

DBP Book Review

Name of Book: The Empty Room: Surviving the Loss of a Brother or Sister at Any Age	Author: Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Trade	Date of Publication: August 2004
Name of Reviewer: Vince Faustino	Date of Review: October 28, 2006
Intended Audience (choose from Parents, Children, Professional, Other): Parents, Adolescents, Professional, Other	
<p>Purpose of the book: At the tender age of fourteen, the author's well-known brother ("The Boy in the Bubble") died from severe aplastic anemia. More than two decades later, she describes in this book her personal journey commencing from the time that the diagnosis was made up to her current life situation focusing on the effects of losing her brother. To further understand the impact of her brother's loss on her, she interviewed other people who experienced the death of a sibling and compared it with her own and with existing psychosocial theories.</p>	
<p>Theoretical Basis: Sibling loss is hidden and unappreciated in our society. When a sibling dies, the death is often referred to as the parents' without realizing that the surviving brother or sister has to grieve too. The sibling is disenfranchised and not allowed to claim the loss as his/hers. Inability to understand fully the consequences of the death of a sibling may lead to psychosocial issues later on in life. These maybe alleviated if siblings are allowed to grieve, in their own way, similar to how we allow parents to grieve the loss of their child.</p>	
<p>Strengths: The author's personal experience in dealing with the impact of her brother's loss on her life gives a face to sibling loss. This is the book's major strength. Added to this, the author compiled the experiences of others providing validation of her own. Likewise, comparison of the collective experience with the few existing psychosocial theories on sibling relationship and loss puts theories and practice in proper perspective.</p>	
<p>Weaknesses: While not necessarily a weakness, it might be construed that the book is "ego-centric" in its treatment of the psychosocial theories, i.e. if it did not happen to the author then it's not true. It has to be kept in mind that the whole idea of the book was to tell the author's story and the efforts she went through to understand the things that happened in her life.</p>	
<p>Recommendation of Reviewer (please choose one and put "X" in box next to selection):</p>	

X	Highly recommend for all parents
	Highly recommend for parents with specific problems/issues
	May be useful to some parents
	Would not recommend

Additional Comments: The book is an eye-opener on the different effects of sibling loss on the survivors. The impact stems not only from the lost relationship but also from the way the family and society deals with it. For example, with the parents grieving, the remaining children are left on their own with some assuming the roles, not only of the departed, but also of the parents, leaving them no time to grieve. In order to find a way to go on living, she suggests that certain important tasks have to be accomplished. These include claiming the loss, re-forming an identity and carrying.