

**By Thomas M. Loarie**

# Book Review: Loneliness and the Feeling of Being Unwanted is the Most Terrible Poverty in Today's World

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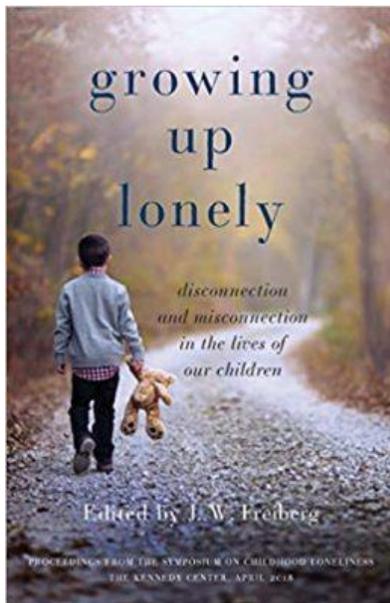
## Column: CEO Learnings

J.W. (Terry) Freiberg, social psychologist turned lawyer, explores what St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) called “The most terrible poverty” in his trilogy of books on loneliness –

- *Four Seasons of Loneliness: A Lawyer's Case Stories* (2016),
- *Growing Up Lonely: Disconnection and Misconnection in the Lives of our Children* (2019),
- *Surrounded by Others and Yet So Alone: A Lawyer's Case Stories of Love, Loneliness, and Litigation* (2020).

**Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted has grown significantly over the past 50 years and is pervasive in today's culture.**

“It is one of the greatest public health crises of our time,” states Freiberg and others. Research at the University of Chicago claims it is lethal. The chronically lonely are significantly more likely to become diabetic, have sleep disorders, develop high blood pressure, acquire Alzheimer's, and have poorly functioning immune systems.



**In 1970, only 17% of us lived alone.** Now it is estimated that one third of all American adults live alone, eat alone, and sleep alone, with 44 million Americans over the age of 45 suffering from chronic loneliness as measured by the UCLA Loneliness Scale.

One in four Americans report that they spoke with no one about something important to them in the last six months.

## Crisis of loneliness

This **crisis of loneliness is a plague rooted in post-communal urban life.** Our culture is characterized by the breakdown of the family, a significant rise in single parent families, eradication of multi-generational families, the uprooting of family and friends due to geographic dislocation, the vanishing of traditional communities, modern day employment with long commutes and workdays, social media cancellation and isolation, the hook-up culture, and a general lack of commitment to responsible behavior which engenders trust and love.

Older people no longer live in an extended family, providing childcare for grandchildren; they wait for death living in institutions that specialize in housing what becomes the terminally lonely.

Most recently, loneliness has been **exacerbated by coronavirus pandemic.** The social disruption it caused has hit people in new way as students, employees, and those in residential care facilities were being disconnected from their family, friends, co-workers, and social life. Isolation rooted in quarantines and lockdowns cut across all age groups, ethnicities, and income levels.

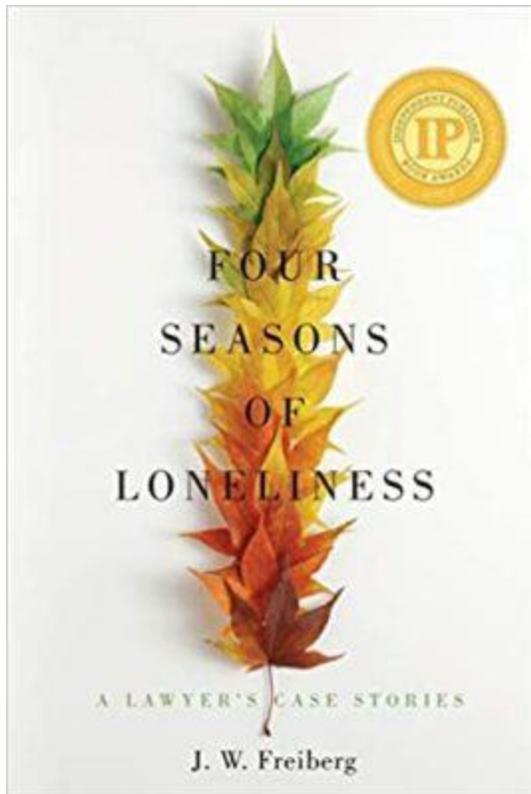
## Notable increase in loneliness, even pre-pandemic

**But even before the pandemic, I observed a notable increase in loneliness with each passing year among acquaintances both new and old. I sensed this was a significant issue for many, so I sought out Freiberg and invited him on my radio show, THE MENTORS RADIO, to share his insights on loneliness**

THE MENTORS RADIO airs Saturdays worldwide on Salem Radio and iHeartRadio. You can listen to this episode at <https://thementorsradio.com/how-to-overcome-loneliness-and-have-great-mental-health/> .

