major source of these impressions; she describes herself as "dazed," "bewildered," "living in a dream." The remarks of hollow-faced labourers scurrying to newly arrived prisoners for news of the war and of family and friends is brought several times before the reader. Likewise, the reader sees the process of imprisonment as it is taking place. Mayer writes of train loads of Jews arriving daily at the camp, of cart loads of bodies being towed away, of smoking crematoriums and of the smell of burning human flesh. Although she does not mention the number "six-million," she conveys the sense of the many people being involved.

One Who Came Back is a short book, written simply and in a matter-of-fact way. There is a message of how senseless and how real the murder of Jews was in World War II. The author wrote her book because she does not want people to forget. Not to forget is to ensure that a holocaust never happens again.

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Divorce North American Style: What it Does to Kids

ELEANOR SWAINSON

My Parents are Divorced, Too, Bonnie Robson. Dorset, 1979. 211 pp. $10.95 paper. ISBN 0-88893-010-0.

Divorced Kids, Warner Troyer. Clarke, Irwin, 1979. 174 pp. $12.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-1122-9.

"Children are not witnesses to divorce," says Warner Troyer, "they are participants." That being the case, it is astonishing that until now little has been written either for or about these children. Bonnie Robson's *My Parents Are Divorced, Too* and Warner Troyer's *Divorced Kids* are beautifully written and compelling books

that should solve this problem. It would be difficult to recommend either too highly.

What makes these books special is the element of warmth and caring evident on every page. The bulk of both volumes consists of interviews with children of divorce. All interviewers were volunteers, and although it was painful for them, most participated in the studies in the hope that they might help others in the same plight. Their stories are sad, and are told with engaging and poignant frankness. The authors have approached their subject from somewhat different perspectives, but both have written hoping to shed some light on the phenomenon of divorce and to ease some of the pain for those affected by it.

As a psychiatrist working with sometimes troubled families, Bonnie Robson found herself wondering what happens to divorced children and in writing this book, she attempted to find out. Throughout the book, twenty-eight teenagers tell their stories to the author and sometimes, in a group setting, to each other. Written primarily for teenagers (but also a "must" for parents), the book is much more than a compendium of their experience. By presenting in each chapter a variety of points of view including her own, Robson provides a cohesive overview of a problem and the possible responses to it. Her tone is warm, direct and reassuring and her message is loud and clear: each person's experience is different, but each is valid. This book should dispel the sense of isolation felt by children who somehow perceive their own misery as unique.

Robson is confident about the strength of our youngsters and pays them the tribute of believing that they can be of assistance to their parents. Mutuality is one of her concerns: "parents, support your children; children, support your parents."

The most important thing about this book, though, is the author's approach to feelings. It is both normal and perfectly all right to feel hurt, confused, and "irrational" and even, at times, to behave that way. Parents, she points out, do too. Nobody must be condemned for not being perfect. Self-acceptance, and therefore acceptance of others, is the key. The main thing is to try to understand and cope with feelings and, for teens and parents alike, this means to "talk it over." Although it may hurt, communication is paramount.

Troyer describes his book as an "intensely personal document" that grew out of his own experience as a divorced and separated father of eight children. Here is a passionate indictment of all well-meaning parents who let their children down, and there is not a parent among

us who will not recognize himself in its pages. Written for adults, the book could well convince teenaged readers that however insensitive, bungling and inept they may be, parents do care deeply about their children.

Hundreds of interviews with children of all ages comprise a catalogue of disappointments: the teenaged girl who came home to find her shared bedroom stripped of all but her own belongings; the seven-year-old whose parents' fighting at his birthday party sent small guests running for cover; the five-year-old girl whose father "threw out Mrs. Wiggins," her pet hamster. There are parents in these pages, too, who boast about how well their kids have adapted to the divorce. He talks about the chilling sophistication of children who are so accustomed to disappointment that they expect too little and forgive too easily.

If Troyer has one overriding concern, it is the need for honest communication on all levels. Many of the children in his book stress this themselves – the need for battling parents to talk with each other, the need for parents to talk with children, the need for children to talk with *somebody*, if only a counsellor. Most people, argues Troyer, are not as good parents as they think they are. Too often they overlook their children's needs, convincing themselves that they are sparing them pain. But pain is normal, unavoidable, and open communication is healing.

