

For Immediate Release

To contact author for more information or an interview:

J. Shep Jeffreys

410-730-3310 or jeffreys3@comcast.net



Helping Grieving People—When Tears Are Not Enough: A Handbook for Care Providers

We are care providers all. Whether you're a professional care provider or someone who wants to comfort a loved one in pain, you can learn how to accompany and support an anguished person on his or her "grief journey" when tears are not enough.

This thoughtful and sensitive new book by Dr. J. Shep Jeffreys teaches you how.

New York, NY (January 2005)—*What can I do to help a person who is grieving?* It's a question most of us have asked, or will ask, at some point in our lives. Many never find a satisfactory answer. Grief alienates. It isolates. It paralyzes. Even the most capable, confident people find themselves wordless—helpless—in the face of anguished tears or angry outbursts or depressions as deep and silent as winter snow. However, most of us eventually find ourselves called on to “help” someone who is walking this lonely path. What we can do, says psychologist and grief specialist J. Shep Jeffreys, Ed.D., C.T., is serve as an *exquisite witness* for that person.

“An *exquisite witness* might be a friend, someone from the faith community who comes to visit the family, or the surgeon who stops by the recovery room after removing a tumor and then proceeds to reassure the waiting loved ones,” writes Jeffreys in *Helping Grieving People—When tears are not enough: A Handbook for Care Providers* (Brunner-Routledge; 2005; ISBN: 0-415-94603-4; \$39.95). “What distinguishes an *exquisite witness* is not one's level of training but one's willingness to approach another human being with compassion and deep respect for that person's needs, fear, and grief.”

Though the “care providers” in the subtitle might imply that this book is only for professionals—medical, mental health, or clergy—Jeffreys makes it clear that the content is equally applicable to family members, friends, and volunteers who serve grieving people. Indeed, in listing the characteristics of an *exquisite witness*, he places the

professional's role in a context that's far more "human" than clinical: "it's not simply a matter of 'This is what I do because this is what I have been trained to do,' but rather 'This is what I do because this is part of the meaning of who I am and how I choose to live.'"

In this thoughtfully written and often lyrical book, the author, who draws many of his learnings from his years on the training staff of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, takes a comprehensive approach to grief, addressing three critical dimensions: *heart* (the process whereby old loss material may rise to the surface and interfere with the ability of a care provider to be available to a grieving person), *head* (knowledge of the phenomenon we know as grief), and *hands* (what the care provider says and does to help the grieving person engage in the process of mourning in the healthiest way possible).

Helping Grieving People covers the unique needs of a variety of specific grievers: children, parents, older adults, and individuals who have chronic illness and/or impairments, the terminally ill, and the dying. Sprinkled throughout are numerous real-life stories of love, loss, and, eventually, hope and healing. Finally, Jeffreys provides practical guidelines on what to say, what to do, and how to act around a person who is grieving.

(EDITOR: See attached Guidelines.)

Here are a few insights from *Helping Grieving People—When tears are not enough: A Handbook for Care Providers*:

- **Be aware of your Cowbells.** Jeffreys uses the word "Cowbells" to refer to the personal loss issues that may surface in a caregiver when he or she is working with a grieving person. He explains that the word has its origins in his childhood. When he was four years old and attending a preschool program, during outdoor playtime he would cling to the chain-link fence and look longingly toward home, missing "Mommy" and wanting to be home with her. At the same time every day, a junkman would come by ringing a cowbell roped to the handlebar of his pushcart. The sound of that cowbell and the author's yearning, grieving feelings became connected.

"Throughout my life when I have had aching, grieving feelings come up, the look on my face prompts my wife to ask, 'Cowbells?'" writes Jeffreys. "And I answer—Cowbells. We *all* have our Cowbells. They accompany us to the bedside of patients and loved ones, to our interactions with counseling or pastoral clients, and to every human contact we engage in. As care providers it is our responsibility to be sufficiently aware of them so that our own Cowbells do not drown out our clients!—ask not for whom the Cowbells toll; they toll for thee . . . and me!"

