

HOSPICARE AND PALLIATIVE CARE SERVICES

of Tompkins County, Inc.

SELECTED LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN: ANNOTATED DESCRIPTIONS

Storybooks and Other Texts for Primary School Readers

Alexander, S. (1983). *Nadia the Willful*. New York: Pantheon Books. Nadia's older brother dies and her father in his grief decrees that no one may speak of his death. Nadia helps her family, particularly her father, deal with their grief by willfully talking about her brother.

Arnold, C. (1987). *What We Do When Someone Dies*. New York: Franklin Watts. This book provides information about death-related feelings, concepts and beliefs, but gives most attention to disposition of the body, funeral customs, and memorial practices.

Barreras, C. (1998). *Hope in Heaven*. Folsom, CA: Hope in Heaven (P.O. Box 874, Folsom, CA 95763; www.hopeinheaven.org). This slim booklet tries to show how one might talk about the possibility of death to a child with a life-threatening illness. It insists the child is important and is loved, and promises that no one will give up the fight, even while admitting that things do not always turn out as we might wish them to. The remainder of the text affirms God's presence and the expectation of heaven.

Barron, T.A. (2000). *Where is Grandpa?* New York: Philomel Books. After Grandpa dies, family members share memories. When a young boy wants to know where Grandpa is now, they decide that Grandpa is in heaven and that "heaven is any place where people who love each other have shared some time together." The thought that Grandpa is way off in the Never Summer range of the Rockies that they used to look at together "as far as we can possibly see" from the tree house they built comforts the boy.

Boritzer, E. (2000). *What is Death?* Santa Monica, CA: Veronica Lane Books (513 Wilshire Blvd. #282, Santa Monica, CA 90401; 800-651-1001). The third in a series by the same author (following *What Is God?* And *What Is Love?*), this book seeks to introduce children to the concept of death and to some of its implications, using examples of customs and beliefs from various religions and cultures.

Bouchard, D. (1997). *If Sarah Will Take Me*. Victoria, BC, & Custer, WA: Orca Book Publishers (P.O. Box 5626, Station B, Victoria, BC V8R 6S4, Canada; P.O. Box 468 Custer, WA 98240-0468). The author's lengthy poem accompanies paintings by Robb Dunfield, a ventilator-dependent quadriplegic since he was 19. The book is a testimonial to what Dunfield would do if only Sarah (his nurse and now wife) would take him to the places he remembers, and if only he had his life to live over again.

Boulden, J., & Boulden, B. (1992). *Uncle Jerry Has AIDS*. Weaverville, CA 96093-1186). An activity book allowing children at about grade level 3-4 to explore issues, attitudes, and emotions that might arise when a loved one has AIDS.

Buck, P.S. (1948). *The Big Wave*. New York: Scholastic. After a tidal wave kills his family and all the fishing people on the shore, Jiya chooses to live with his friend Kino's poor family instead of being adopted by a rich man. Years later, Jiya marries Kino's sister and decides to move back to the seaside with his new bride. Loss is universal and inevitable, but life is stronger than death.

Bunting, E. (1982). *The Happy Funeral*. New York: Harper & Row. Two young Chinese-American girls are puzzled when their mother says they will have a "happy funeral" for their grandfather. At the funeral, food is provided for the journey to the other side, paper play money is burned, people cry and give speeches, a marching band plays, and a small candy is provided after the ceremony to "sweeten the sorrow" of the mourners. In the end, the children realize that although no one was happy that their grandfather died, his good life and everyone's fond memories of him did make for a happy funeral.

Carrick, C. (1976). *The Accident*. New York: Seabury Press. Christopher's dog, Bodger, is accidentally killed when he runs in front of a truck. Christopher is angry at the driver, at his father for not getting mad at the driver, and at himself for not paying attention and allowing Bodger to wander across the road as they walked. Christopher's parents bury Bodger too quickly the next morning, before he can take part, but anger dissolves into tears when he and his father join together to erect a marker at Bodger's grave.

