



## The Loss That Is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father

*Maxine Harris*

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"The Loss That is Forever" provides a thoughtful framework for understanding the impact that early loss has on every aspect of adult development. Through extensive research, interviews with more than sixty-five men and women, and the compelling writings of such well-know figures as Virginia Woolf, C.S. Lewis, and Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Maxine Harris illustrates how themes of loss and survival weave through the lives of those who have lost a parent in childhood. Who one becomes, how one parents, and what one believes about the world are all shaped by the experience of a parent's early death.

## **The Loss That Is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father Details**

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## **From Reader Review *The Loss That Is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father* for online ebook**

### **Elsje says**

Ik lees een aantal boeken over het verlies van een ouder op jonge leeftijd. Eerst Hope Edelman, en nu Maxine Harris. De aanpak van beiden is ongeveer gelijk: via een groot aantal interviews proberen ze inzicht te krijgen in wat het verlies van een van of beide ouders doet met een kind. En beiden combineren algemene inzichten, gelardeerd met quotes en wat langer uitgewerkte levensverhalen van enkele geïnterviewden.

Het boek van Harris heeft een wat bredere focus. Want daar waar Edelman kiest voor dochters die hun moeder verliezen, kiest Harris voor mensen die een van of beide ouders verloren. Dus ook zonen. En vaders. Dat is prettig, en wat ik al vermoedde: veel van de zaken die Edelman beschrijft voor dochters die hun moeder verliezen, blijkt ook te gelden voor zonen die hun moeder verliezen of dochters die hun vader verliezen.

Over het verlies-deel ga ik hier niet veel zeggen, dat lijkt heel veel op Edelman. Wat Harris toevoegt is het concept van 'verlies tegenover afwezigheid'. Als je heel jong bent als je een ouder verliest, weet je niet wat je verloren bent, wat je zult gaan missen. Harris spreekt over de 'afwezige herinnering', het gat in het familiealbum.

Belangrijker vond ik de duidelijke beschrijving van hoe mensen die op jonge leeftijd een ouder verloren zijn om kunnen gaan met liefde en relaties. Altijd die angst voor verlies met je meedragen, beïnvloedt fundamenteel hoe je denkt over deze dingen. Zo ziet zij dat veel van deze mensen relaties heel kort en intens houden, of steeds degene zijn die een eind aan de relatie maken. Een tweede groep begint gewoonweg niet aan relaties, zo beschadigd zijn zij geraakt door het verlies op jonge leeftijd. Tot slot is er een groep die weigert te geloven dat er aan hun liefde een eind kan komen door opnieuw een groot verlies.

Ook besteedt Harris veel aandacht aan ouderschap door mensen die een ouder op jonge leeftijd verloren. De angst dat jouw kind hetzelfde verlies kan treffen als jijzelf hebt geleden, weerhoudt veel van de geïnterviewden ervan om überhaupt aan kinderen te gaan beginnen. Voor diegenen die er wel aan beginnen, is het ontbreken van een rolmodel (hoe moet ik moeder/vader zijn, ik heb geen voorbeeld gehad!) een grote worsteling. En natuurlijk kan het krijgen van kinderen je juist doen verzoenen met je verleden.

Tot slot voegt Maxine Harris een deel toe over herstel van het verlies, waar Edelman hieraan slechts een hoofdstuk wijdde. Jezelf opnieuw definiëren, de pijn van het verlies door middel van rituelen leren verzachten, het lot in eigen handen nemen. Allemaal hoofdstukken die inzicht geven en helpen bij het verwerken van het verlies.

Harris schrijft minder persoonlijk dan Hope Edelman, en daardoor afstandelijker. Ook vind ik dat ze, door in elk hoofdstuk citaten van beroemde schrijvers die een van hun of beide ouders verloren als kind op te nemen, kiest voor stijl boven werkelijkheid. Daarom krijgt dit boek van mij drie sterren.

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### **Isabel says**

I simply lost interested after a hundred pages. I felt no emotional connection towards the people whatsoever it just got dull.

## **Jo says**

This is a wonderful book for anyone who has lost a parent before the age of 18 or is wanting to understand a child or adult who is coming to terms with an early loss.

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## **Tara says**

I have spent a good few months savouring this book. For the first time in my life I felt myself being understood in a book (rather than escaping into a book). Like other readers, I felt as if all of my questions about why I behave and feel the way that I do is actually a response to the loss of my father (I was 8 when he died). For me, the loss of my father has been the defining moment in my life, and created a hollowness and barrier between myself and others, as I felt no one else could ever understand.

Through this book I've realised that I'm not alone, and that although every loss and grief process is unique, there are some linking threads for those who lost parents in childhood. This book has given me what many years of therapy couldn't, that the loss is real, the hollowness is real, but I am now beginning to realise that although a defining moment in my life, my grief doesn't need to define me as a person anymore.

I found this book painful and exhausting to read at times due to its content, but also it is filled with such hope. If I could rate this 10 stars I would. This is essential reading for anyone who has lost a parent. I can't thank the author enough for writing this book.