• **Help people use rituals and traditions for healing.** Jeffrey's book is filled with ideas that care providers can use to help people grieve and subsequently heal. "Special days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and anniversaries are appropriate and natural times for bereaved people to acknowledge their loved ones and maintain their continued bonds," he writes. "Care providers can help individuals and families to plan for some ritual or ceremonial observance of acknowledgment. Families can create artwork, letters of remembrance, memory albums, and collage posters."

"Families can be encouraged to mention the name of their deceased loved one at family gatherings in some way," he continues. "The first post-death Thanksgiving meal can be a time to start a new tradition. Prior to beginning the meal, the family can decide that all family members will have an opportunity to mention any blessings they are aware of and to name whomever they are missing. A deceased loved one's favorite food can be served, a candle can be lit in remembrance, and a vase of flowers can be placed on the table in honor of deceased loved ones. Ritualistic gestures will help people recall the loved one's special role in the family."

• **Be aware that hope exists in the wake of the strongest grief.** One of the most poignant sections of *Helping Grieving People* is the chapter on parental grief. Partly, this is because we instinctively recognize that the death of a child is the most devastating bereavement one can face. It's also because the author himself has experienced this most unthinkable of losses: his own son Steven died in 1975 at the age of eight. Yet, he points out, care providers can sometimes help grieving parents find that elusive spark of hope.

"In the most despairing times, I might simply offer parents something to read with a spiritual message, a beautiful piece of music to listen to, or some lovely artwork to contemplate," he writes. "Even books designed for children that are about nature and the cycle of life can comfort grieving adults. Books can soothe the younger self when there is pain. I include this poem of hope that I wrote the day after I'd been to a bereaved parents' meeting, as I walked around a nearby lake on a snowy, wintry morning in March."

A Robin in the Snow—March 11, 1999

I move into the day,
Once more.
The sky is blue and
The bright sun stretches down
To touch the fringes of brilliant
Snow around the lakepath.
And the air is frigid,
Almost painful, as I
Breathe it into me.
Signs of winter's retreat
Surround my walk,
And I hear the aching words of
Parents in grief—
"Oh how I hate spring!"
What a contrast
What a paradox.
Who doesn't feel some excitement stirring

From the prospect of warmth,
And green growth's return?
For grieving parents renewal of life is soured, and
Inner pain screams out against
The coming rebirth of earth.
And then, I see nearby
In the cold whiteness . . .
A robin in the snow.

Copyright J. Shep Jeffreys, 1999

As emotionally rousing as this book is to read, it is also strangely uplifting. This is, no doubt, an accurate representation of how people who regularly tend to the grieving feel every day. Indeed, in his epilogue, Jeffreys writes of the gifts received from this tough and painful work.

“Some of the treasures come in the form of being with sick and dying people who have reordered their priorities to such bottom-line goals as being pain-free, being clean, and giving and receiving love,” he writes. “Other gifts come from the recognition of our own Cowbells, our personal unfinished grief, which, when effectively managed, will not diminish our availability to those we are serving. Finally, while dying and death is a topic so many wish to turn their eyes away from, you as an *exquisite witness* provider will be shining your light into that darkness because you will not turn your eyes away. Your joy in this work will come from your confidence and comfort in knowing that you will be available to help grieving people heal ‘when tears are not enough.’”

###

About the Author:

J. Shep Jeffreys, Ed.D., C.T., is a licensed psychologist specializing in grief, loss, and end-of-life concerns and a Certified Thanatologist. In addition to maintaining a private practice, Jeffreys is assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and adjunct assistant professor of pastoral counseling, Loyola College in Maryland. He is a consultant to hospices, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, and corporations. He served as trainer and workshop leader with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in the United States, Canada, and overseas, and as consulting psychologist for the Johns Hopkins AIDS Service. In the November 2001 issue of *Baltimore Magazine*, Jeffreys was selected as one of Baltimore's “best mental health practitioners” in an annual feature that selects “top docs” based on a survey of professional peers. The author can be found on the web at www.GriefCareProvider.com.

About the Book:

Helping Grieving People—When tears are not enough: A Handbook for Care Providers (Brunner-Routledge; 2005; ISBN: 0-415-94603-4; \$39.95) is available at bookstores nationwide and major online booksellers.