Chin-Yee, F. (1988). *Sam's Story: A Story for Families Surviving Sudden Infant Death Syndrome*. Available from the Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, 586 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 308, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 1P2; 416-488-3260 A rare book that tells a story about the confusing experiences of a child in a family that has experienced the sudden death of his infant brother.

Coburn, J.B. (1964). *Annie and the Sand Dobbies: A Story about Death for Children and Their Parents*. New York: Seabury Press. When young Danny encounters the deaths of both his toddler sister from a respiratory infection and his dog after it ran away from home and is found frozen to death, a neighbor uses imaginary characters to suggest that the deceased are safe with God.

Coerr, E. (1977). *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. New York: Putnam's This book is based on a true story about a Japanese girl who died of leukemia in 1955 as one of the long-term results of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (which occurred when Sadako was 2 years old). In the hospital, a friend reminds Sadako of the legend that the crane is supposed to live for a thousand years and that good health will be granted to a person who folds 1,000 origami paper cranes. With family members and friends, they

begin folding. Sadako died before the project was finished, but her classmates completed the work and children all over Japan have since contributed money to erect a statue in her memory.

Coleman, P. (1996). *Where the Balloons Go*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation (P.O. Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104-0600). When Corey asks where balloons go as they fly up into the sky, Grandma suggests that perhaps their destination is a lovely Balloon Forest. Later, after Grandma becomes sick and dies, Corey wishes that his balloons could carry him up to the Balloon Forest to see Grandma, but settles for attaching a message of his love to a balloon and releasing it.

Corley, E.A. (1973). *Tell Me about Death, Tell Me about Funerals*. Santa Clara, CA: Grammatical Sciences. This book depicts a conversation between a young girl whose grandfather has recently died and her father. In ways that avoid euphemisms, they discuss guilt, abandonment, and choices about funerals, burial, cemeteries, and mausoleums. At one point, we are treated to a child's delightful misunderstanding about the "polarbears" who carry the casket.

Donnelly, E. (1981). *So Long, Grandpa*. New York: Crown. At 10, Michael witnesses his grandfather's deterioration and eventual death from cancer. We learn about Michael's reactions to these events and about the way in which his grandfather had helped to prepare Michael by taking him to an elderly friend's funeral.

Douglas, E. (1990). *Rachel and the Upside Down Heart*. Los Angeles: Price Stern Sloan. After Rachel's daddy died when she was 4-years old, she was sad and had to move from a house with a yard, green grass, and two dogs in Kentucky to a noisy apartment in New York City. Mommy said Daddy would always be in Rachel's heart, so she began to draw hearts but could only make them upside down. Later, Rachel begins to find some new friends and some of the hearts that she drew were upside up. Finally, when his father died, Rachel was able to talk to a new friend and help him with his loss.

Farrington, L. & Weil, J.C. (1993). *And Peter Said Goodbye*. Woodside, CA: Enchante Publishing (P.O. Box 620471, Woodside, CA 94062; 800-473-2363). After his Grandpa moved to California and was killed in a car accident, Peter is left behind in the care of a neighbor while his parents go to the funeral. Only a magical character, Mrs. Murgatroyd, seems to understand. Through her enchanted paints Peter visits the funeral in a dream and finds within himself ways to accept the death and say goodbye.

Goble, P. (1993). *Beyond the Ridge*. New York: Aladdin/Simon & Schuster. At her death, while her family members prepare her body according to their custom, an elderly Plains Indian woman experiences the afterlife believed in by her people. She makes the long climb up a difficult slope to see the Spirit World beyond the ridge.

Goodman, M.B. (1990). *Vanishing Cookies: Doing OK When a Parent Has Cancer*. Available from the Benjamin Family Foundation, 2401 Steeles Avenue West, Downsview, Ontario, Canada M3J 2P1. This book seeks to bridge the gap between adults and children by helping them share feelings when an adult is coping with cancer. Children are encouraged to ask questions and are offered information about cancer, treatments, coping with feelings, friends and school, and death. The title refers to the vanishing cookies that some children shared with their mother when they visited her in the hospital.

