

stands up as a means of developing and enhancing exceptional practice, but success comes from a commitment to 'something more than a job', something akin to what most parents do.

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### Getting near to 'Baby'

Audrey Gouloumbis

G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1999. 211 pp.

This novel for children is a gem of a book that, despite some intensely sad moments, has a hopeful view of the potential for growth of adults and children as they pass through the grief process.

It tells the story of two children's experiences when their 'Baby' sister dies and they are temporarily looked after by their maternal aunt Patty and Uncle Hob.

The book opens with Willa Jo and her 'Little Sister', who has not spoken since 'Baby' died, sitting on the roof of their aunt's house.

Willa Jo, who tells the story, explains that, followed by Little Sister as always, she 'came up on the roof to watch the sun rise and ... just stayed'.

She tells us about the accidental death of 'Baby' by poisoning and how her mother had become obsessed with painting 'Baby' 'with the angels' to try to make sense of what had happened to her baby. As a consequence she and the children had lost all sense of time and daily routine and had to be 'rescued' by Aunt Patty.

We hear how Aunt Patty had insisted on taking their clothes and storing them in a box on a shelf in the hall closet, quickly to be replaced with new outfits. Willa Jo observes that her aunt behaves like this not because she has not been able to have the children she desires (as her mother might have explained it) but because she just wants to dress them like dolls and make them look like miniatures of herself.

Willa Jo describes how, despite her best efforts, her frustration with Aunt Patty's apparently rigid and fearful lifestyle gradually leads to more open antagonism between them. Especially difficult for her to tolerate is Aunt Patty's attempts to choose her friends. However, this does not stop her from making friends with Liz, who according to Aunt Patty 'is no better than she should be', but who is the first person to allow her and Little Sister to cry about the loss of 'Baby'.

Life is also made more tolerable by Uncle Hob whom you can talk to because, although he doesn't always have the answers to a problem (unless it is a mathematical one), he agrees 'that is some serious problem you have there' and 'you feel better, that's all'.

The book is full of these insightful and sometimes witty observations by Willa Jo on the behaviour of her family and friends. They become more poignant as the story proceeds, such as when aunt Patty admits to her that she doesn't know, 'the right thing to say to someone who is in such pain, even if she is my sister', and Willa Jo tells her that she should have said to her mother that no matter what she had done, 'it wouldn't have made a bit of difference' (to whether the baby died), and then realises at the same time that 'it wouldn't have made a bit of difference' (what her aunt said because) 'there are no right words. Words are not enough'.

The story illustrates how family members are affected by the loss of 'Baby', but their differing personalities and past experiences mediate the way they cope and change. Aunt Patty acknowledges this succinctly when she responds to Little Sister's explanation of why she would not talk - 'I tried but my voice was lost in sadness', with 'We've all been lost in sadness Little Sister'.

As well as being a powerful description of the grief process the story also points to some of the do's and don'ts for alternative caregivers of children who have experienced a separation or loss, be they kin or foster carers. As such it could be a useful adjunct to the reading list of foster and adoptive carers, and their children - considering that the book is a children's book! (for pre-teens upwards).

Reviewed by: Dr Tony Lunken

### Issues in foster care: Policy, practice and research

Edited by Greg Kelly and Robbie Gilligan

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2000.

These editors from Belfast and Dublin respectively have drawn together an impressive array of authors, including themselves, for the chapters of this very up to date text on foster care. Altogether the book canvasses all the current debates around foster care practice in its various forms. The types of carers considered are the child's relatives, largely untrained

volunteers who are paid expenses, trained and supported volunteers and salaried foster carers. The varieties of foster care includes respite for parents, short term care in emergencies, short term care for assessment and preparation for long term care, medium or long term care and specialist placements for adolescents. Throughout the book attention is given to the theory