



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 159

APRIL MAY 2017

When a baby arrives
Be it for a day, a month, a year or more,
Or perhaps only
A sweet flickering moment
The fragile spark of a tender soul
The secret swell of a new pregnancy
The goldfish flutter known only to you
You are unmistakably changed...
The tiny footprints left
Behind on your heart
Bespeak your name as Mother



Author unknown

YOU WILL NOT FEEL THE 'ALONENESS' OF YOUR GRIEF SO ISOLATING, IF YOU REACH OUT TO ANOTHER BEREAVED PARENT

RETURN ADDRESS
52 SUNRISE DRIVE,
SEAWARD BUSH,
INVERCARGILL
9812
NEW ZEALAND

TO

OUR CHILDREN

Children's names appear in this column if parents ask when they complete their annual donation form. You are also able to e-mail, write or phone me to have your child's name included.

This column includes names of those children whose anniversary or birthday occur in the months that the newsletter applies for.

You are also able to contact me if you wish to have a poem or piece, with or without a photo of your child included.

Once again, this is generally used for children whose birthday or anniversary occurs during the months of the current newsletter. I apologise for any omission or mistakes which I may make and ask that you contact me if this occurs.

Please contact me on 03 4326004, or TCF, Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru or by e-mail tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz



Our Children ... Remembered with love

Forever Young Forever Loved Forever Longed For

Andrew Meldrum Cox	Born 16/4/68	Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Died 6/4/02
Jack Stephen Dyer	Born 24/4/07	Rebecca Clare Halkett	Died 20/4/03
Nicholas Ian O'Hara	Born 17/4/74	Greg Holley	Died 6/4/85
Caren Amanda Phillips	Born 16/4/81	Matthew David Hubber	Died 30/4/00
Alan Bruce Scoringe	Born 26/4/66	Sally Verone Kitto	Died 23/4/01
Anthony Mark Staite	Born 5/4/74	Robbie Knight	Died 18/4/96
Jonathon Upton	Born 15/4/68	Jake Lucas	Died 26/4/77
		Nikolaas Remmerswaal	Died 1/4/12
Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Born 9/5/1978	Gary Brendon Thompson	Died 9/4/96
Nicholas Evan Hood	Born 12/5/1985	Hayden Watson	Died 11/4/97
Vicky Knight	Born 21/5/1980		
Paul John Nicolaou	Born 21/5/1964	Paul Graham Albrecht	Died 19/5/2004
Cindy Parish	Born 25/5/1965	Michael Barry Duke	Died 20/5/2005
Liam Veters	Born 1/5/2005	Ben Henderson	Died 15/5/2003
David Jason Eugene Walker	Born 7/5/1993	Thomas Craig McDonald	Died 25/5/2008
James Wing	Born 31/5/1980	Maryann Gaye Pearce	Died 27/5/2000
		Wayne Edward Summers	Died 9/5/1999
		David Jason Eugene Walker	Died 13/5/ 2000
		Peter Gregory Warren	Died 17/5/1998
		Dan Wells	Died 13/5/2003
		Timothy James Williams	Died 29/5/2005

Dear Friends,

14 years ago, my son was a vibrant, happy, carefree 14 year old. Now 14 years later, he remains forever 14 years old; in our memories, in our minds pictures, in the last photo, his school ID. Now Ben has been dead for the same length of time as he lived.

14 years.....

And us, how are we; how has the 14 years of missing, yearning, mourning, grieving shaped us? How are we different to what we could have been, had not Ben died? How has being a bereaved parent shaped who I have become?

I believe that apart from becoming a parent, becoming a bereaved parent is possibly the biggest life changing experience I have had. It has left me with a knowledge of pain, despair and grief that can only come from an experience such as this. It has also left me with a deep fear that something will happen to my youngest son, actually not just something but that he will die too. I am impatient with stupid people and mundane things and hate seeing and hearing stories of parental abuse and neglect (do they not know how lucky they are!!)

I am also more understanding, more compassionate, more aware of others pain. I have a need and longing to live this life fully. I try to not put off today what is important; talking with family and friends, spending time with loved ones and letting loved ones know they are loved. I have to make sure that I become a better person in memory of Ben and that I make the most of the gift of life which I still have and which was taken too soon from my son.

