are included along with discussion of the use of poetry resources for that topic. All of the writers are certified poetry therapists in the National Association for Poetry Therapy.

December 5, 2003

MCFR Annual Meeting

**Given the State of Affairs...
What are the Possibilities?**

Earle Brown Centre St. Paul, MN

Books About Relationships: Emerging, Ending, and Continuing

By Ted Bowman

The Art of Loving Well: A Character Education Program for Today's Teenagers.

(1993) Boston: Boston University. Student anthology \$19.95 - teacher's guide \$10.00.

The challenge of teaching adolescents about values and family relationships is often named and lamented. Frustration about if and how it can be done is a common experience. Typical textbooks and teaching methods have been debated and reviewed.

Boston University, in its controversial linkage with area schools in Boston, has created, with the assistance of the Dibble Fund, a character education program using literary resources. The result is a book and teacher's guide that I find stimulating, provocative, engaging, and well done.

The use of stories may provide the distance that allows adolescents to address values and family themes without the risks of self-disclosure or exposure of their own family. Stories, as the developers purport, allow us to think and talk about profound experiences without the embarrassment of talking directly about ourselves.

The choices of stories include a range of viewpoints and voices. The readings are organized in three sections: 1)early loves and losses, 2)romance, and 3)commitment and marriage. While written with an adolescent audience in mind, many of the stories could be easily and effectively used in parent education and in work with couples.

There are parallel resources for elementary and middle school ages. For more information about ordering contact www.BuildingRelationshipSkills.org

Fault Lines: Stories of Divorce

(2001) edited by Caitlin Shetterly. New York: Berkley Books, hardback \$21.95.

We Used To Be Wives: Divorce Unveiled Through Poetry

(2002) edited by Jane Butkin Roth. Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, paper \$14.95

These two volumes complement *The Art of Loving Well* without the teacher's guide. Both deal with divorce and offer stories and poems as a way of addressing important themes.

Caitlin Shetterly has collected a rich array of short stories of divorce, beginning with John Cheever's haunting tale "The Season of Divorce." *We Used to Be Wives* is even more specific. As the title suggests, these are poems of divorce written by women.

The editor, for example, wrote about houses and marriages: "I used to think/once we filled it up/ we would find our lives there." And later, "We carefully stacked dreams like deserted chairs..."

Each of these volumes is organized around the phases of divorce and those affected by such choices. Family educators and therapists would find each of these a useful resource for aiding families in dealing with this all-too common experience.

Gay and Lesbian Couples: Voices From Lasting Relationships

(1997) by Richard Mackey, Bernard O'Brien, and Eileen Mackey. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, paper, \$19.95

The authors of this important volume have been studying committed relationships for years. This volume follows an earlier study of lasting marriages. Their goal, as stated in the preface, was to sensitize people to the world of lasting relationships of lesbian and gay couples without pre-judging the research. Using a rich mixture of measures with an even richer array of voices and stories from the couples, the book pulls the reader in. You will want to read more about each of the couples.

After chapters addressing topics like roles, conflict, decision-making and intimacy, the final chapter compares the results of studies of heterosexual and homosexual lasting relationships. Similarities and differences are highlighting and discussed. The book will be a wonderful resource for all persons working with families. It can be used as important background and counterpoint to prejudicial stereotypes. It can also serve to enrich the direct work of therapists and educators.

Family *f-o-r-u-m*

Minnesota
Council on
Family
Relations

State Affiliate
of the
National Council on
Family Relations

READER'S CORNER:

Fresh Perspectives for Work with Families

By Ted Bowman

Resiliency enhancement: putting the strengths perspective into social work practice

(2000) edited by Elaine Norman.

New York: Columbia University Press, paper, \$22.50

Among the reasons this book stands out is the way it moves the resiliency discussion beyond children. Chapters addressing resiliency in older people; women and midlife; couple resiliency; even a resiliency model for mental health organizations are included. Such an array of perspectives makes this volume distinct among the many volumes addressing resiliency or hardiness.

Further, Elaine Norman in the opening chapter places resiliency squarely within the strengths outlook now complementing and replacing the traditional deficit model for working with families.

As with all edited volumes, some chapters are stronger than others. Yet, on balance the chapters weave together providing rich food for thought for family professionals.

The special mission of grandparents: hearing, seeing, telling

(1999) by C. Margaret Hall.

Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, hardback, \$39.95.

This impressive volume explores the special role of grandparents. Drawing on more than 25 years experience as a clinical sociologist, Margaret Hall, utilizes wonderful examples of all sorts of families as she looks at purpose and relationship. This is not a book about ideal relationships. No, Hall takes families as they are

and as their history has shaped them. In the midst of often complicated family systems, the role and mission of the grandparent is developed. Practical, though not a handbook of activities, Hall invites critical reflection.

Here are three examples of the questions she addresses. What is it that grandparents know that is most helpful to their grandchildren's development and social progress? What are the most effective ways for grandparents to communicate that knowledge? How can grandparents have a constructive impact on their families and communities?

As a grandfather, this book was helpful. I could see it being used in a parenting or a grandparents group. Therapist will find much to inform their practice. This will add greatly to your volumes on grandparenting.



