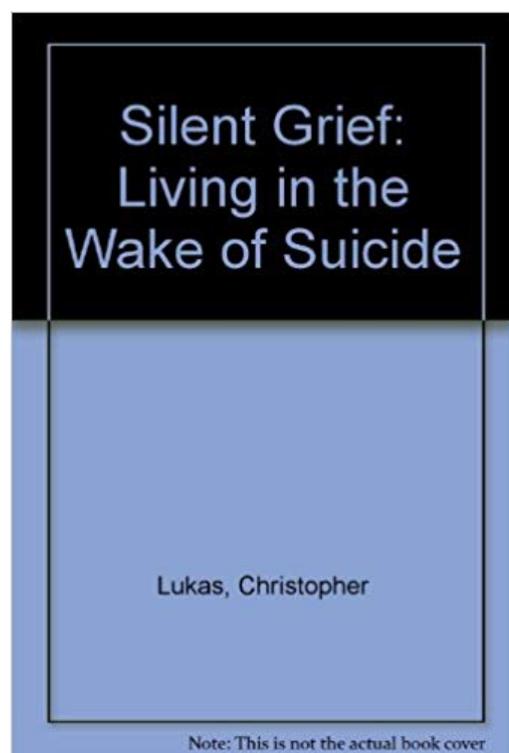


Silent Grief : Living in the Wake of Suicide *by* Christopher; Seiden Henry M. Lukas



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Reviews of the *Silent Grief : Living in the Wake of Suicide* *by* Christopher; Seiden Henry M. Lukas

Atineda

I was somewhat puzzled by the thrust of the authors' chapters on what they call "Bargains." They seem to think that these feelings and thoughts, which I would regard as quite natural to anybody whose loved one had died by suicide, are harmful. True, they say that these "bargains" have positive and negative effects, but it seemed as I read that Lukas and Seiden didn't really accept the authenticity of the feelings and focussed more on why they were dysfunctional.

The first "bargain" is what they call "Scapegoating." This would be anger at people and institutions that might have contributed to the loved one's decision to end his life. Somehow this (and many

other books) ask us survivors to squelch our anger. The only person to blame is the dead victim himself, they say. Thus the families who sue schools for allowing indiscriminate bullying are somehow "wrong." Doctors who ignore danger signs or prescribe dangerous drugs are not in the least to blame, according to Lukas and Seidin. Family or friends who leave firearms or poison around a suicidal person are not to be blamed.

I encounter this "magnanimous" (to the guilty) advice in other self-help books on grief, but it seems to me a form of censorship. Why should we, as survivors of a brutal loss, suppress our anger or turn it against the suicide victim himself, who can no longer defend himself or his reputation?

The next half-inappropriate response is prolonged mourning. I'm not quite sure how this is to be avoided. If there is a huge hole in the survivor's life, it would be nice if the authors offered consolation instead of just saying it's wrong to mourn for a long time.

The next "bargain" is feeling guilty. So, as well as considering how our actions could have prevented the death, we also have to feel guilty about feeling guilty!

Then we have "cutting off." This is apparently anhedonia, lack of the energy to move forward. I grant you that this is a damaging state of mind, but no advice is offered to avoid it, except talk therapy. However, in the talk therapy, we must beware of expressing anger, extended mourning, or guilt, if I'm reading the earlier "bargains" correctly. Maybe I'm playing devil's advocate here, but the authors seem to want us to trim our emotional response and don't seem to allow much leeway to feelings that I think are quite natural.

Suicide is the next inappropriate "bargain," and here I'm entirely with the authors, except that if in talk therapy you are told repeatedly that you aren't supposed to be angry at people you regard as guilty, you're not supposed to mourn for a long time, and you're not supposed to feel lackluster as a result of depression, what the heck are you supposed to talk to the therapist about?

The final bargain is what they call "running," and I think this must be the opposite of prolonged mourning. You aren't supposed to change things in your life, run away from a bad family situation, a harmful job, or a town that reminds you of your bleakness and loss. You're supposed to man up and face these things. But my experience with a number of friends who have lost spouses is that "running" -- i.e. moving into a new circle of friends, new job, new city even -- is what enables the person to have a decent life with some hope of future happiness.

So, I may be overstating these objections, but I'd like to see more understanding and less disapproval. For heaven's sake, if we feel angry, why shouldn't we be allowed our feelings? If we are allowed neither to wallow in guilt nor try to batter through and find a new life, where are we? If we aren't supposed to repress our feelings and at the same time we're not supposed to lie around depressed, what is the alternative?