Let us learn from the lips of death the lessons of life. Let us live truly while we live, live for what is true and good and lasting. And let the memory of our dead help us to do this. For they are not wholly separated from us, if we remain loyal to them. In spirit they are with us. And we may think of them as silent, invisible, but real presences in our households.

[Felix Adler](#), *Life and Destiny* (1913), Section 8: Suffering and Consolation

If we kept in mind that we will soon inevitably die, our lives would be completely different. If a person knows that he will die in a half hour, he certainly will not bother doing trivial, stupid, or, especially, bad things during this half hour. Perhaps you have half a century before you die—what makes this any different from a half hour? ~ [Leo Tolstoy](#)

As mother's day approaches and passes I wish you all peace and love and hope that you too are able to travel the journey of grief and arrive at a point where you can live your life fully and share the love with others.

Take care of yourself and each other,
Lesley Henderson

**IN MEMORY OF
BEN HENDERSON
6/1/89-15/5/03**

You fall, you rise, you live, you learn. You're human,
not perfect. You've been hurt, but you're alive.

Think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive- to breathe, to think, to enjoy and to chase the things you love. Sometimes there is sadness in our journey, but there is also lots of beauty. We must keep putting one foot in front of the other even when we hurt, for we never know what is waiting for us around the bend.

Unknown – insprationalpicturequotes.blogspot.com

Page 3 TCF Otago April May 2017

Central Otago Compassionate Friends

Kia ora everyone.

We have been very fortunate to have escaped the severe weather experienced by a lot of areas throughout New Zealand. Hopefully no more adverse weather for the rest of the year!

Our next meeting will be Monday evening, 1st of May. I am hoping to have a DVD titled "The Gifts of Grief" for viewing. It is a documentary following the personal journeys of 7 bereaved people.

There will be time for discussion and of course, a cup of tea!

To all of you who are bereaved mothers – I hope that the hurting doesn't overshadow your loving hearts. We love our children so much and of course that is why we hurt so much when they have gone.

Arohanui to all,

Louise and Jan

Kapiti Coast Report.

Good Morning,

Goodness Easter upon us and Mother's day just around the corner. A sad day for many but a day full of memories; those first hand- made cards we all have kept, and breakfast in bed, if only cold toast. Up here on the Kapiti Coast, we are due for another dinner, always a happy evening. I must say we all support one another, with groups meeting for coffee or out for an evening at the local. All in all we are a happy group. Take care everyone and keep warm in the coming winter months. My sympathy to anyone having lost so much with the floods we have experienced, so lucky up here, no floods and very little wind.

Best wishes to all,

Anna Upton



An Open Letter to the Loved Ones of a Grieving Mother

I know you mean well. I believe you. I 100% believe you have the best intentions for her. She isn't the same person and that probably scares you. You think of her before her (and your) loss, and you might wonder why things aren't going back to the way they were. You try and fix her broken heart by telling her things that you would think would make it all better, or in the past make her smile. Somehow your words of comfort aren't doing the trick. She might even be pushing you away.

I beg you - don't take it personally. She hardly knows what to do with her own bazillion emotions, much less yours. So she isn't trying to hurt you, but she also might not have the best ways of expressing just how much she still needs you.

You miss her laughter. You miss her jokes and conversation about trivial things. You want to remember her child with her, but somehow - to you - it might seem like she's taking it a little far. I'm here to ask you to leave her alone. No, don't walk out on her. That's not what I am talking about. Quite the opposite. Let her go a little crazy. (She's not crazy, by the way.) She is grieving the death of her child. She is the only person in the entire history of the universe that feels the full impact of this loss. She's alone. She has you, but really? She is doing this by herself.

So watch her as she visits the gravesite frequently (or not). Go with her. She might say it's okay that you don't, but don't listen to that. She might not thank you for joining her, but go anyway. I guarantee your presence will not go unnoticed. Study the things that become suddenly important to her. Online blogs, forums, support groups, angels, wings, feathers, butterflies, certain jewellery pieces, songs, colors, places.

