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Preface

Dearest reader,

The End of Silence is a book on how children who experience parental loss desperately need words and support from adults that will enable them to express their pain instead of remaining alone and silent therein. *The End of Silence* is a book on the pain and effects of discontinued relationships between children and their parents. The purpose of *The End of Silence* is to find ways to provide timely support and assistance to children in obtaining the required help to put their experiences, feelings, and thoughts into words. On the other hand, I want to provide the help adult readers need to gather the courage to seek help that they are entitled to and that is available to them.

Friday, 15 December 1978, marked the most painful day in the life of our family, a day that changed us forever. On that day, I was a 9-year-old girl whose father had died.

Even though it pains us to open up about tragic topics associated with our human existence that our society does not want to hear or listen to, I hold the firm belief that a discussion is urgently required. If we want to raise our common awareness as a society as a whole, we need to open up about pain by applying scientific discoveries on attachment, neurobiology and neuroscience as a whole. This is the only way to provide as many people as possible with help with a

capital H that they so badly need. In particular because a raised social awareness serves as one of the pre-conditions for the provision of proper and timely help to children and youth who have experienced parental loss.

Millions upon millions of children all over the world are faced with the tragic and traumatic experience of losing their mother or father on an annual basis. I am positive that parental loss marks one of the singular worst pains children can possibly experience by placing them on the shadow side of life very early in their existence. The effects of parental loss can be particularly severe if the relationship between a child and a parent is discontinued abruptly if the latter commits suicide and the child is left to their own devices in dealing with their grief.

The heart of the book is composed of experiences, feelings, reflections, and observations stemming from more than 10 years of psychotherapeutic work. The book also includes my personal reflections and insights established hand in hand with the findings of so many teachers who have written them down in their books or generously shared them with me during lectures and discussions.

In addition, the book contains insights and experiences associated with individual and group counselling sessions according to the Relational Family Therapy (RFT) model. Throughout the entire text, you will find italicised direct quotations that shed a tiny bit of light on the painful experiences of my clients (all quotations are published with their consent), Jana and I.

The term *traumatic loss of a mother or father* is defined as trauma induced by parental loss in childhood in the event

that the child has learnt of a sudden or violent death of a parent due to an accident, sudden illness, suicide or murder, has witnessed the sudden or violent death of a parent first-hand or has experienced trauma by discovering the corpse of the deceased parent which has led to severe psychological distress accompanied by feelings of extreme fear, helplessness, horror, and fear of loss of livelihood.

Having experienced so often how only simple words can help and provide us the assistance we need to find words again, it was my sincere wish to write the book in simple and understandable terms. Because I believe in the power of dialogue, I invited my friend Jana to join me on this path. The book was created in dialogue, in an emotionally safe environment, filled with trust and empathy. Covering and formulating the content of this book in ten chapters, I decided to discuss those topics which have brought me the most *relief* on the path of recovery.

Aware that our minds – as demonstrated by neuroscience – find it extremely challenging to accept change, some concepts are purposely repeated, highlighted and summarised several times throughout the text. Whereas change, new insights, knowledge, experience, and habits are of great importance for healing and learning and are accepted by the brain, if they are repeated patiently and persistently.

The wish to get to the very bottom of the origin of mental disorders awoke a good two decades ago during my social work studies under the mentorship of Professor David Brandon at the then Anglia Polytechnic University¹ in Cambridge, for whom I had to write several essays, out of

which two gave me the most food for thought: *The Significance of Madness* and *Does Help Have to Hurt*. Because I became so enraptured by the topic, I delved deeply into its very recesses and received one straight A after another. Ever since then, I have been treading diagnostics with extreme caution by always establishing a trust-based client-therapist relationship first.

One year later, during my post-graduate studies at the University of Bath in the UK and St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ireland, I became acquainted with counselling and working with suicide survivors bereavement groups – readily available in the UK and Ireland at the time – in greater depth for the very first time.

A decade ago, I also successfully specialised in Relational Family Therapy (RFT) at the University of Ljubljana, as established and developed in Slovenia by Christian Gostečnik.² I acquired such a great deal of new knowledge, exactly what I needed the most to gain an additional understanding and the ability to look my past directly in the eye. My studies enabled me to find the right words that I had been missing before and the causes of my feelings and emotions, so as to find the path back to myself and re-establish contact with myself.

In 2010, I started to run my first suicide survivors bereavement group in Slovenia, which was immediately recognised by its members as a precious and safe space in which they could speak up. During my counselling work, I quickly established that people with a similar experience to mine were still faced with the same feelings of helplessness, silence, loneliness, fear, stigmatisation, and other

anxieties that I once had even though more than three decades had passed since I lost my father. I kept wondering how that was possible. Had nothing changed during that period of time?

Five years ago, in May 2012, I spoke of my experiences in helping suicide survivors overcome their bereavement in public for the very first time by giving an interview for the Med.Over.Net online portal. Two broadcasts on that portal discussed how to go on living as a suicide survivor and how to support and help children who have lost a parent to suicide. This interview was followed by several appearances in other media. I could not help but feel how we needed to open up and speak, speak! Viewers, listeners, and members of my counselling groups have since then told me loud and clear that they also wanted to read more on the subject.

Even though the book is primarily intended for children, it should be read in particular by adults who can help children who have experienced parental loss-induced trauma. Children need the truth. They deserve it! It causes me so much pain to see children at the mercy of adults in their helplessness, to see how dependent they are on them. During the earliest years, everything is impressed into children and has an effect on them for the rest of their life. The book is also intended for teenagers and adults who also suffered a similarly severe experience years or decades ago and who have already embarked on the path of healing. I sincerely hope that the book can also prove helpful to all readers who are still in the process of gathering the strength to seek help and discuss their anguish.

The End of Silence has also given new meaning to my childhood's suffering that has enabled me to bond with millions of people all over the planet. I am of the belief that others shall benefit from this book in the same way that I have been touched by the courage of people who, once upon a time, recognised that boldness, authenticity, and the truth are the only path to proper healing. Just like their words had a healing effect on me, I trust that mine will have a healing effect on others as well.

I am a big advocate of sincere testimonies. I believe that adult witnesses, who can already do this, need to share with others what we, as vulnerable children, used to miss the most, which were the greatest challenges that we were faced with and what proved the most helpful. Even though the suffering of children who experienced parental loss in childhood cannot be avoided, you have the ability to let go of the victim role and provide help to others in your adulthood.

Reasons that have led me to the writing of this book also include the wish that it could be kept by people turning their backs to distress on their night stands and referred to whenever they find themselves in need of encouragement and hope. Even though I cannot be by the side of my readers in person, I would like to provide them with my moral support on the way out of silence every step of the way.

I trust, dear readers, that this book will mark one of the things that will help you be more empathic and gentle towards yourself, as healing of traumatic grief caused by parental loss-induced trauma in childhood requires a great

deal of power, strength, courage, and tenacity. I believe that you will do it.

If we do it hand in hand and join forces
– it can be done!

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