

## Books that Explain Death and Grief to Children

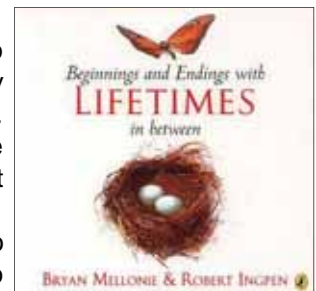
A list chosen and compiled by The Children's Bookshop, Wellington (Updated May 2011)

### Beginnings and Endings with LIFETIMES in Between Beautiful Ways to Explain Life and Death to Children

*Bryan Mellonie / Robert Ingpen*

This has been our "go-to" book for 19 years as the best for explaining life and death to young children. Everything has a life span, some creatures live for a week, others for many years but sometimes something happens, an accident or illness, and they do not live. "Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in-between." And so it is for people. Mostly they live for 70 years or more, but sometimes they are so badly hurt or sick they die. It is sad, but it is the way nature works.

Effective for many death situations - humans, pets, young and old - it can be read to children as young as three but, just as importantly, it gives the adult the correct language to convey the concept of death without becoming maudlin, trite or over-elaborate. Sensitively illustrated in full colour, we highly recommend it.

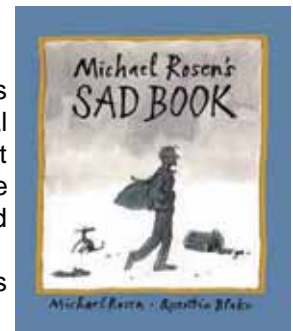


### Michael Rosen's Sad Book

*Michael Rosen / Quentin Blake*

Children's author, poet and anthologist Michael Rosen went into his 18-year-old son Eddie's bedroom to wake him one morning and found he had died overnight from meningococcal septicaemia. This is about his intensely personal grief, how he experiences it and how it affects him, and also how he controls it and tries to do something every day to make Eddie proud of him. At times deeply moving, the book combines dark emotions with unexpected humour to give a message of hope for anyone coping with a sense of sadness and loss.

Quentin Blake's stark, haunting illustrations add a poignancy to the overall impact. It works at different levels for many ages – from 5-year-olds to teenagers and adults.



### All the Dear Little Animals

*Ulf Nilsson / Eva Eriksson*

*"The world is full of dead things," said Esther. "In every bush there's a bird or a butterfly or a mouse. Someone has to look after them. Someone unselfish must make sure all these dead things get buried." "Who must?" I asked. "We must," she said.*

One summer's day three children start a business called Funerals Ltd to help all the poor dead animals in the world. Esther does the digging, her little brother Puttie cries at the grave sites and paints the gravestones, and our narrator writes the poems.

This charming, off-beat Swedish story has been translated into English by a New Zealand publisher. The humour is beautifully understated, revealed subtly through Esther's bossy leadership, the boys' eagerness to be brave and helpful and in Eriksson's summery pastel illustrations that depict children resolving a big issue through play. Highly recommended for ages 4 to 10.

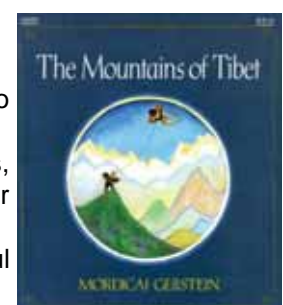


### The Mountains of Tibet

*Mordicai Gerstein*

In a tiny village, high in the mountains of Tibet, lives a woodcutter. All his life he has longed to travel to faraway places, to see the world. But he grows old without ever leaving the mountain. When he dies he is suddenly offered the chance to live another life, in any form he wants, anywhere in the galaxies. Carefully he decides and then finds himself in a place he never thought he would choose.

This is a gentle look at one man dealing with life's choices and the impact of its peaceful message remains with you as the story comes full circle. Age 7 up.



## Duck, Death and the Tulip

Wolf Erlbruch

This is an extraordinary book, simple, powerful, unsentimental yet somehow tender, and an important addition to the “grief” genre.

When Duck notices Death, a skeleton in a checked robe and carrying a black tulip, following her she is frightened.