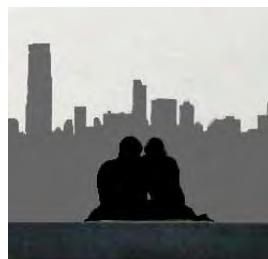
Don't stop obsessing over why you fell in love with her in the first place. She's still in there. I promise. She is doing her absolute best to mend her own heart but no one handed her the manual on how this was going to happen when the casket was lowered. She's winging it, just like you are. And you love her; so trust me when I say I'm on your side too. She sheds a thousand tears a day, and you might be lucky to spot a few. She knows you're tired of her sadness. She knows that you care, but she is also tired of seeing you exasperated when you realize you can't fix her. She hasn't stopped crying. She just cries more when you're not around.

So instead of trying to fix her sadness the next time, just listen. Nothing you can say or do or buy can make her pain any less painful. She isn't crying so that you will fix her, she's crying because she can't help it. It actually has nothing to do with you. You might notice her go from sad to depressed to completely angry and back to sad in a day. I know it's scary to watch someone we love become someone we hardly recognize anymore, but the things she needs more than anything is your unconditional and demonstrative love and support. She needs to know she is safe, no matter where she lands.

And we aren't forgetting about your pain too, because while she is breaking into a million pieces, you too are bearing the pain and weight of this loss, and to top that off maybe even a little misplaced, self-induced guilt for not being able to make her feel better. Admitting just how devastating this all has been for you too, can be a constructive way to reunite after loss. Consider opening up to her. Above all else, support her. In her anger, in her sadness, in her depression, in her lonely spells, in her confusion, in her wandering, in her distance and in her closeness. There are few things that hinder healing more than judgment from loved ones. She will make it through this to the other side. She won't always be bombarded by the most intense pain that new grief delivers on a regular basis, but she will never be quite the same. And she needs you to be okay with that.

Francesca Cox Upper and Lower Cape Cod Chapters

Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News





Mother's Day is just around the corner. It's a time for celebration, right?? We get together to honour our mothers, or to be honoured AS mothers.

But, what about the mums out there that have lost a child?? And what if that child was the only one they ever had born to them? Do they still feel like it's a day for them to be honoured? Or do they feel lost and in limbo, knowing that at least at one point in their life, they felt the honour due to them for simply being a mum?

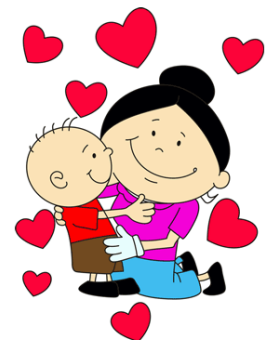
So many feelings can come out of this, and it is all too easy to fall into the negative ones. For weeks, the day is marketed by companies such as Hallmark, signs appear everywhere telling you to not forget your mother, special brunches are offered at restaurants... the list goes on and on. Despite whatever the underlying intentions of the marketing schemes are, feeling the crushing blow of a cruel reminder of yet another holiday that you will have to spend without the person that you are still learning to live without can be unbearably evident. So what's a mum to do?

Many people find developing new rituals to be helpful. If you do have other children, try to do all you can to focus on the days celebration with them. Even though Mother's Day is meant to honour the mum, kids (and especially small children) tend to thrive on this day and the ways they can pay tribute to the woman who brought them into this world. Allow them that! And for those of us who may know a mum dealing with the loss of her child (and ESPECIALLY if that was her only child), continue to acknowledge and recognize her on this day. People get so uncomfortable and often feel the need to "err on the side of caution" so as to not upset the person they care so much about. This, however, often leaves the mum simply feeling forgotten. A card, a phone call – even an email – wishing her a happy Mother's Day can go farther than you could ever know. While she's on her own path of redefining where she now "fits" on this day, you are helping her to know. She fits where every other mother fits – in the spotlight. She's still a mum, and she still needs to know that she is viewed this way by everyone else.

That said, other mums may find it easier to crawl into a hole and wait for the day to pass.

