Dear Mallory: Letters to a Teenage Girl Who Killed Herself
By Lisa Richards
Reviewed by Teresa Ward, M.A., L.I.M.H.P.

New Required Reading?

Dear Mallory: Letters to a Teenage Girl Who Killed Herself is a 132 page paperback book of letters to Mallory, edited and co-authored by her mother, Lisa Richards. I am struck by the courage that it took Ms. Richards to share these letters so publicly, to try to make meaningful her daughter’s life and untimely death. Her letters are a soul laid bare and to share it in this way took a strength beyond my imagining.

The first part of the book is filled with letters from Lisa to her daughter, starting in the days after her suicide and throughout the first year. The second part of the book is letters from other family, friends and acquaintances written about a year after her suicide.

Extremely personal and poignant.
I read this book in one sitting, largely because it was so heart-wrenching, I wasn’t sure I could pick it back up again if I stopped. Her mother’s pain over the unimaginable loss and the mental torment of all the what-ifs and unanswered questions pours through every entry. It is an extremely personal and poignant way to demonstrate the long reaching ripples of suicide, through immediate family members and friends, to people who were barely acquaintances.

I have been in mental health practice for 16 years, and I was still shaken by the reality that this happened in spite of Mallory having a mother who had her own expertise and clearly tried desperately to do everything “right”; get her beloved only child the best of help, be mindful of signs, be present and there and always make sure her daughter knew she was loved.

Although no journey through suicide grief is the same, there are common threads. This book has the potential to be life changing for a number of people. I can only imagine that survivors of suicide would find some measure of comfort in the universality of the thoughts and emotion in the aftermath of their loss. Although no journey through suicide grief is the same, there are common threads throughout many losses; the wondering what could have been done differently, the asking of why, the trying desperately to find clues in hindsight, to make meaning out of any number of events or conversations that might have seemed meaningless at the time. It has the potential to have enormous impact on those considering suicide, from teens through adulthood, to see in black and white that we matter to each other in ways we may not even imagine. It could be required reading for teens and young adults to increase awareness that the things we say and do and the way we treat each other matters and we can’t take that responsibility lightly. I can’t imagine that anyone who reads it wouldn’t walk away with some new knowledge, insight or perspective. The format of this book gives impact different than any other
format with the same information possibly could. It makes the pain of the loss deeply personal and deeply real.

Since reading it, I haven’t had a day go by that I haven’t reflected on it and on just how much teeny, tiny moments can matter long after they have passed, whether it’s with people I barely know, clients in my practice, co-workers and staff, or my friends, family and child.