

Reviews

doi:10.1017/S0144686X1600091X

Alexandra Butler, *Walking the Night Road: Coming of Age in Grief*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, 165 pp., pbk £17.50, ISBN 13: 0231167539.

This account tells a journey of sadness and loneliness which so often encapsulates the caring journey, the change in dynamics when a child cares for a parent, the bringing together of people in illness as well as the strain on relationships.

It is known that caring for someone has many consequences, including emotional pain and distress, burden, feelings of guilt, anger and, finally, sometimes a sense of relief. Butler in this book tells us of the journey of not only caring but fighting for two great minds, her mother an eminent academic of social work, gerontology and ageing dying with cancer and, subsequently, her grief-stricken father, the father of modern gerontology. She elegantly takes the reader through similar stages of caring to that which Lindgren described as the encounter stage, the enduring stage and the exit stage of caring (Lindgren 1993). Butler describes all the associated emotions with caring including a mix of anger, upset, panic, rage, sense of failure and finally relief. Caring for anyone, be it a spouse or parent can be one of the most demanding and challenging experiences anyone could face, but caring for someone at the end of life is even more difficult.

Butler describes the onset of symptoms and confusion of her mother's illness, the subsequent diagnosis, deterioration and her final hours. But alongside this description of her journey with her mother's illness, we see the personal journey Butler goes through and her battles with her own life. As a bright young intelligent woman freshly out of college, Butler relinquishes her own life and freedom to care for her best friend, her 'mom'. Throughout caring for her despite having such a close relationship, she portrays a picture of loneliness and abandonment, highlighting her father's absence, feeling she was left to care while he was 'off working'.

From the very beginning, the emotive language and suspense that is created in the writing grips the reader. 'Cancer. Tumour. Glioblastoma. Stage four. No cure. His and our job was to make her death as painless as possible. She had six to eighteen months' (p. 33). This poignant and emotionally charged portrayal of this journey brings to life the reality of caring for someone who is dying. Butler describes her mum's desire to put a human face on cancer and consequently, in writing this memoir, Butler herself helps to also put a human face on cancer, a personal story of a journey through cancer, and gives the reader a sense of reliving what Butler went through.

This account is a great opportunity for health and social care practitioners as well as students to experience and understand what family carers

experience when caring for a person who is dying, and the implications on the carer's health. For example, the blunt reality of what they do on a daily basis: 'I was daily humouring a crazy woman – a mad hatter trying to find my way with the Cheshire Cat's map' (p. 70).

However, it is not just the experience whilst the individual is dying that this memoir portrays, but also the sometimes forgotten aftermath of death and those left behind. Butler describes the prolonged aftermath of death and the continuation of a life once lived but lost. Taking the phrase of the 'exit stage' from Lindgren's stages of caring, we see how Butler struggles with leaving behind the caring role and re-establishing the life she had relinquished. Instead of the sadness of her loss of her mum, we readers are now saddened by the relationship Butler finds herself with a lost love, which becomes abusive and violent. She demonstrates her strength in finally leaving this relationship, as she has shown similarly the strength of a carer throughout this book. Despite a diagnosis of depression and a series of upsets and hard times, she finally finds a man whom she loves and loves her. The reader is left feeling a sense of relief that the battles and sadness that this woman, daughter and carer has experienced for so long concludes with joy for her and the reader, and as Butler says 'we loved one another. We were lucky' (p. 165).

Reference

Lindgren, C. L. 1993. The caregiver career. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, **25**, 3, 214–9.

Centre for Ageing Population Studies,
UCL, London, UK

NATHAN DAVIES

doi:10.1017/S0144686X16000921

Shibley Rahman, *Living Better with Dementia: Good Practice and Innovation for the Future*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2015, 400 pp., pbk £21.99., ISBN 13: 978 1 84905 600 7.

Health and social care practice is inevitably shaped and sometimes constrained and confined by government policy and national strategies. In this excellent new book from Shibley Rahman, the rhetoric of English dementia policy is teased out and positioned against current research to illuminate areas where people are 'living better with dementia' and perhaps more importantly those areas of dementia care where inequality and stigma remain.

This is a progressive look at initiatives and innovations which will continue to impact on people living with dementia over the next few years. Chapter One is a good starting point for those new to English dementia policy, providing a brief summary of current policy and strategies including