Although they are cautious about generalizing too much from the particular, the authors share a number of findings and viewpoints. Divorced children, they agree, are different because they feel different. They seek each other out. Children who haven't experienced divorce are described as "dumb," and are clearly perceived as not living in the real world.

Most children were numb with shock in the wake of their parents' separation, even those who could see it coming and were later relieved. Although small children clung to the hope that Mummy or Daddy would come back, few teens entertained any illusions about the possible reconciliation of their parents.

It is disturbing to discover that a majority of children of all ages felt guilty and to some degree responsible for their parents' break-up. Although these feelings were labelled "silly," they persisted – sometimes because parents fought about a particular child, sometimes because a child knew he had been the trigger of his parents' "shotgun" wedding, but more often, because parents had failed to explain the reasons for the separation. Mystery apparently produces

guilt and anxiety. One of Troyer's subjects summed it up: "No matter what, it would be better if they'd tell me why it happened. I mean, nothing could be any worse than what you imagine, if you don't really know."

The guilt of divorce is both a tragedy and a Catch-22, especially if parents are still engaged in active combat. A child feels guilty if he doesn't visit his absent parent, and sometimes equally guilty if he does. He resents dishonesty. If he spies on one parent for the other, he feels guilty; if he lies to avoid spying, he again feels guilty. Some children report that hearing parents put each other down induces feelings of guilt in them, for being willing to listen. Custody is an especially guilt-ridden issue; a child who chooses one parent sees himself as rejecting the other. Some children are given no say in the matter. "I felt like a ping pong ball," complained one of Robson's subjects, and a child interviewed by Troyer compared himself to a piece of luggage. Clearly, children must be heard, but they should not be burdened with the total responsibility of choice. Divorced children know instinctively that blame is futile – they don't want to be forced to take sides.

Many children report growing closer to either or both parents following divorce, but most claim feelings of loneliness as well. Visits often feel awkward or contrived and are too frequently dominated by "special" activities that preclude the chance to talk. Ordinariness, for the divorced child, becomes a precious commodity. Christmas, birthdays and graduations are painful too. Why, wonder these children, can't our parents put up with each other just for one special day?

Divorced children perceive themselves as strong, but their independence has been exacted at a price. None, in either of these studies, remained unaffected by his parents' break-up, and many were marked for life. This was especially evident in their approach to the future. They spoke about individuals changing and society changing. For the most part, they welcomed new mates for their parents, but they were afraid of commitment for themselves. They were cautious about love, marriage and parenthood; the phrases "be careful" and "be sure" cropped up regularly in their conversation.

Little children are seldom taken seriously and teenagers have rarely enjoyed good press. But the children portrayed in these books are more sensible, more mature and more loving than we could ever have imagined. Survival, these children realize, is impossible without self-respect. They have emerged through the fire intact and have learned to like themselves. Concludes one of Robson's subjects, "Whatever does not kill me strengthens me."

But divorced children are more than self-reliant; they are unselfish. These are kids who worry with intensity about their parents, their siblings and each other. Such caring is perhaps surprising in the wake of the "me decade," particularly in children who have had to sacrifice so much. Despite the almost universal and somewhat Panglossian assertion that the divorce was for the best, most children admitted to a permanent sense of loss. They deserve better, which is why these books were written.

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How to Make Friends with Reality

ROBERT MUNSCH

Good Times, Bad Times, Mummy and Me, Priscilla Galloway. Illus. by Lessa Calvert. The Women's Press, 1980. 32 pp. $4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88961-066-5.

Sloan & Philamina, or, How to Make Friends with Your Lunch. Patti Stren. Clark Irwin & Co. 1979, 36 pp. $8.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-525-39485-0.

I once worked for two years in a daycare centre taking care of a group of twenty children. Eighteen of them had working mothers who were either single or divorced. The mothers all had the same washed out look as a result of trying to cope with kids, jobs, laundry and life in general with too little time and not enough money. The children were all trying to meet their own needs for attention and affection from their very frazzled parents. Conflicts were common, especially since most of the children resented their mother's jobs.