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TITLE INFORMATION

HEART GUIDE

True Stories of Grief and Healing

Diana Ensign

SpiritHawk Life Publications (300 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Survivors describe their grieving processes and how they found strength in the face of death in this volume about spiritual growth.

Ensign (*Traveling Spirit: Daily Tools for Your Life's Journey*, 2013) begins her second book with a dedication to all of the lost loved ones whose tales are told in these personal interviews. Her introduction describes how she sought out grieving people, ages 19 to 89, of diverse faiths, secular backgrounds, races, and socio-economic levels. She asked them to share not only their stories, but also what helped them and what they would want others to know about their journeys. Her prologue urges readers to view the healing process as individual “heart knowledge” and includes a tale of loss that will be retold by a different family member later in the volume. Seven chapters with inspirational quotes describe the heartache and shock as well as the guilt, confusion, and secrecy (especially with a suicide or drug overdose) that surrounded the experiences. The author’s themes address the disorientation of sudden accidents, the challenges of caregiving, and the dangers of interrupted grieving—due to personal misconceptions or others’ exhortations to “Get over it.” Conversely, the book examines feelings of peace in fond memories; a sense of a deeper faith, purpose, or transcendence; and the empowerment to make a positive change in the world. Ensign returns to one of her interviewees in a deft epilogue and shares her own tragic loss. Told in the survivors’ own words and laced with the author’s insights, this honest work does not shrink from uncomfortable subjects. The survivors—who include Jews, Christians, Muslims, atheists, Buddhists, Santería practitioners, and New Age believers—differ in their methods but agree that self-care is crucial. Each stresses that a person’s healing comes in its own time. Ensign’s mature and tolerant approach uncovers humor, anger, and disgust that are often self-censored in conversations at the funeral home, gravesite, or memorial service. (Interestingly, even devoutly religious survivors resented the well-meaning “a better place” and “see them again” sentiments.)

Frank, warm, unflinching, and compassionate—a heartfelt work that explores sorrow and healing.

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