

V566-04

PARENTS' BOOK CLUB
Susan Goodlaxson

P43

Grappling with the Grief of Losing a Child

No Mountain Too High: A Father's Inspiring Journey Through Grief

Ned Levitt
(ECW Press, 2004)

In 1995, Ned Levitt's beloved 18-year-old daughter Stacey stepped off a curb while jogging. She was listening to her Walkman and never heard the car that hit her. She was killed almost instantly—and the lives of her family members were changed forever.

The loss of a child in our society is a rare event. We have few resources to lead us through grieving the death of a child. We lack experience and ritual. Grandparents are reeling; neighbors are speechless. Funeral parlors fill up and empty. And parents suffer excruciating pain, physical and psychological.

Often, with no roadmap, no reference, suffering parents must make their own way.

That, in part, is why Ned Levitt, a Canadian attorney, wrote *No Mountain Too High: A Father's Inspiring Journey Through Grief*—to help other grieving parents. In this book, Levitt hits his grief head on, fighting to get past an immobilizing pain.

One local mom certainly knows that pain. Nearly two years ago, Vivian Schafer's son PJ, age 20, died suddenly while playing lacrosse at Catonsville Community College. In an effort to deal with the loss of her oldest child, she began to look for support by visiting grief sites online. That's when she found Ned Levitt.

According to Schafer, what he posted online caught her attention because it was so positive—that, as a parent, you really can survive and eventually learn to live again.

Although he admits that every parent who loses a child responds uniquely, Levitt reacts to his daughter's death by refusing to let his memory of her fade and by reaching out to others. For Levitt, feelings are meant to be dealt with up front.

However, Levitt also acknowledges that suffering such a loss made certain people in his life feel uncomfortable to be near him. For instance, he tells of how one day

while walking down a street he noticed an old business associate cross the street to avoid him. Levitt reacted by deliberately crossing the street to approach this person, reach out and shake his friend's hand. He contends that his ability to reach out brought some relief to his friend as well as himself.

Schafer also finds Levitt's approach comforting, adding, "The book isn't just for people who have had a loss, but for other people to understand the depth of the loss."

In Memory of Stacey

There's no doubt that Levitt also wrote *No Mountain Too High* to memorialize his daughter. One of three daughters in a close-knit family, Stacey Levitt was a good student, a good friend, a good athlete. She was also a journal-keeper and a poet.

Levitt paints a beautiful portrait of his family and then moves on to a brave and emotional explanation of individual grief. Responding as he is able, he talks of when he first published a book of Stacey's poems, *I Am a Rose: A Life in Poetry*.

Yet, despite discovering that Stacey's poems were inspirational to both friends and strangers, Levitt explains that he continued to struggle with his emptiness.

It's at this point he decided to climb Mt. Ixta in Mexico—a mission he chose in an effort to finish a climb that Stacey had once undertaken, only to be defeated by inclement weather.

Levitt succeeded in his climb, leaving Stacey's poetry to be found by future climbers.

The courageous spirit of Levitt's book helps all readers understand the inconsol-

able loss of one's child. But, more importantly, *No Mountain Too High* also offers grieving parents someone to identify with as they struggle through their darkest dark days.

As Levitt conquers Mt. Ixta, he also conquers bereavement. In tribute to his daughter, he offers himself as the experience we lack, as one roadmap through unthinkable grief. **BC**

For more information, visit Ned Levitt's website, www.iamarose.com.

