Unfinished Conversation: Healing from Suicide and Loss – A Guided Journey
By Robert E. Lesoine with Marilyinne Chöphel, MFT, (Parallax Press, 2013)
Reviewed by: Quintin A. Hunt

Unfinished Conversation: Healing from Suicide and Loss begins with an invitation to take a journey into the pain of loss. This journey, the authors claim, will lead through the heart of the pain and help to heal shattered hearts and to develop a new relationship with the one who is now gone. The base of the book is taken from a journal that Robert Lesoine kept after the death of his friend, Larry. Expertly woven into the raw feelings expressed in the journaling of Lesoine’s loss are the tools and techniques of Marilyinne Chöphel that will help to understand, heighten, experience and refine these emotions. The authors claim this journey will help anyone left after a suicide find greater perspective, meaning, and well-being in their lives. I agree without reservation.

When I began reading the book, I will admit that I was skeptical of the authors’ claim as I felt that I was being sold. However, the willingness of Lesoine to share his feelings in such an honest and sometimes vulnerable manner disarmed me. I connected with experience in a way that made differences in vocation, stage of life, or spiritual views irrelevant. Themes of Lesoine’s own experience of spirituality are prevalent in the book because they were prevalent to him; not because the authors were trying to tell me they should be prevalent to me as I had feared initially. In fact, it is because of these shared spiritual experiences—though different than my own—that I was able to connect so deeply with the book.

The guided journey in this book begins with an account of Lesoine’s experience of learning of his friend’s death. While the chapter acts as a preface for the following chapter—regarding shock and disbelief—it also gently invites readers to reconsider “getting over it.” Readers are invited to turn towards their pain and accept that a certain amount of grief may always be present but that it is possible to feel whole again. After this discussion of grief and shock, the authors then guide readers through feelings of responsibility, unanswered questions, feelings of abandonment, and many more common experiences after suicide.

Each chapter has questions designed to develop a further understanding of the experience of loss, sometimes to heighten the feelings, and also to bring the readers back down to earth. It is very worthwhile to note that with every exercise readers are invited to return to the present moment and be grounded. These exercises are valuable tools to cope with difficult emotion. As the book begins to close, readers are assisted in findings ways to remember their loved one but also to say goodbye as Lesoine says goodbye to Larry’s dog that served as a great connection and keeps Larry alive. The book also includes six appendices that are all extremely useful resources for this journey of healing, creating support, and for suicide prevention.
Unfinished Conversation: Healing from Suicide and Loss is a book that I will use in my own clinical practice and one that I will recommend to friends and family as well. The book helps to create some understanding out of an experience that is largely devoid of it. Most importantly, the book helps to believe that there really is hope that it gets better.