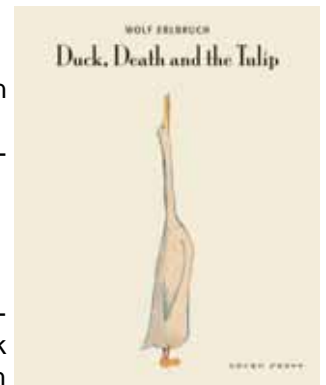
*“Who are you? What are you up to, creeping along behind me?”*

*“Good,” said Death “you finally noticed me. I am Death.” ... “I’ve been close by all your life—just in case.”*

Together Duck and Death strike up an unlikely friendship as they speculate about the afterlife and both begin to accept the inevitability of the outcome. When summer ends Duck feels cold so she lies down and asks Death to warm her. As she stops breathing Death strokes her feathers, and gently lays her on the water and helps her drift away.

*He was almost a little moved. ‘That’s life,’ said Death.*

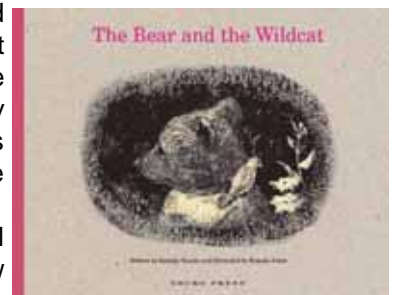
Translated from German, the book has been published by Gecko Press of Wellington to wide international acclaim.



## The Bear and The Wildcat Kazumi Yumoto / Komako Sakai Translated by Cathy Hirano

Beautifully wrought, this is a look at friendship, death, grief, depression, memory and the renewal of life through the voice of Bear, desperately sad at the death of his best friend “Little Bird”. As he tenderly carries her body around in the special box he made for her, grief overcomes him and he shuts himself away from the world. Then one day he ventures out and comes across Wildcat, a minstrel with a fiddle who understands Bear’s sadness and teaches him that memories will remain and that life will continue and that the fun and colour will return.

The monochrome illustrations add a gentle and sombre beauty and the story will enchant all readers, taking them through the grieving process from raw grief to new hope. Translated from Japanese and published by Gecko Press, this is a book that is not only for children, but for anyone experiencing the pain of loss.

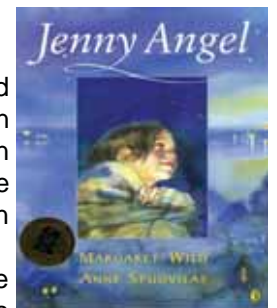


## Jenny Angel

Margaret Wild / Anne Spudvilas

This is an eloquently told story of a young girl grieving for her terminally ill younger brother and her desperate efforts to prevent him from dying. To will him to live she becomes his guardian angel, soaring across the sky and staying on guard so that death cannot come. No-one, not even Davy, can see the wings that she constantly keeps covered with her mother’s old rain-coat. She even wears it to school and sometimes stops by Davy’s class so that she can report to him on what is going on there.

There comes a time though when Davy is so light she feels that she can pick him up with one hand and he doesn’t want to hear about school any more. *“Believe,”* she whispers as Davy turns to hear the angel’s wings. A tender portrayal of the journey children must make from denial to acceptance.



## Heaven

Nicholas Allan

For many children their first experience of grief is the death of a pet. *Heaven* is an absurdly funny look at the death of Dill, Lily’s much-loved dog. When the (dog) angels call to take him, Lily asks if she can go too.

*“You aren’t invited,”* says Dill and they then have a spirited discussion about the relevant merits of Heaven. *“Full of funfairs where all the rides are free and there’s whole islands of chocolates and lollies and you can eat as much as you like and never be sick,”* says Lily. *“No, no, no,”* says Dill. *“There’s bones with meat on them and hundreds of lamp posts and whiffy things on the ground to smell.”*

*“But what if you go down instead of up?”* asks Lily. *“What about the time you stole that chicken, or the time you bit Aunt Julia?”* *“Well I’ve tried to be good,”* says Dill.

Utterly charming, witty and warm and, despite its title, totally irreverent. For all ages.



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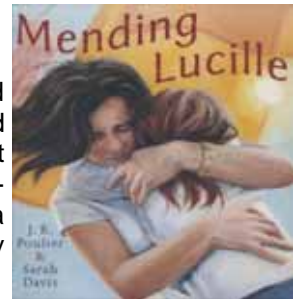


## Mending Lucille

*J R Poulter / Sarah Davis*

A young girl has only her broken doll Lucille to comfort her after her mother has gone away and both of them need mending. It is beyond her father, lost in his own sadness but, when a kind waitress offers to mend Lucille, she helps mend both their hearts and gradually becomes a part of their new lives. While the key element, the cause of the mother's absence, is left open - death or abandonment? - this gives more depth and provides the potential for the story to be a vehicle for children to accept that grief, however it arrives, will diminish with love, and that they will heal. Uniquely, it introduces children to the idea of remarriage as part of that process.

