

Review Article

Love's last gift- a journey through bereavement

Patricia McWalter*

Department of Family Medicine and Polyclinics, King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre, Saudi Arabia

Book Review

The book "Love's Last Gift" by Bebhinn Ramsay tells a story of one woman's journey through bereavement which she described as "a universal and integral part of our experience of love". Over the centuries, people have had different views of bereavement. The poet Christina Rossetti in 1849 wrote "Better by far you should forget and smile, then you should remember and be sad" [1].

Love's Last Gift starts with a happy family event in 2007, full of love and beauty; their happiness ends abruptly when Bebhinn's husband succumbs to a rare complication of a common infection, leaving her to cope alone with two young children. She is fortunate to have the support of a loving family and many close friends. However, the hopeless despair can be overwhelming and at times she is inconsolable, "Grief still feels like fear".

She sees no future without her soul mate "My former plans hang before me like drooping skeletons, mocking me from the sidelines, I can never go back to how it used to be". She searches for a meaning for this huge loss, but as C.S. Lewis described it "sorrow turns out not to be a state, but a process" [2].

Bebhinn questions why her husband had to die, leaving her with two young sons to raise on her own. She is told by people that she will have to be both mother and father to the boys. She goes on a spiritual journey, where the strength of her character is highlighted, travelling through Spain with her children in tow, "pushing an uncooperative double buggy laden with bags along uneven woodland passes".

Bebhinn next embarks upon a Buddhist retreat but cannot tolerate the silence. Feelings of intense guilt continue "I feel guilt that I did not kneel in the hospital corridor and scream and scream until someone made him better". She sees her GP who suggests counseling, she begs for "10 easy steps for feeling better" but there are no easy answers. "Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape" [2].

When she returns to the city where her husband died and later to her husband's birth place, friends suggest she visit a spiritual healer. She travels to Germany to do a retreat with Byron Katie [3]. Later, "returning home to her family with seeds of peace planted in my subconscious".

With this new-found peace, she decides she must follow a path that will keep the memory of Alastair alive. She decides to

establish a children's charity in Brazil where they had lived in the past. Charity work had brought them together and now she had an opportunity to fulfill some of their dreams. Again, the formidable woman is packing up to move to an island in Brazil with her children, where she builds a home amongst a warm and welcoming community.

To help her find meaning, she tries meditation by Oysho, yoga, homeopathy and reading. She throws herself into establishing the children's charity. Friends and family offer amazing support and encouragement, one telling her "May your suffering open up a bridge to understanding and compassion for the suffering for others".

Compassion becomes her guiding principle. She now feels "the seeds planted at the Bryon Katie retreat are beginning to bear fruit".

She begins a new life and finally acknowledges that "My time to weep and mourn has passed and now is my time to laugh and dance". As William Wordsworth wrote "Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more, that neither present time, nor years unborn, could to my sight that heavenly face restore." [4].

References

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Patricia McWalter, Department of Family Medicine, King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, E-mail: pmcwalter@doctor.org.uk