Although there will inevitably be "helpful" people offering their suggestions, it really comes down to what is right for the individual person. If this is your first Mothers' Day without your child, listen to what YOU feel is right for you! Don't listen to me or anyone else who tells you what you SHOULD do. Other holidays will, without a doubt, be difficult (and maybe especially even more so the first year), but due to the intense focus put on you as a mum, this just may be the most difficult one to endure.

www.psychologytoday.com
Gratefully reprinted from TCF Queensland Inc Newsletter



Coping with Mother's day

I am the mother of a child who died. And that makes Mother's Day very hard. Recently I was talking to a mother whose child had just died. 'What about Mother's Day?' she asked, through tears. It was hard to know what to say, because it's a terrible day for those of us who have lost a child. Other days of the year you can maybe make it a few hours without thinking about your loss; other days of the year you can pretend that you are an ordinary person and that life is normal. But not on Mother's Day.



On Mother's Day you can't pretend you are ordinary or that life is normal. All the hype, the cards, flowers and family gatherings, make it almost excruciating. Our town has a Mother's Day road race for which I am eternally grateful because, in a demonstration of grace's existence, the start and finish are next to the cemetery where my son is buried. On my way I can visit his grave and say what I need to say. At the end of the race, they give all the mothers a flower; on my way home, I go back to the grave and lay my flower there. And then I move forward with the day.

See, that's the real challenge after losing a child, moving forward. It's almost impossible to envision in that moment of loss; how can life continue after something so horrible? But life does continue, whether we like it or not. There are chores to do and bills to pay; morning comes, again and again. So you pick yourself up and you live, but you are never the same. At first, we are different because of our raw sadness. But over time, the sadness moves from our skin into our bones. It becomes less visible. It changes into wisdom, one we'd give up in a heartbeat to have our child back. We who have lost children understand life's fragility and beauty. We who have lost children understand that so many things just aren't important. All that is important is those we love. All that is important is each other. Nothing else.

It can feel very lonely, being the parent of a child who died. Especially on Mother's Day or Father's Day. We feel so different from those around us, all those happy people with children the same age our child was, or would have been. But over the years, I've come to understand that I'm not alone at all. There is a Buddhist story about a woman whose son gets sick and dies. She goes to the Buddha to ask him to bring her son back to life; I will, he says, if you bring me some mustard seed from the home of a family that has not known loss. She goes from house to house but can find no family that has not lost someone dear to them. She buries her son and goes to the Buddha and says: I understand now.

That is what I understand now. It doesn't make me miss my son any less, or Mother's Day any easier. But it helps me make sense of it; loss is part of life. There are no guarantees, ever. Our children, and all those we love, are gifts to us for however long we have them. I understand now too that we are together in this, all of us, in joy and in loss. It's the connections we make with each other that matter - it's the connections we make that give life value and help us face each morning.

Years ago, I chose words to say each time I go to my son's grave. It makes it easier to have a ritual. And over the years, the words have come to mean more to me. They aren't just about grief anymore. They are about who I am, what I have learned, and what I can give. 'I will always love you,' I say. 'And I will always be your mother.'

Clair McCarthy MD, TCF Johannesburg Chapter Reprinted with thanks from UK Compassion



Mother's day

As I write this, I am very much aware that Mother's Day is coming soon. That will be an undoubtedly difficult day in countless homes. For all the thousands of mothers who will be glowing with a radiant kind of pride and happiness at cemeteries where the sweet clear notes of a single spring bird perched nearby float over our heads and seem surely to have been intended as divine comfort for a heart full to breaking. You will hear of yellow roses being sent to a small church - "in memory of..." and a cherished story of a kind and sensitive friend who sent a single rose that first Mother's Day "in remembrance".

Always we struggle with the eternal questions - how does life in fairness extract from us the life of a beloved child in exchange for a clear bird call in a spring-green cemetery, a slender vase of yellow rosebuds or even the kindness and sensitivity of a friend who remembered our loneliness and pain on that day? Where is the fairness and justice in such barter? The answer comes back again and again - life does not always bargain fairly.

