

## THE HEAVENLY VILLAGE

When grief touches a family, the hardest part for adults is talking to kids about what happens after we die. It's not often we have the perfect title at hand to help explain loss and grief, but since every family will have to cope with the issue sooner or later, it might be advisable to have some of the following titles ready.

THE HEAVENLY VILLAGE by Cynthia Rylant (BlueSky/Scholastic, \$15.95) holds to the premise that "when people die they travel to a place of Perfect Happiness, a place of Complete Ecstasy, a place called Heaven". But God has also created for some reluctant-to-leave spirits a special place, a stop-over on the way to eternity, where they "may keep half a heart in heaven and half a heart on earth" until they are ready to move on. The book tells their various stories, leaving the reader with a sense that life itself is an extraordinary gift and that those we love are never really far away. It is a remarkable book for its comforting message as well as its resonant sense of wonder.

WHAT'S HEAVEN by Maria Shriver, illustrated by Sandra Speidel (Golden Books, \$15) provides a starting point for parents to talk about passing. The dialog between a little girl and her mother about the death of the great-grandmother echo the typical questions small children have.

THE TENTH GOOD THING ABOUT BARNEY by Judith Viorst (Atheneum, \$5.95) tells how a family memorializes their cat by each child telling at the burial ten good things about Barney. The narrator child can only think of nine, and is distraught until he realizes that the tenth is that Barney has been returned to the earth and is "making flowers". Certainly a beginning place for itemizing the memories one holds at the moment of death.

LIFETIMES by Bryan Mellonie (Bantam, \$11.95) explicates the thought that everything has a lifespan--rocks, trees, butterflies, and people. The pictures help young children visualize a rather abstract concept and allow the adult reader to interject as needed.

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS by Susan Varley (\$5.95, Mulberry) treats the topic of death in old age particularly well, and also introduces some interesting imagery for young children to hang onto.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross conveys the stages of grief and healing in REMEMBER THE SECRET (\$9.95) about a child dying and being met along the journey to eternity by "spirit guides". It's not perfect for everyone, but certainly covers the territory of the stages of grieving.

Marc Brown (creator of Arthur series) covers all the basic questions in WHEN DINOSAURS DIE (\$5.95, Little Brown) using dinosaurs as the lead characters, thus enabling youngsters to get a little fictional distance while still absorbing basic information about death, funerals, and more.

Leo Buscaglia's ever-popular THE FALL OF FREDDY THE LEAF (\$9.95 Holt) is actually about cycles of life and death, loss and gain as well as grieving. It has recently become a best-seller in Japan for unemployed executives whose life-dreams have died!

THE DEAD BIRD by Margaret Wise Brown ( \$5.95, HarperTrophy) is a classic picture book of how some kids find a dead bird and bury it; the connection to funeral traditions make this a necessity for every age child.

LIPLAP'S WISH by Jonathan London, illustrated by Sylvia Long (\$13.95, Chronicle) introduces at a very simple level the "rabbit legend" that departed ancestors become stars in the sky. This opens the door to using legend and myth as a way to broaden the grieving perspective to historical and world-wide traditions surrounding death and grieving.

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