Packed with visual metaphors and stunningly illustrated by New Zealand-born Sarah Davis, *Mending Lucille* is highly recommended by Sydney's Monash Centre for Grief Education for use by counsellors, but it works equally well as a moving and empathetic picture book for young children.

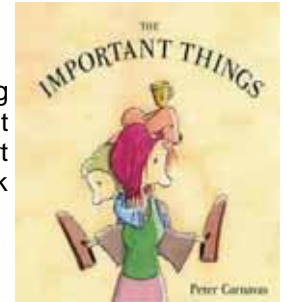


## The Important Things

*Peter Carnavas*

Christopher's father has faded from their lives, and his mother must do everything, from painting the house to reading him stories. Then one day she packs some of his father's old, unimportant things in a box and takes them to a secondhand store. Later, to her surprise, some of them start to reappear about the house. Christopher has been reacquiring them and smuggling them back home. While she had been trying to forget, he had been trying to remember.

A charming, beautifully understated lesson about involving children and allowing them the time to adjust to absence.



## Old Hu-Hu

*Kyle Mewburn / Rachel Driscoll*

This book won the prestigious NZ Post Book of The Year in 2010 for its beautiful portrayal of "death and the celebration of life", as young Hu-Hu tries to find out what has happened to Old Hu-Hu after "he flew to the moon back, and then fell down dead". He asks all the normal questions and gets a variety of answers, until he realises the universal truth that through the love and experiences they shared, Old Hu-Hu lives on in him. Although the characters are insects, the emotions are very human and depict the grief the young feel around aging and loss.

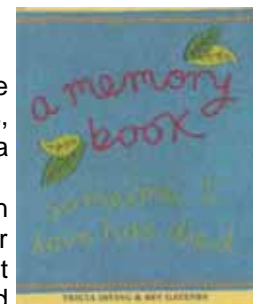
The stunningly poignant illustrations, created in "pencil, paint and tears" add to the soul of this funny, loving, spiritual, rational book.



## A Memory Book: Someone I Love Has Died *Tricia Irving / Dr Bev Gatenby*

Essentially an album/scrapbook, this is designed for a child, or an adult on their behalf, to store the memories of someone they have loved who has died. With space for photographs, drawings, writings, dried flowers, locks of hair, this book is anything the child wants it to be - a workbook, a memorial, a keep-sake or an opportunity to grieve, and it can be used for any death situation.

The creators were motivated by the lack of similar resources at their time of need – Irving with three young children to help when her husband died suddenly in 1996, and Gatenby when her daughter died. Irving was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of Skylight ([www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)) and is its Resource Manager. Gatenby is a Waikato academic, writer and researcher, specialising in social justice and community welfare.



## Grandad

*Janet Pereira / Bruce Potter*

Based on her father, the late Dr Humphrey Belton of Nelson, Pereira portrays a Grandad's ageing and eventual passing through the eyes of his grand-daughter. From the fit and healthy, fun-to-be-with Grandad to an old man too tired to play, the young girl watches as he fades away. Her questions, such as, "Will his body go hard and stiff?" are ones that children want answered. The family response to his death reflects our cultural diversity, with a mix of Māori, Pacific and Pakeha customs giving the story a uniquely New Zealand perspective.



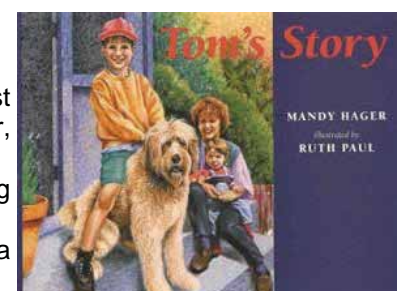
## Tom's Story

*Mandy Hager / Ruth Paul*

Written for her son after the death of his father in a yachting accident, Hager's honest portrayal of a child's grief allows the reader to understand that feelings of anger, bitterness and self-pity are all valid, as well as not feeling guilty for having happy times.

A breakthrough book when it was published in 1995, it is particularly useful in giving boys permission to express their emotions.