We are surrounded from birth to death by those things which we cannot keep, but which enrich, ennoble and endow our lives with a fore taste of Heaven because we have been privileged to behold, to experience, to wrap our arms around the joyous and beautiful. Can we bottle the fragrance of an April morning or the splendor of a winter's sunset and take it home with us to place it on our fireplace mantle? Can we grasp and hold the blithesome charm of childhood's laughter? Can we capture within cupped hands the beauty and richness of a rainbow? Can we pluck the glitter of a million stars on a summer night or place in an alabaster box the glow and tenderness of love? No, we cannot.

But to those who have been given the splendor, the blithesome charm, the glory, the glitter, the tenderness and the love of a child who has departed, someday the pain will speak to you of enrichment, the compassion for others, of deeper sensitivity to the world around you, of a deeper joy for having known a deeper pain. Your child will not have left you completely, as you thought. But rather, you will find him in that first clear, sweet bird call, in those yellow rosebuds, in giving and receiving, and in the tissue-wrapped memories that you have forever in your heart.

Mary Wildman, TCF Moro, IL
Gratefully lifted from TCF Minneapolis Chapter newsletter



Here are my Top 4 Tips on how to handle Mothers Day

Grief is a dynamic process, what worked last year might not work this year and what works this year will change next year. Leave yourself open to new ways of approaching where you are.

Also, if you have a tough year, don't get attached to thinking. "this is what it is going to be like for the rest of my life!" Accept it as simply being a tough year and look to find ways to improve it.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. You are the only one who can determine what you need. You are as individual as the relationship you had with your child. Honour your uniqueness.

Know that it's not just 'the day' that makes it hard. Often it's the days leading up to and following it that weighs on us. The anticipation and the letdown can be very exhausting. Set aside 10 minutes to check in with yourself—how is your energy, your mood, your body, your emotional state?

Don't be afraid to feel like you're moving forward—we don't HAVE to stay stuck, we can choose happiness....if for no other reason than you, of all people deserve it!

Paula Stephens—crazygoodgrief.com
Lifted with love from TCF Queensland Inc Newsletter

Anticipating Mother's Day

Before we lost our children to death, Mother's Day was a happy time. We each reflect back on Mother's Days past.....gifts, cards, special memories and one day set aside to acknowledge the best in our relationship with our treasured child.

With the death of our child, this dynamic was forever transfigured. Now, instead of looking forward to this day, we grasp at anything that will keep our minds away from it. Yet the anxiety still creeps into our minds and hearts; our stomachs churn and tears fill our eyes at the most inopportune moments. The dreadful count-down begins in late April and lasts for nearly three weeks.

This is the eighth Mother's Day I have endured since the death of my son. Each year I have the same, desperate anxiety, yet each year the day is a bit easier to handle. Each year the anticipation is far worse than the day itself.... "borrowing trouble" as my dad would say. Since my son is my only child, I do not have the comfort of other children nor do I have the need to put on a happy face. Instead, I am able to choose what I will do without feeling the burden of guilt.

While my first Mother's Day was filled with tears, subsequent Mother's Days have been more subdued. The choice to embrace or ignore Mother's Day is yours alone. Many bereaved mothers adopt a new perspective which honors their child and still gives normalcy to their family. Mother's Day is bittersweet for us. The pain is part of the love that we will feel for our children for eternity. We wouldn't trade one treasured moment for a cosmic reduction of our pain.

Some of us plan the day carefully. Some of us just "go with the flow." Some of us weep; some of us work. Some of us read, some of us revel in this special moment set aside just for mothers. Each of us makes a choice that is based on our own truth.

The day itself is not nearly as overwhelming as the buildup of anxiety and sadness which precedes it. I have found this to be true of all holidays, birthdays, death anniversaries and special occasions. I am trying to live in the moment. When the moment of Mother's Day happens, I will decide what I should do. I refuse to let others pressure me. I refuse to become maudlin over greeting card commercials and heart grabbing point of purchase marketing efforts. I will not be manipulated by the agenda of others.

But on Mother's Day, as on each day of the year, I will think of my son, remembering the child he was and the man he became. I will honor his life by doing the best I can with what is left of my life. I will remain in the moment and treasure my memories. And for this mother, that is enough.

