

REVIEW

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When Living Hurts, by Sol Gordon, 144 pp. UAHC Order Department, 838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021, 1985, \$8.95, softbound.

Sol Gordon wrote *When Living Hurts* for youth experiencing pain (depression, suicidal thoughts) and for their peers, parents and others who care about them. Gordon nicely captures the spirit of the book with this quote from Helen Keller, "Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it." Gordon's message is that while there is pain in life, there is also growing through and beyond it. The bottom line is hope. Life is or can be worth living. This review will focus on four reasons for sustaining hope.

Hope is developed, first, in knowing that you are not alone, knowing that others have been there too. While this thought by itself provides little comfort, it can be helpful when the author, as Gordon does, shares enough of his own story and struggle to generate connections as well as enough practical ideas to challenge, educate, and guide the reader toward taking the risk to try again. Learning, courage and starting over are the steps that transform hope into renewal of spirit, action and relationship. For this to occur, it can be helpful to know how others have navigated their way through troubled waters.

Next, Gordon suggests that hope depends on making contact with others. As a bridge to this contact, Gordon provides simple, straightforward information about how to get help for yourself or someone you care about. Suggestions range from some helpful things to do when you're lonely to a sampling of telephone hotline and crisis intervention center numbers. (Regrettably, this appendix is far from complete.) In the sections, "Dear Mom" and "Dear Dad," the reader is given words to use and permission to ask directly for the help he/she needs. In "A Message to Parents of Teenagers—Don't Turn Off Your Kids," parents are provided with information that will help them communicate with their children. Communication is the vehicle through which contact is made.

Third, Gordon indicates that hope depends on successfully coping with life issues. He provides concise, realistic information about concerns and choices we all grapple with, e.g., sex, love, dealing with guilt, boredom and not liking oneself. Some of the concepts mentioned have

been explored in Gordon's books on sexuality. The idea that unhealthy guilt reinforces self-defeating behaviors makes good sense in this context too. Without labeling and diagnosing, Gordon helps the reader identify behaviors that are unhealthy and confronts us with the choice of whether or not to continue these behaviors. It is suggested that there are many ways to move beyond fear and conflict and the reader is encouraged to find or create routes to freedom and sanity that fit for him/her.

Finally, hope rests upon developing a philosophy that nourishes and sustains living. Gordon's preference seems to lean toward a philosophy of personal meaning that grows out of encounters in relationships. This, of necessity, involves risking, learning and forgiveness. The path one takes is of less importance than that each individual chooses actions that are conducive to healing and connecting. The very process of choosing life over death, trying again over stagnation, enhances living. Becoming less concerned with oneself and more concerned with others is often the spark that rekindles hope.

When Living Hurts reflects the author's respect for life. It addresses pain without wallowing in it. It encourages people to choose while acknowledging that youth need education in order to be aware, and to make use of their options. While accepting that ultimately each of us has to choose whether or not to like oneself, Gordon challenges the reader to live. He suggests that help is available and gives the reader permission to seek it out. He uses simple ideas that lead to clarity. He demythologizes suicide, moving it from the arena of statistics, diagnoses, and helplessness into the realm of individual responsibility and hope.

I found *When Living Hurts* to be direct, helpful and inspiring. It is unfortunate that it presently is available only by ordering it from the publisher. My hope would be that the book becomes available for those who need it. The messages contained are vitally important for youth in pain as well as for those who are concerned about them.