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## **Michaela says**

While this book of insights gained from dozens of interviews with adults who lost a parent in childhood may be useful for readers in a similar situation, it did not have much to offer for a child currently facing such a loss. Given that the book is 20+ years old, and the subjects were generally middle aged when interviewed, the losses in question occurred roughly 50 years ago. Parental gender roles were largely typical, and there is no mention of the possibility that parents were not married when one of them died.

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## **Sue says**

Maxine Harris' book *The Loss That is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father*. This is another psychology book that is more than a "self help" book. Through case studies the author discusses bereavement and how to build relationships, and owning your own destiny. Keep lots of tissue on hand.

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## **Tre says**

This book offers great validation and insight into the "personal mythologies" those of us who have lost a

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parent, particularly during childhood create. I felt like I was reading a biography someone else wrote about me a number of times. For anyone who feels inclined to explore how the death of their mother and/or father has impacted who they have become as an adult, I highly recommend this book.

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## **Marie says**

Obviously not of interest for everyone, but found some good tidbits in here - but otherwise it took the formulaic approach of sharing vignettes from survivors lives to illustrate a range of reactions and implications, but with little insight. Covers the waterfront and may be helpful for those actually trying to help others who have lost a parent(s) more than perhaps those who have.

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## **Annie says**

I was looking through books on death and dying, when I saw this book. I ignored it, but kept feeling drawn to it. The title seemed a bit extreme, yet I kept wanting to pick it up. When I started reading, I realized that one of the people it was about was me.

If you have lost a parent as a child, please read this book. It is not a self-help book - but it leads to healing by acknowledging that the loss of a parent is a major event in the life of a child, changing that child's view of the world and affecting his or her life into adulthood. Like attending a 12 step program, and feeling instantly at home, this book opens doors to a community of like-minded souls.

Our culture used to minimize the effects the death of a parent has on a child. While adults grieved in their own healthy or unhealthy ways, children were often ignored, sent off to relatives, cut off from one-side of the family and often introduced to a new, substitute parent and expected to never talk about the parent they lost.

My own father died a sudden, fairly publicized death when I was 17 and my sister was 11. I've been painfully aware that there was one life before he died, and another one after, as clean a break as you could make cutting a thick rope with a sharp knife. But no one else - aside from therapists - seemed willing to talk about it. With children, it is important that the grieving process not be ignored or minimized, for how they process their grief will have a lasting effect on how they live their own lives.

While reading the stories in this book, I felt deeply saddened and warmly comforted. The book validated what I have known to the core of my heart for a long time. The death of a parent makes a hole that lasts forever.

Now, that hole isn't dark and deep forever. It isn't a huge pit you fall into and can't get out of, though at times it might feel like that. Instead, it is a loss, or an absence, that is always there, sometimes small, sometimes large. It can be healed, to varying degrees. But it is there, and it will not go away. Ignoring it only seems to enlarge it.

Harris' book offers the comfort of knowing that the reactions we had to our parent's death -- and still have, as we proceed through life without that parent -- are not abnormal. I realized that many of the things I did that weren't so good for my life were 'normal' reactions (and thank goodness I've learned from them all).

Better yet, some of the things I've done that have seemed a little odd to others are actually healthy and quite common. For example, in my personal pages I have a web page for my father -not a grieving memorial, but a

place filled with photos and memories to share with my own children, who never met him, and with other family members. In the chapter entitled "Staying in Touch," Harris tells how some of us talk with our parent, years after they've died. Other cultures have rituals to remember a lost parent. It isn't morbid -- it is a way to grieve, heal and move on without trying to erase memories that need not go away.

She tells stories of over 60 individuals, each with a very different situation. The chapters cover the grown children's struggles to grow up without one -- sometimes two -- parents; to risk loss in love and other relationships; the changed relationship with the surviving parent; issues in parenting their own children; dealing with their own mortality.

This book is not a self-help book, but a book that anyone who has lost a parent before they were 18 should be aware of and read when they are ready. It is also an excellent book for the surviving parent who wants to be aware of their own child's needs.

For me, this was an excellent and helpful book.

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### **April says**

This book truly is a must read for anyone that has lost a parent at an early age. It helped me figure out a lot about myself and the impact losing my dad at age 5 had on me.

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### **Madeleine says**

Een verlies voor altijd.

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### **Harry says**

This book is a life-saver. If you lost a parent before the age of 18, you owe it to yourself to read this book. Harris's book was incredibly validating, helping me to understand feelings and grief I had been repressing for 40 (!) years. Thank you, universe, for putting this book in my hands.

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### **Susan Brougher says**

I read this book years ago while searching for answers and hoping to understand how the loss of my mother formed who I am. There are not many books that help in a meaningful way when someone goes through losing a parent. The fact that I could relate to the stories gave me a needed comfort. It has been many years since my mother died of cancer when I was fourteen. This is a difficult subject but one that begs for more books written by those who have walked life's path without a parent to guide them. The loss is forever and the impact is lifelong.

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## **Irene says**

Important book for anyone who loses a parent as a child. I found it helpful to understand why I felt the way I did in my loss.

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