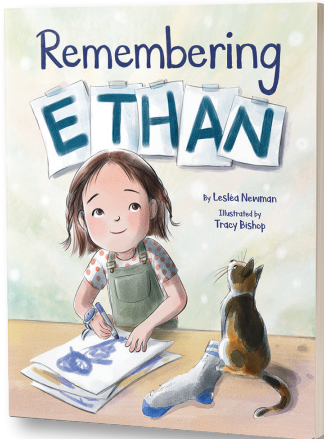




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Coping with Grief and Loss: An Interview *Remembering Ethan's* Author



Magination Press recently interviewed author Lesléa Newman, about her experience writing *Remembering Ethan*, a book about how a family copes with grief and loss. *Remembering Ethan* was illustrated by Tracy Bishop.

Magination Press: You are a beloved and award-winning writer who sometimes tackles tough or groundbreaking—even sometimes controversial—topics in your books for children. How do you find your topics?

Lesléa Newman: There is no lack of topics, considering the world in which we live is full of joy and sorrow. I look around and wait for something to tug at my heart.

MP: What inspired you to write *Remembering Ethan*?

LN: I was inspired by three things:

1. There was a list, composed by librarians, of topics that weren't being covered in picture books. Death of a sibling was one of those topics.
2. I have a friend whose very young daughter died. She said the hardest thing, among many hard things, was telling her son that his sister wasn't coming home from the hospital.
3. The character Sarah was inspired by Judy Shepard, who works tirelessly to make sure her son Matthew, who was murdered in 1998, will never be forgotten.

MP: What is *Remembering Ethan* about?

LN: The book is about grief and how one family unites to remember and mourn a tremendous loss.

MP: What have reader responses been?

LN: Tears. Lots and lots of tears.

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MP: What was unexpected about the writing process?

LN: I didn't expect the character of Ethan, who died before the book begins, to come alive as much as he did on the page.

MP: How do you see *Remembering Ethan* being useful to kids?

LN: I think the book can comfort a child going through the same situation. Children reading the book may realize that they are not the only ones who have ever lost a sibling and there is comfort in that.

MP: What did the illustrator bring to the story that brought depth or unexpected insights into your story?

LN: The illustrator, Tracy Bishop, did such a beautiful job! I especially appreciate how Sarah is wearing Ethan's watch throughout the story. That keeps him close to her. I can almost hear the ticking of the watch as similar to the beating of a heart.

MP: Do you have a favorite part of *Remembering Ethan* or was there a section that was especially challenging to write?

LN: Handling Ethan's death was particularly difficult. I spent a long time thinking about the way he died, and then decided not to be specific about that. My favorite part of the book is the next to last page when the family is all sitting together, remembering, feeling their sadness, and offering each other comfort.

MP: Was *Remembering Ethan* your first book to be vetted by a psychologist? If so, what was that process like for you?

LN: I believe it was the first time that a book of mine was vetted by a psychologist. I was very grateful to receive feedback through writing several drafts of the book, and I like to think each revision showed improvement.

MP: Grief is such a difficult topic—one that people are reluctant to talk about. This book is a great conversation starter. What other resources or strategies can families use to help process the loss of a loved one?

LN: In Judaism (my tradition) we have a week's mourning period called "sitting shiva." The house remains open, people come and go, bring food, sit and talk about the person who died, or just sit quietly with the mourners. We also donate to charities that were meaningful to the person who died. We remember them on special occasions such as the anniversary of their death. These rituals have helped me while grieving the loss of both my parents.

MP: What do you do when you aren't writing?

LN: Wishing I was writing! I also solve crossword puzzles, play with my cat, weed my garden, and read, read, read.

MP: Do you have any fun facts about you that readers might not know that you'd like to share?

LN: I have a green belt in karate!

MP: What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?

LN: My favorite children's book was *The Golden Treasury of Caroline and Her Friends* by Pierre Probst. It's about a little girl named Caroline whose friends are all animals. I am a huge animal lover and I wanted to be just like her when I grew up with friends such as Bruno the Bear, and Leo the Lion!