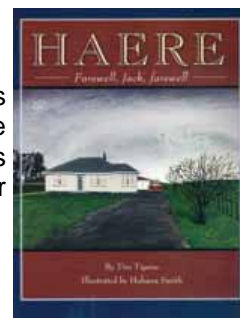
Wellingtonian Ruth Paul's richly coloured illustrations bring a positive touch to a poignant story.



## Haere — Farewell, Jack, Farewell

Tim Tipene / Huhana Smith

A moving look at the death of an elder and the birth of a new baby into the whanau, this book is for children aged four and older. The initially haunting and stark illustrations reflect the sombre times, but later splashes of colour highlight life coming full circle. Informative, with explanations of marae and tangi protocol, *Haere* was shortlisted in the 2006 NZ Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. Also available in a Māori language edition.

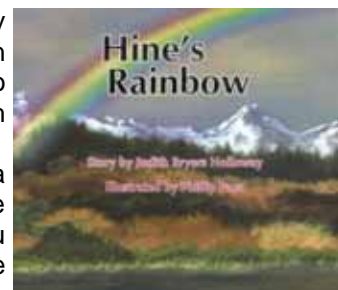


## Hine's Rainbow

Judith Bryers Holloway / Phillip Paea

Hine's younger step-sisters love her visits to their Taupo home and they miss her very much when she goes home. Then Hine dies and, while the adults grieve, the children struggle to come to terms with the idea that they will never see her again. They travel to her tangi and witness the whole process of a Māori funeral, from the karanga through to the burial at the family cemetery at the foot of Mt Ruapehu.

As well as being a moving tribute (*Hine's Rainbow* is a true story), it is a comprehensive look at the protocols of tangi, including the gathering of the whanau, the prayers to ancestors, the lying on the marae, the ceremony and the lifting of the tapu and the hakari that follows. The story deftly handles the situations that confuse children, answering many questions they are often too afraid to ask. *Hine's Rainbow* is also available in a Māori language edition.



## What's Happened to Baby?

Skylight

Written and produced by Skylight and Wellington groups SIDS (Sudden Infant Death), and SANDS (Stillbirth and Newborn Death Support), this book explains to young children a wide range of situations when a new baby dies - from miscarriage to childbirth, an accident and natural death. Written in a clear, child-friendly style by parents who have been bereaved, it is cleverly illustrated by Wellington artist Ali Teo to give it a multi-ethnic appeal.

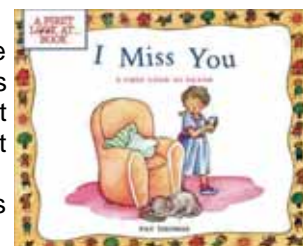


## I Miss You – A First Look at Death

Pat Thomas

A gentle and simple explanation of death, taking a very matter-of-fact approach to the whole process. It covers why people die, how the body actually dies, and then the effects on the living, dealing with issues like loss, the sense of guilt, and the despair of grief. It then looks in a straightforward, non-religious way at the various belief systems of different cultures as to what then happens to the body, always a major question for children.

Sensitively written in child appropriate language, it is suitable for reading to children as young as 3 years old, and for opening further dialogue and discussion.



## After The Suicide of Someone You Know

Tricia Irving Hendry / Leora Hirsh

Specifically written for young New Zealanders this guide is designed to help teenagers navigate the aftermath of a suicide among their friends or family. Widely used in schools and by support agencies, this is written and produced by Skylight, the not-for-profit national youth grief support organisation. Go to [www.skylight.org](http://www.skylight.org).

## FOR ADULTS

Books written for children are ideal for explaining the big issues, but are often just as valuable for giving adults the language to use when talking with them. There is a need though for books specifically for adults that deal with the techniques and strategies they can use when they need to help a grieving child.

## Children's Grief – A Guide for Parents Pam Heaney

Former funeral director Pam Heaney is a nationally recognised expert in the field of grief education and ***Coming to Grief*** deals with the issues that arise from the grief children experience and how adults can practically respond to their needs.

It is frank and clear in its approach that we cannot protect children from loss and should not prevent them from experiencing their own grief. Heaney explodes a number of myths - that (young) children have little understanding of death or that they get over death more quickly.

There are some **don'ts**. Don't say a dead person is only sleeping. Don't say it's God's will - why should "He" be the scapegoat? Avoid euphemisms and don't resort to the "little white lie". Recommended reading for an adult overview.



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