Graeber, C. (1982). *Mustard*. New York: Macmillan. Mustard is an elderly cat with a heart condition that needs to avoid stress. But one day Mustard runs outside and gets into a fight with another animal, leading to a heart attack and to Mustard's death. After Father buries Mustard Alex goes along to donate the cat's dishes and some money to the animal shelter where they had gotten Mustard. Because he is preoccupied with sadness, Alex wisely declines (for now) a well-meaning offer of a new pet.

Greene, C.C. (1976). *Beat the Turtle Drum*. New York: Viking. This book describes 13-year old Kate and 11-year old Joss' loving, warm family. When Joss is abruptly and unexpectedly killed in a fall from a tree, the family is flooded with grief. Conveying this sense of the many dimensions of bereavement is the book's strong point.

Johnson, J. & Johnson, M. (1978). *Tell Me, Papa: A Family Book for Children's Questions about Death and Funerals*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation (P.O. Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104-0600). Using the format of a discussion between children and a grandparent, this slim book provides an explanation of death, funerals, and saying goodbye.

Krementz, J. *How It Feels When a Parent Dies*. (1981). *And How It Feels to Fight for Your Life*. (1989). Boston: Little, Brown; paperback by Simon & Schuster, 1991. Short essays by children and adolescents (7-16 years old) describe their individual reactions to the death of a parent and to a variety of life-threatening illnesses. A photograph of its author accompanies each essay.

Lee, V. (1972). *The Magic Moth*. New York: Seabury. Maryanne, 5-year-old Mark-O's 10-year old sister, dies as a result of an incurable heart disease. Mark-O is helped to make sense of this experience by the metaphor of a moth as it experiences a transition from one mode of life to another.

Marshall, B. (1998). *Animal Crackers: A Tender Book about Death and Funerals and Love*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation (P.O. Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104-0600). A young girl describes her Nanny, who hid animal crackers all over her house for her grandchildren. After Nanny became forgetful, she went to live in a nursing home and eventually died. But the children always remember Nanny fondly through the good times they shared with her and through her "Nanny crackers."

McNamara, J.W. (1994). *My Mom Is Dying: A Child's Diary*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress. The illustrated diary format of this book offers an imaginary record of Kristine's conversations with God while her mother is dying. Notes from the author identify Kristine's reactions and suggest how they could provide a basis for discussion with children.

Miles, M. (1971). *Annie and the Old One*. Boston: Little, Brown. A 10-year old Navajo girl is told it will be time for her grandmother "to go to Mother Earth: when her mother finishes weaving a rug. Annie tries to unravel the weaving in secret and to distract her mother from weaving, until the adults realize what is going on and her grandmother explains that we are all part of a natural cycle. When Annie realizes she cannot hold back time, she is ready herself to learn to weave.

Mills, L. (1991). *The Rag Coat*. Boston: Little, Brown. After Papa got sick and died. Minna couldn't start school because she had to stay home and help Mama make quilts to support the family. When she was eight Minna wanted to go to school, but she didn't have a winter coat. So she was happy when the "Quilting Mothers" volunteered to piece together a coat for her out of scraps of their old materials and had it ready for Sharing Day. At first, the children teased her about her rag coat, but not after she explained the stories behind each scrap that she had selected.

Peavy, L. (1981). *Allison's Grandfather*. New York: Chas. Scribners' Sons. While her friend Allison's grandfather is dying, Erica asks questions that we might all ask: Is he ready to die? Would she be told if her own grandfather was dying? When Allison's grandfather does die, Erica's mother is able to be there and to hold his hand, and to tell Erica about what it was like.

Pellegrino, M.W. (1999). *I Don't Have an Uncle Phil Anymore*. Washington, DC: Magination Press. Following the unexpected death of his uncle, a boy and his extended family go to New York to attend the funeral while he thinks about what this event will mean for all of them. In the end, he throws a sparkle blue ball up toward heaven and catches it as he used to do when he played with Uncle Phil.