Annette Mennen Baldwin

In memory of my son, Todd Mennen

TCF/Katy, TX Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter



I've learned a lot this year. I learned that things don't always turn out the way you planned, or the way you think they should. And I've learned that there are things that go wrong that don't always get fixed or get put back the way they were before. I've learned that some broken things stay broken, and I've learned that you can get through bad times and keep looking for better ones as long as you have people who love you.



-Jennifer Weiner fb/the idealist

Pregnancy And Infant Loss



In our society we avoid talking about death. The death of a baby is even more hidden because it so violates our expectations. A difficult challenge for many of us is society's refusal to acknowledge that the loss of an unborn or newly born child is the loss of a unique individual. The fact that our babies were in the womb or in our arms for such a little while adds to the pain and isolation of losing a child. However or whenever it occurs, a baby's death is a profound loss, and one of the most painful and traumatic experiences a parent will confront in a lifetime. Our attachment can begin before conception. When we lose a child, our hopes and dreams for the child have already become a part of our life. The loss of a child, regardless of gestational age, is a loss of part of our future. Memories, so important for the bereaved, allow us to experience a more gradual good-bye. When a child dies before or shortly after birth, we have precious few memories. Our child is gone and we have very little evidence that he or she ever really existed. This abrupt hello-good-bye relationship makes grieving very complex and painful. Unfortunately, many friends and relatives do not recognize the depth of the loss of an unborn or newly born child. Acquaintances may never have seen the baby and find it difficult to imagine our grief over a child we have never seen or perhaps held only briefly. Because so few people actually knew our child, our grief may be even more isolating. Although nothing can take away the pain, it may be helpful to know what others have experienced or found comforting as they struggled to deal with the intense grief that followed the death of their child. As we travel this path, it may be helpful to seek out those who are supportive in helping us cope with the loss of our babies. May we reach out and comfort one another on this journey.

[TCF: Verudugo Hills Chapter] Lifted with love from Johannesburg Chapter Newsletter

Grief is Unique

People in families can grieve quite differently. Maybe a mother needs to cry a lot, but a father needs to work out. Sometimes a younger sister may keep playing as if she doesn't know a person died. An older brother may want to spend all his time with friends, but maybe a middle brother may want to stay around his house and family.

Even twins can be really opposite in their feelings; one twin might be so mad he wants to fight and fight, the other might try to do everything perfectly to make his family feel better. Maybe dad wants Dave to be just like his brother, but Dave isn't interested in the same things.

George usually feels like talking on Sunday, but nobody else in the house seems ready to talk. Someone in the house wants to have lots of pictures of the baby around, but another person doesn't want to see them.

Grandma can't bear to hear Daddy's name, but the kids love to hear stories about him. Sue, who is twelve, feels better when she can visit the grave, but her other sisters never want to go. John wishes they could do fun stuff again, but his mum doesn't want to do anything.

Maybe there are differences in your family too. It's hard when people feel differently about the same thing. It would be a lot easier if everyone felt exactly the same at the same time, but people are unique in their feelings and in their grief.

If your family has different needs and wants, you'll have to figure out some compromises that will be okay for everyone. Try making a list of things that you like to do and things you don't like to do. If everyone makes a list and reads it to each other, you can figure out if there are any changes you can make to try and help each other. At least it will help you understand why the people in your family act or say the things they do.

It's not easy, but this is a time when a lot of patience is needed. Be easy on yourself and be easy on each other.

A very dear friend gave my husband and me some very good advice after the death of our son. "Hold each other tonight, for when you hold each other, you hold him. He was a part of both of you."

Barb Coe – Newsletter of the Centre for Grieving Children who have had a family member or friend die. Lifted from the TCF Victoria Newsletter

POETRY / MEMORY CORNER

You are all invited to submit poem's, in memory of your child/children. These may be original poems or one that you have read which means something to you and your loved ones. Please remember to add the authors name if known.

Ask My Mom How She Is

My Mom, she tells a lot of lies,
She never did before
But from now until she dies,
She'll tell a whole lot more.
Ask my Mom how she is
And because she can't explain,
She will tell a little lie
because she can't describe the
pain.