Freiberg, who has a **PhD in psychology from UCLA and a JD from Harvard Law School, has become a recognized specialist on loneliness.** He was **drawn into the subject area by other lawyers who sought his counsel in cases involving clients affected by chronic and debilitating loneliness.**

His *Four Seasons of Loneliness: A Lawyer's Case Stories* received the **IPPY (Independent Publishers Book Award) Gold Prize for 2017** for best Psychology / Mental Health book of the year.



Freiberg found that loneliness, which he says is not an emotion, but a sensation, was a very “interesting topic because you can’t write about loneliness without writing about connections. Just like you cannot write about hunger without writing about food.

The author found loneliness to be rooted in “the perception of an adequate connections, precisely the same way that hunger is the perception of inadequate food and thirst is the perception of inadequate hydration.”

## Three categories

In his trilogy, Freiberg outlines three categories in which we experience a loss of connection.

**Solitude:** the state of mind where one can be alone without being lonely: the monastic and his vow of silence, the Buddhist monk in a meditative repose, or a recluse who psychological makeup requires seclusion. Solitude is a choice.

**Loneliness:** an unwelcome sensation familiar to all. We experience it when we perceive detachment or separation from those we care about. It happens – throughout all seasons of our life.

**Chronic loneliness:** a devastating sensation. Those who experience it lead truly isolated, solitary lives, with no one to go home to, no one to call or be called by, no one to care for, and no one who cares.

As he gained experience working with hundreds of cases, the author discerned archetypes, recurring patterns, and themes:

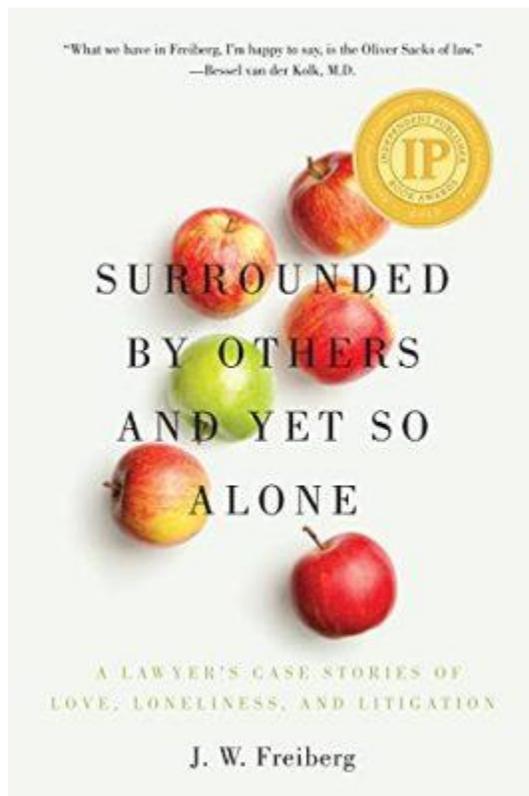
- There can be **powerful external forces** that can lead to loneliness.
- Loneliness can be determined at the moment of his conception.
- There is an **ever-increasing isolation** of individuals due to faulty relationships and tenuous connections (uncertain, tentative, or unreliable) including fraudulent connections (delusional, false representations, manipulation, obstructed connections (inability to love), and dangerous connections that could rise to the level of being life-threatening.
- Someone **can be in a relationship or group, and still experience loneliness.**

## Human connections are not possessions

The author notes that connections are not possessions; they are active, living, dying, dynamic processes.

To improve health and happiness, it is **important to build strong social networks.**

Assessing our connections, nurturing our connections, making new connections; all this takes time and effort and even courage. **This hard work should never cease**, as life is messy, and a “whole new round of



the network/relationship building will need our attention tomorrow, and the next day, and down the weeks, and years, and seasons of our lives.”

**Freiberg says the brain can calm emotions such as anger, but it can't soothe the brutal sensation of loneliness.** In his trilogy, **he offers strategies and countermeasures** rooted in his work to soothe and combat loneliness so we can enjoy a healthy connected life.

These include:

- **Understanding the importance of being aware** when we feel lonely or when we are making poor choices that expose us to loneliness
- **Being active in nurturing our existing connections and daring in creating new ones**
- **Grieving loss and moving through it by building new connections to replace** those that have faded or vanished

Each of Freiberg's books examines loneliness through **a collection of deeply moving human stories** of isolation and/or faulty connections in failing relationships. **His master storytelling** has earned him the tagline "the Oliver Sacks of law."

For those interested in this subject, Freiberg's trilogy will not disappoint.