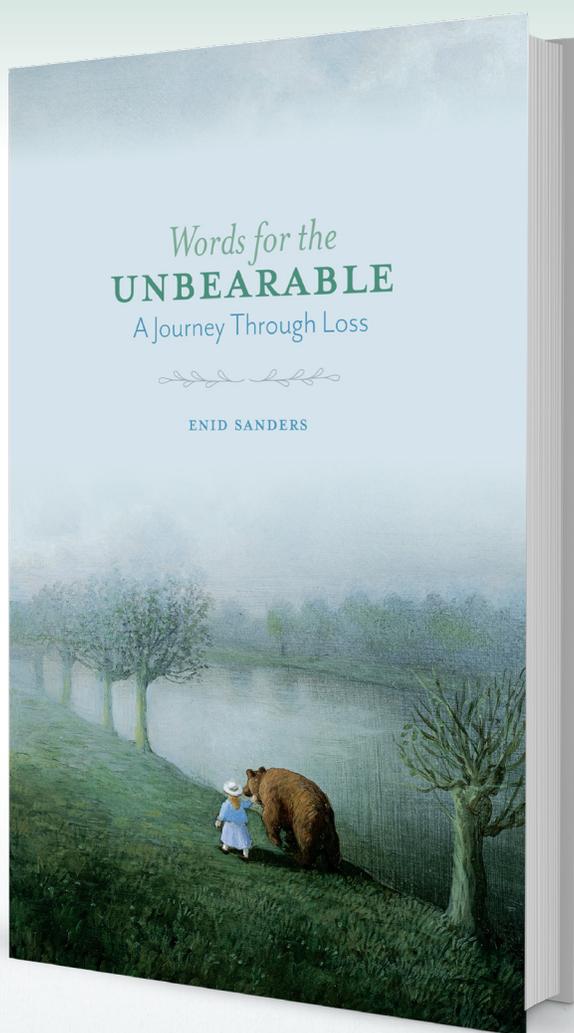


MEDIA CONTACT

Helena Brantley | Red Pencil Publicity + Marketing
HelenaBrantley@RedPencilPublicity.com | 510.350.7822 | @RedPencilPR

“I am wiping tears so that I can write...I feel as though I’ve been seen and heard and understood. Each poem is a picture memory, a reminder, a suggestion, a loving gesture, words that attest to the author’s love. I thought only I loved so deeply and hurt so profoundly, but she’s captured and clarified grief so well, it was comforting to read her words, even though many hurt like hell...Enid Sanders’ words evoke strong feelings and encourage reflection, while providing the strange comfort that comes from being understood.”

—Eliana Gil, PhD, author, *The Healing Power of Play: Working with Abused Children*
and senior partner, Gil Institute for Trauma Recovery and Education



When psychologist Enid Sanders’ first child Keri died, the young mother spilled out a series of poems and put them away in a drawer. Decades later, when her husband Andrew died, she took them out and started writing again. At first she wrote for herself, for Andrew and to Andrew. A poem would rise up from nowhere and she’d jump up and scribble it down, not knowing how it would end until she wrote the last word.

Little by little, she shared the poems with friends and fellow therapists who pushed her to turn them into a book. The title comes from a friend who read the poems and said, “These are words for me, words for the unbearable.” Because it is poetry, the book reaches people at a deep level, helping therapists, patients, hospice workers, clergy, and anyone who grieves.

Dr. Sanders brings 34 years of experience as a noted clinical psychologist and bereavement counselor to the writing of this book. Having trained with internationally renowned child abuse expert Eliana Gil and specialized in helping abuse survivors for 18 years, she now focuses on helping clients negotiate grief and transition. She’s also led popular workshops with institutions and companies from Xerox and Kaiser to Lawrence Livermore Labs and the Stanford Research Institute. A mother of four and grandmother of eight, Enid enjoys reading, writing and spending time with her family in Northern California.



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A Conversation with Dr. Enid Sanders

How are you and your family navigating life in quarantine?

During quarantine, I've been really aware that I'm alone and need to deal with this on my own. My two youngest daughters each have a two-year-old and a kindergartner at home and I tease them that they'll be in the hospital when this is over. My two other children with older kids are having a hard time in different ways. One was able to build a schoolroom on her house and hire a teacher—she's come a long way from growing up with a struggling single mother. The other had the opposite experience, losing a thriving business. It reminds me of the saying, "We're all in different boats, but in the same storm."

Your daughter died after heart surgery and your husband after a four-year illness. Is there a reason you did not specify his illness?

No reason. I just didn't think people would wonder why an older person died. He had complications from diabetes, including kidney failure and gangrene, and was on life support at the end. I knew people would wonder why Keri died because she was so young. She had Tetralogy of Fallot, a heart problem. Just after her first birthday she had successful routine surgery to fix it, but died unexpectedly 17 hours later.

How do you envision a therapist using your book with patients?

I can see therapists recommending or giving the book to grieving patients, and saying, "Are there any parts that spoke to you?" That will raise issues for the client. It may also trigger people to write their own poetry, or to paint. It tickles me that some of my therapist friends who are grieving have begun writing poetry themselves.

Some readers will be in the thick of fresh loss. Is there an ideal time and way to give this or any book about grieving?

After a death, I'd recommend giving the book in person if possible and saying, "here's a book that I found useful. I don't know if it will

help you. You can try it and see but don't push yourself through it." If need be, you can mail it with the same message. When I shared the first draft of the book with my grief support group, they said my loss helped them on their own journeys of grief. I could not ask for more.



You would like readers to understand this is a self-help book. Why? How?

I think it can help more than a self-help book, because it goes to a deeper place than most self-help books. People feel numb. By being literally "words for the unbearable" poetry touches places they can't get to. As a psychologist, I'm fascinated to see that different poems do different things for different people at different times. My colleague Eliana, who is a widow, said the poem that got her the most was "Last Time," which starts, "When was the last time we made love?"

How did you discover or encounter books after Keri and Drew died?

In my experience, when someone gets a divorce, they seek out all the books on divorce, and the same after a death. I did that. And my friends, who are therapists, recommended books. Maybe I just wasn't ready but I found most self-help books repetitive and condescending. It reminded me of my poem "Super Griever"—these books were telling me all this stuff when all I really wanted to know was how to bring my husband back. The only self-help book I found useful was "It's OK That You're Not OK," by Megan Devine.

For me, books like "Being Mortal" by Atul Gawande and "The Year of Magical Thinking" by Joan Didion helped a lot. So many self-help books try to tell you how to get past your pain. The truth is, the pain doesn't go away, you have to learn to allow it. I like the mindfulness acronym RAIN. Recognize the pain, Allow it, Investigate and Nurture yourself. I find that very useful, especially the "allow" part of it.

"It is rare that an author can capture both the emotional and intellectual experience of grief, but Dr. Sanders has succeeded...Most of us find it impossible to express that experience, but Dr. Sanders uses her work as a psychologist—and a poet—to help the reader identify, name, and deal with the profound and universal aspects of grief... a work of compassion and understanding that comes from the soul of someone who has loved deeply."

—Daniel Kostalnick, MD, psychiatrist



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