Ask my Mom how she is,
She'll say" I'm alright."
If that's the truth, then tell me,
why does she cry each night ?
Ask my Mom how she is
She seems to cope so well,
She didn't have a choice you see,
Nor the strength to yell.

Ask my Mom how she is,
"I'm fine, I'm well, I'm coping."
For God's sake Mom, just tell the
truth,
Just say your heart is broken
She'll love me all her life
I loved her all of mine.
But if you ask her how she is,
She'll lie and say she's fine.

I am here in Heaven
I cannot hug from here.
If she lies to you don't listen
Hug her and hold her near.

On the day we meet again,
We'll smile and I'll be bold.
I'll say,
"You're lucky to get in here, Mom,
With all the lies you told!"

Auther Unknown

ONE DAY, ONE STEP AT A TIME

As I travel forward on my journey
Taking one day, one step at a time
I cherish the 21 precious years
God gave me with my daughter
It doesn't ease my pain
Or heal my broken heart -
Nothing ever will
The cherished memories I have
Are mine and only mine
No one can take them from me
They are locked deep in my heart
To cherish forever
I am thankful to God
For the true friends
He has blessed me with
Who are always there for me
To share my tears (and laughter)
To listen, support me and
Let me say my daughter's name
I try hard each day
To be strong and carry on
But in my times of darkness
My tears will always flow
My heart will always ache
For a daughter I love dearly
And miss more and more each day
BUT each time I see
A butterfly, often in
The strangest of places
Or a rainbow in the sky
It gives me renewed hope
And strength to travel my journey
One day, one step at a time

Dorothy Kelly
Forever Alison's mum

UK Compassion

I'm not sure that I'm ok,
Don't even think I'm fine.
I'm empty on the inside,
But not inside my mind.

My mind can't stop thinking,
What more could I have done.
I really can't stop wondering,
Where did everything go wrong.

I'm not really here at all,
Just the shell is left to see.
I have become someone,
I never thought I'd be.
A Grieving Mother

By Lisa McCann
fb/grievingmothers

A club no one wants to join....

Recently I started going to a support group for bereaved parents. We meet once a month. It's not nearly enough, but there is also a telephone hotline available daily. All this is run by volunteers who are bereaved parents themselves. I was welcomed with the words: 'Nice to meet you but we're really sorry you have to be here.' Later that evening, someone said: 'It's a club no one wants to join... and one you can never leave.'

For the first time since Wes died, everything everyone said made sense. We spoke of the isolation we all experience; mental, physical and emotional. It's an inevitable part of being a bereaved parent. There is no standard way to overcome this, to deal or live with it. Isolation starts almost as soon as you hear the worst news you could ever have imagined. I will never forget my younger son's words as he came up the stairs to meet me at 05:56 on 26 January 2014. In a voice I'd never heard before, he quietly said: 'Wes is dead...' I wanted to scream, but no screams came. In numbed shock and utter disbelief, we just hugged each other. We were shaking, shivering, unable to speak. Like in some 1940s movie. I put the kettle on. We needed a hot drink, just to stop us shaking. Everything I heard made no sense. 'Am I awake?' I asked. 'That's exactly what I asked the police officer who told me, said Wes's mum, 'Yes, I'm afraid you are....' From being in everyone's world, I was suddenly completely in my own. My time had frozen; my life imploded.

Everything I did from then was on autopilot. Nature lets you use the anaesthetic effect of severe shock to carry on temporarily. There will be an unimaginable amount of things to think about and do. Somehow, you get these done. Then you have to tell people. That's never easy, especially when you are unaware of everything yourself. People will ask the thing you don't know about: how did it happen? In trying to comfort you they will say the most hurtful things. Your guard has dropped; you are vulnerable. You are not ready to hear things that you normally could filter out. 'I knew this would happen as soon as Wes got that bike....' said one. It was later followed by, 'Please keep his brother off bikes'. Had I been within reaching distance, I would have slapped this person hard. As I wasn't, I've employed a metaphorical slap instead. I don't discuss anything with that person anymore. The most helpful and comforting words to me have been six simple ones: 'I am sorry for your loss.' If you like adjectives, then just adding 'deeply', 'I am deeply sorry for your loss,' makes it even more comforting. Many people visited Wes's mother's house, where he had returned to live after finishing university. Almost all these visits, while I was there, were from those who sought to comfort, support and help us. But I remember one person well. We weren't quite sure who she was. At some point, she said 'Ah well, onwards and upwards.' I just glared at her, looked at the door and left the room. I think she took the hint.