Powell, E.S. (1990). *Geranium Morning*. Minneapolis, MN: CarolRhoda Books. Two children—Timothy, whose father died suddenly in an accident, and Frannie, whose mother is dying—struggle with strong feelings, memories, guilt ("if onlys"), and some unhelpful adult actions. In sharing their losses, the children help each other; Frannie's father and her mother (before she dies) are also helpful.

Saltzman, D. (1995). *The Jester Has Lost His Jingle*. Palos Verdes Estates CA: The Jester Co. (P.O. Box 817, Palos Verdes Estates, CA 90274; 800-9-JESTER; www.thejester.org). This is the story of a Jester who awakens one morning to find laughter missing from his kingdom. The Jester and his helper, Pharley, search high and low to find it. Ultimately, they discover that laughter—the best tonic for anyone facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles—is buried deep inside each of us.

Schwiebert, P., & DeKlyen, C. (1999). *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing after Loss*. Portland, OR: Grief Watch (hardcover) \$19.95, plus shipping and handling, from 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland, OR 97212; tel. 503-284-7426; www.tearsoup.com). See Box 10.2.

Scrivani, M. (1994). *I heard Your Mommy Died*. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation (P.O. Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104-0600). A slim booklet offering an empathic approach to a bereaved child, affirming what he or she may feel, do, experience, want, or need.

Simon, N. (1979). *We Remember Philip*. Chicago: Whitman. When the adult son of an elementary school teacher dies in a mountain climbing accident, Sam and other members of his class observe how Mr. Hall is affected by his grief. In time, the children persuade Mr. Hall to share with them a scrapbook and other memories of his son, and they plant a tree as a class memorial.

Smith, D.B. (1973). *A Taste of Blackberries*. New York: HarperCollins. After the death of Jamie as a result of an allergic reaction to a bee sting, his best friend (the book's unnamed narrator) reflects on this unexpected event.: Did it really happen, or is it just another of Jamie's pranks? Could it have been prevented? Is it disloyal to go on eating and living when Jamie is dead? He concludes that no one could have prevented this death, "some questions just don't have answers," and life can go on.

Tiffault, B.W. (1992). *A Quilt for Elizabeth*, Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation, (P.O. Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104-0600). When Elizabeth was eight, her Daddy got sick and died. Elizabeth got angrier and angrier. One day, Grandma suggests that together they sew a patchwork quilt out of swatches of material from their old clothes. Each square of fabric has a story to tell and memories to recall as it binds the quilt and their lives together.

Vajentic, A., & Neuer, N.V. (1993). *Remembering: Explaining Organ and Tissue Donation; Loss, Grief and Hope*. Cleveland, OH: Academy Graphic Communication (1000 Brookpart Road, Cleveland, OH 44109-5824). In two parts, this booklet offers a basic explanation of donation, together with some comments on loss and grief.

Van-Si, L., & Powers, L. (1994). *Helping Children Heal from Loss: A Keepsake Book of Special Memories*. Portland, R: Continuing Education Press, School of Extended Studies, Portland State University. This workbook's structured format is intended to help a child work through his or her grief.

White, E.B. (1952). *Charlotte's Web*. New York: Harper. This is a classic story of friendship on two levels: that of a young girl named Fern who lives on a farm and saves Wilbur, the runt of the pig litter; and that of Charlotte, the spider, who spins fabulous webs that save an older and fatter Wilbur from the butcher's knife. In the end, Charlotte dies of natural causes, but her feats and her offspring live on.

Whitehead, R. (1971). *The Mother Tree*. New York: Seabury Press. Where do 11-year old Tempe and her 4-year-old sister, Laura, turn for comfort in the early 1900s when their mother dies and Tempe is made to assume her mother's duties? To a temporary spiritual refuge in the large backyard tree of the book's title, and eventually to good memories of their mother that live on within them.

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