Mind you, I've been in talk therapy, and while my therapist doesn't condone my going on a rampage to avenge my dead son, she also does not tell me that I "shouldn't" be angry at people who threatened to kill him and who destroyed his self-esteem. She allows me to have my feelings. These feelings are valid, not a way of covering up the "real" feelings, whatever on earth those might be.

This isn't the whole book, of course. I was very touched by the accounts of survivors, although sometimes I felt the authors in their commentary were being censorious of the survivors' reactions.

Saying that feelings have both good and bad sides is effectively asking people to shut down their

reactions. Feelings are just feelings. Trying to squelch them because they supposedly are partially bad is not going to comfort a survivor.

As to publicizing suicide and telling family members what happened, I understand that this is something that should be done. I'm not sure a five-year-old should be told, though. How and when to tell, and the compassionate details of an explanation might have featured bigger in the book.

I did like the two authors' accounts of their personal experience, but I was not sure that they should generalize and decide how others "should" feel.

The other good thing about this book is that it has a detailed list of resources. I didn't always agree with what was included and what left out, but at least there was this list.

Thomas Joiner's excellent *Myths about Suicide* and the more general book, Redfern and Guilbert's *The Grieving Garden*, were a lot more helpful. Both seemed more grounded in reality, and more empathic. The authors seemed more in touch with victims' and survivors' actual feelings and explored causes and reactions to suicide (and other deaths) without making so many value judgments and recipes for what is realistic or good. Both were more descriptive and less prescriptive.

Conjulahala

Those left behind in the wake of a suicide do not need nor cannot take in a mass of psychological jargon, statistical abstracts or pie charts and graphs. What they need is the reassurance that they are not alone, that there is a community of compassionate, sensitive people which will welcome them as they try to absorb and accept their loss. "Silent Grief" provides a real service in helping the reader to sort out his feelings and to begin to make sense of the senseless.

Authors Lukas and Seiden provide many real life examples of the behaviors of suicide survivors. These should be helpful to anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide, no matter how long ago the event occurred, no matter how close emotionally the survivor was to the deceased, even if they were not family.

Although they do not mention Elisabeth Kubler-Ross by name, Lukas and Seiden do detail her famous five stages of grief, (from her 1969 book, "On Death and Dying") and explain that these emotions and behaviors can and often do run deeper in suicide survivors than in those mourning the death, say, of an elderly person who dies of natural causes. The stages of grief and the order in which they are experienced are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally, acceptance. Not everyone goes through all the stages, regardless of the intensity or nature of their loss. But there are suicide survivors who get stuck in one stage of grief never to leave it, not for years or even decades. "Silent Grief" discusses not only why this happens, but the ways in which the suicide survivor can become "unstuck," and finally achieve acceptance of his loss.

To work one's way through the process of grieving can take years. I lost a brother to suicide in 1995. He was only 31. The authors discuss deep, unrelenting depression as a primary cause of almost every suicide. This my brother experienced for years, and it seemed resistant to treatment. Now, although there are days when I feel his presence acutely, and other days when it seems as if his death just occurred, I did eventually reach the acceptance phase, but it took about six years. (I don't know if this was a long or short period of time, nor even if there are any meaningful yardsticks.)

I don't believe it is the intention of Lukas and Seiden to encourage the reader in accelerating the grieving process. Rather, their many real-life examples make it easier to understand the complexities, the patience and the backtracking that will inevitably mark the road to recovery. It has been said that while a suicide survivor will never get over it, he can eventually get used to it. Only by

completing this process can acceptance of this unimaginably painful event be achieved. "Silent Grief" offers hope that one day acceptance can be achieved, and that the process may be arduous, but reaching this vital last stage of the journey does not mean abandoning the memory of or forgetting the one who died.

Those who need to read "Silent Grief" know who they are, but it may be very difficult for them to pick it up. Perhaps a loved one can introduce them to its wisdom, compassion and hope. The survivor needs all of these, and "Silent Grief" is a safe and comforting place to begin.

AnnyMars

For me, I was feeling so lost and wondering what will be ahead tomorrow, the next day...how can I possibly feel better. I finally chose this book after reading all the reviews on several books. So much information and affirmation in these pages - not statistical, psycho babble or mumbo jumbo stuff...stories are relatable and on point - especially for me, as I lost my BROTHER and the book talks quite a bit about siblings lost. The information and stories unfold with each new topic dealing with so many pitfalls a survivor finds themselves struggling with and wondering about. I learned a lot about what to expect, what to avoid and steps I can take to keep my family together and moving forward.

xander

We lost our 32 year old son to suicide last September and this book was recommended to me. I have found a great deal of comfort in it. I am hoping my other sons and my husband will read it. I recommend it to anyone who has lost someone they love to suicide. It is written with compassion and thoughtfulness.

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