self-awareness will guide caregivers and clinicians to be fully present and supportive of bereaved children and families.

Dina Frid, MD
Seneca Families of Agencies
San Leandro, CA
dina_frid@senecacenter.org
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Perhaps it is because of my work as a consult-liaison child psychiatrist, or because I read Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children with my 2-year-old daughter and Me and Toby with my 10-year-old daughter, but these 2 books hit close to home. Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen, published in 1983, is a classic among parents, grandparents, and professionals and serves as an introduction to the ubiquitous and natural progression from life to death across different species. It is appropriate and engaging for toddlers, preschoolers, elementary school-age children, and grown-ups alike. The prose and illustrations are poetic, matter-of-fact, and beautifully intertwined, with delicate captions that accompany the drawings.

This is true for all living things.
For plants.
For people.
For birds.
For fish.
For trees.
For animals.
Even for the tiniest insect.

Lifetimes takes the reader through the vivid world and life cycles of newly laid speckled eggs, vine-ripened tomatoes, butterflies, Emu wrens, and a school of startled anchovies. Then, the book explores our own 4-generation, wrinkled, and layered lives as it touches on illness and mortality. My daughter Solvei pointed with 2 fingers and called out with delight at the ant crawling across the bottom of the page and then was suddenly taken aback 2 pages later: “Oh, Mama, butterfly broken!” She could summon no words to describe the ant’s demise on the very next page. However, I could tell from her silence and slump that the book served as an introduction not only to the universality of death but also to the sadness and shock that can accompany it.

Although Lifetimes has an impressionistic quality, Me and Toby, written by clinical psychologist and grief recovery specialist Beth Creel, PhD, and illustrated by Shannon Tolhurst, conveys a story about the relationship between 2 sisters and reveals how the younger of the 2 experiences the death of her older sister. Me and Toby begins with sisterly squabbles over jewelry and clothing, bicycle rides along the shore, and bus rides to school together. One day, Toby, the older sister, suddenly becomes ill and is taken to the hospital. The story is told from the perspective of the younger sister—her bus ride alone to school, dinner with “Grams” in the quiet house, and feelings of uncertainty and confusion.

The next day she learns from her parents that Toby has died, and the narrative that follows travels alongside a young child’s grief and her family’s struggles. Creel does a good job describing the myriad feelings cycling through the younger sister’s mind, heart, and body and the destabilizing effect of parental grief and marital conflict arising in the aftermath of the death of a child. The story takes readers through Toby’s funeral, her sister’s angry outbursts and fears of
forgetting, and ultimately describes the family’s resilient trajectory.

Unni, my 10-year-old daughter who is going on 15, read the book aloud to me while sitting by the fire on a snowy day. When Toby became ill and suddenly died, I could tell that she felt uncomfortable as she paused to clear her throat between pages and asked about the plausibility of the scenario, “That wouldn’t happen right? She seemed perfectly healthy.” I held my tongue as I remembered back to the handful of cases from our pediatric intensive care unit of seemingly healthy teens who suddenly became life-threateningly ill.

We took turns reading, and although I had read the book once before, it seemed much harder the second time around with Unni by my side. (It turns out Unni also had read it once before, when she found the book on my bedside table many months ago.) As the 2 of us, a child psychiatrist and a precocious preteen, discussed the reasons why this might be, we came to these conclusions. Me and Toby pulled no punches. It felt very sad and very real. It took us on the course of sibling grief and loss from a place of deep sadness and painful uncertainty through anger and conflict to the acceptance of a new normal. Creel shows readers that grief can be processed through simultaneous missing and remembering our loved ones and ultimately moving forward alone but somehow still together.

Karen Ron-Li Liaw, MD
New York University Child Study Center
New York
Ron-Li.Liaw@nyumc.org
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Note to publishers: Books for review should be sent to Schuyler W. Henderson, MD, MPH, NYU Child Study Center, One Park Avenue, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10016 (email: schuyler.henderson@bellevue.nyc.gov).