Family *f-o-r-u-m*

**Minnesota
Council on
Family
Relations**

State Affiliate
of the
National Council on
Family Relations

READER'S CORNER:

Fresh Perspectives for Work with Families

By Ted Bowman

Reprinted from the Spring 2002 Issue of *Family Forum*

In this issue of Reader's Corner, you are invited to consider one volume that could be described as a core text or resource, and a specialized grief resource made all the more poignant since September 11 of last year.

Each volume pushed my ways of thinking to new areas. Even as a long-time family educator, Powell and Cassidy's perspectives stretched me. Finally, Margaret Hall helped this grandfather of four consider grandparenting as a special vocation.

Consider adding these volumes to your library.

Family life education: an introduction

(2001) by Lane H. Powell and Dawn Cassidy. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company. Hardback.

There are some books that don't get the visibility they deserve. And this is one of those. Well-known family educators Lane Powell and Dawn Cassidy have written a splendid text that also deserves a wider audience than the one to which it is directed. This volume is written for undergraduate family life or family education use. I commend it to veteran family educators and family therapists as well.

Easily accessible and comprehensive, Powell and Cassidy invite the reader to consider key themes in family education. Mixing case studies or examples with ample references, the reader moves through theory and history to practice to personal reflection, and program implementation.

I could, for self-serving reasons, suggest that the section on group processes is the strongest, especially since the authors draw on some of my work. But, I won't do that. The overall volume is balanced and well constructed. One section leads into another and builds on the foundation preceding it.

If you want a sound and solid overview of family education, get this volume.

Remembering well: rituals for celebrating life and mourning death

(2000) by Sarah York. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, hardback, \$20.

From the beginning of time, peoples and animals have marked with rites and rituals the deaths of family and friends. More recently, a renewed interest in rituals has been shown.

Examples include the wide-spread practice of roadside markers where road deaths have occurred; the overwhelming outpouring of flowers and notes after the death of Princess Diana; and after the September 11th tragedy.

Rituals, as collective and symbolic acts, can aid the grieving processes. Those working with families, even those who don't think of themselves as grief resources, need to be ready to respond to questions and statements about rituals. Sarah York's book can be a valuable resource. While addressing death rituals, York displays a keen sensitivity to the importance of story-telling, to balancing painful and positive aspects of persons, and to the inclusion of a wide circle of caring. Readers will be able to adapt much of what is said in *Remembering Well* to other disruptive changes. Further, her Unitarian background invites readers of many traditions to consider the wisdom she offers.

Sections of the book include themes like the following: composing a service; when a family is alienated; the seasons of grief; and a resource section. Given this breadth and the depth of sensitivity York displays, the book will be a valuable resource for many.

Family *f-o-r-u-m*

Minnesota
Council on
Family
Relations

State Affiliate
of the
National Council on
Family Relations

READER'S CORNER:

Fresh Perspectives for Work with Families

By Ted Bowman

Reprinted from the Winter 2002 Issue of *Family Forum*

Winter is a time for soups and stews. When cooking, I'm on the lookout for fresh ideas for nutritious meals. Sometimes, it's only a different spice or ingredient added to a familiar recipe. In other cases, I am drawn to try something not tasted before.

Books and their connections to my work fit with this analogy. Some books match the spice category, providing me with insights or tools to do continuing work. Others become resources for personal change. The books reviewed in this issue offer those possibilities and more. As is our custom, books with Minnesota connections are highlighted.

The Cancer Poetry Project (2001)

edited by Karin B. Miller. Minneapolis:
Fairview Press, paper \$12.95.

This is a poignant and powerful book of poems written by cancer patients and those in their circles of care. Karin Miller, a Twin Cities newspaper reporter and writer, began the project after her husband was diagnosed with cancer. She initially wrote for herself. Then, one morning the thought of gathering poems from cancer patients, their families, friends, and care providers came to mind. This collection is the result.

While obviously most useful as a resource when dealing with cancer, many of the poems have wider use. Stories and poems, when selected and used well, can spark conversations about many things. One example that could be used in any family education or therapy setting to aid people in talking about what is difficult in talking about tough stuff is entitled

"An Explanation to my Dying Daughter"

You say you do not understand
Why I sorrow for the loss of things
Rather than for the greater losses
Your time of travail brings.
Oh, my child, don't you know

That sometimes to endure we choose
To grieve for unimportant things
That we can bear to lose.

Poetry, at its best, weaves the specific with the general aiding the reading in addressing both. This poem does that for me. If space allowed, I could continue with examples like these. Your better choice would be to purchase the book.

Schools and Families: Creating Essential Connections for Learning (2001)

by Sandra Christenson and Susan Sheridan. New York:
Guilford Press, hardback \$32.00

What a timely addition to our libraries! The tie between schools and families is a highly charged current topic. This book will aid you in thinking about these special connections. Sandra Christenson, a University of Minnesota professor, and her Nebraska colleague, Susan Sheridan, add richly to the growing literature on this subject.

I was drawn in to read more when on the first page, I was asked, "Why another book...on this subject?" Immediately, the authors make the case for a book that explores a real partnership between schools and families, not another book of activities of minimal substance. If you are looking for new twists on advisory groups, volunteers opportunities in schools, or the schools obligation to inform parents, then this will NOT be the book for you. If, however, you want to examine what real partnership could involve, then get *Schools and Families*.

The book is respectful of both families and school personnel, cognizant of their special roles in children's lives, willing to discuss boundaries, but also ways to partner...fully. Rationale and rich examples are provided. The process of relationship building, they write, must start early and continue across an academic year, and across a child's entire academic experience. How that can be done is detailed in this impressive volume.

Family *f-o-r-u-m*

Minnesota
Council on
Family
Relations

State Affiliate
of the
National Council on
Family Relations

READER'S CORNER:

Practical Resources on Dealing with Conflict

By Ted Bowman

Reprinted from the Summer 2001 Issue of *Family Forum*

During a recent class session, the students were asked to recall the spoken and unspoken messages of their childhood about anger and conflict. After acknowledging that some may have experienced distorted messages because of violence or incest - they could pass on the task -the messages were collected and shared. On a continuum, more fell on the end that could be described as "no conflict or avoid conflict" than on the "encouraged to engage in respectful conflict" part of the continuum. Where would you place yourself then and now?

Family professionals constantly face conflict Differences of opinions, ways of processing the world, values, power and control, discipline, and the list could go on of topics or processes containing potential or real conflict. Even though common, it has been my experience that anger and conflict intimidate, scare, or baffle many working with families.

In this column, several practical resources useful in providing perspective or as resources for family education or therapy settings will be discussed. Reinforcement and new information can be found within each. Read them all and your confidence level for addressing conflicts could change and move closer to the accepting and encouraging end of the conflict continuum.

***Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community* (1996) by Alfie Kohn. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. paper \$17.95.** Alfie Kohn has long been a voice of reason and depth in the often-charged debates about schools, children, and values. Whether one agrees with him or not, he invites thoughtful conversation about important matters. He models through his writing and speaking ways of engaging in respectful conflict.

In the current attention to outcomes, tests scores, and accountability. *Beyond Discipline* stands as a provocative counterpoint. In other writing Kohn directly addresses the testing debate. This is a book about school climate and the creation of community. He takes on easy answers like "whatever works," punishment as a teaching tool, bribes and threats, and the importance of adult control. These and other commonly used perspectives or tools are evaluated in light of child development, about respect for children, and the messages they teach.

While written with school settings in mind, family educators and therapists in all settings will find a gold mine of thought and insight in this slim volume. Problem solving, for example, is addressed, especially with the bias that it difficult if not impossible without a relationship with a child. Authentic solutions last longer and teach more than impul-

sive, reactive solutions moves from a nice-sounding slogan to practice. "Be seated and refrain from talking" will be more difficult to say after reading this book.

This will not be a book that you will describe as enjoyable. But, if you are ready to think, to engage in self-scrutiny and be helpful to parents, adults, and children, get a copy and dig in.

***Help! The Kids Are At It Again* (1997) by Elizabeth Crary. Seattle: Parenting Press, Inc. paper \$11.95.**

Elizabeth Crary has a deserved reputation for her ability to write easily accessible books for parents which show grounding in research and theory. This provocative book builds on that reputation. Subtitled "using kids' quarrels to teach 'people' skills," Crary addresses conflicts within families. She rightly puts primary emphasis on parental roles in responding to quarrels and their teaching/modeling roles of parents.

Crary emphasizes four people skills that parents can teach: achieving belonging; setting and respecting boundaries; dealing with feelings; and solving problems. Specific challenges are discussed in light of these skills. Developmental perspectives for children only a few months old to those 6-12 years old are also included in each chapter.

Continued

READER'S CORNER:

Practical Resources on Dealing with Conflict

Continued

This would be a useful gift (I have given some to family members), a provocative text for a parent group, useful to professionals because of its practical slant, and a take-home resource accessible to most parents.

***The Third Side: How We Fight and How We Can Stop* (2000) by William Ury. New York: Penguin Books. paper \$13.**

William Ury is an anthropologist who has become a student of and teacher addressing conflict. In this book, he demonstrates that he has listened, teamed and can share the learnings. The title of the book comes from his encounters with the Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert. As he put it, he was astounded to discover that in spite of their capability of violence, it rarely happened. "The secret of the Bushmen system for managing conflicts, I discovered, is the vigilant, active, and constructive involvement of the surrounding members of the community." That became his notion of the

third side. Conflicts escalate not only because of the engagement of the two warring sides but also because third parties fail to get involved.

Let me emphasize that this is not only a book about mediation, about third party intervention. Yes, that is included, but it is much more. It is a stimulating discussion of prevention, containment and resolution of conflicts. That is its strength. Steps that can be done before conflicts escalate, strategies to contain active conflicts, and ways of resolving conflicts are all addressed in depth and with practical emphasis. The implications for this approach are far reaching. Persons working with families will be able to draw implications at the micro and macro levels, from organizational and community situations to family conflicts.

We have few models of respectful and effective conflict resolution. Ury points toward hope with useful tools and perspectives.