So what's it like when one of your adult sons dies? So far, I haven't put it into words. It's like this: something hits you so hard that you don't have time to recover. It rips a whole chunk out of you, yet leaves you with enough so that you can limp along with life, day-to-day. Sometimes, it takes up all your energy to do even the simplest things. Yet, it's easy to pretend that you are getting on well, simply because you can't cope with others' words and reactions if you say you're not. This hole in my life can't be repaired or filled. Its rough edges, the numbing pain, will I guess, ease with time. But yet, part of my life will always remain frozen at 26 January 2014. There's no 'onwards and upwards' from there. Christmas is approaching. If I'm to get through it, I need a plan. I have one. I'm not going to do it this year. Maybe not next year. The pain will be too much. So yes, I'll seem unsocial and even antisocial at times - and sorry if I do - but this is selfpreservation.

So, why do we get isolated in our grief? Partly, it's because there are few ways of dealing with it in western cultures other than therapy. It is also because you need time to face it head-on. For some, it will mean withdrawing for a while. I've had concerned and well-meaning friends try to stop me from doing that, insisting that my life should be full and busy. That, I'm afraid, is a slapping offence. And please, please, don't talk about closure to me. 'Closure' is better used to describe something holding a bread wrapper together. I don't think you can ever 'close' the death of your child, but most, if not all us bereaved parents, will try and live with it the best we can.

Here are some things people have said and done that I consider slapping offences:

'Be strong.' Thanks for the advice but think about this. My eldest son has died. It was sudden and a complete, utter shock. Before you say something like this, step back. If you have children, close your eyes and think what life will be like without one of them. That's what it's like for me. Strong doesn't come anywhere into it.

'The good die young.' Unlikely. Statistically, it's probably the bad who die young; those who cause wars, engage in life-threatening activity. If the good dying young idea was true, then all parents would bring up children to be bad for fear of losing them early on in life.

'Think about your other son.' Thanks for this advice too. There isn't a single hour in a day when I don't think of my other son.

'Ring me anytime you want.' Thanks, but please don't say it unless you mean it and are prepared for anytime calls. I heard lots of these. Only one who said it is there for me at any time, apart from immediate family. I am eternally grateful to that someone I will only identify as 'Dr Mrs' and her family.

'If there's anything I can do to help....' This is positive, so why is it in the 'slapping' section? Well, if you say something like this, then please follow through. Don't let someone keep asking for help and listening to reasons why it can't be provided.

'I think you should do this or that....' I will only listen to you if you are a bereaved parent, but thanks for the advice. You may have already noticed my glazed expression.

'God knows all / These things happen....' To me, it's like hearing 'Paint dries...'

'It's all God's plan.' Well, it's a crap plan and knowing that is no comfort to me.

'Heaven has gained an angel / He is in heaven with God / He's in a better place now...' There is no better place for a child than with its family, so the idea of them being in an abstract place connected with religion is really not much comfort. I acknowledge there is something greater than human experience and have written about this. It's really not a good idea to say such things to those who have lost young children. It can cause deep, deep hurt.

Some people have shunned me. A few even before Wes's funeral. Sadly, those I had - up to then - considered as mutually supportive close friends. No problem - I understand. It wasn't an easy time for anyone. I have made a decision about that; the time, effort, energy and emotion invested in those friendships, I'm going to channel elsewhere from now. You can't get more positive than that!

Anil Herat anilherat@gmail.com <http://anilsays-hello.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/dont-go-yet.html>

Lifted from TCF UK Compassion Newsletter

A Stiff upper lip causes wrinkles...

The next time someone tells you to "keep a stiff upper lip," tell them I said it causes wrinkles.

Bereaved parents will generally say that losing their child has "aged" them. I used to have a baby face. Into my late twenties I still couldn't buy alcohol without showing my driver's licence. When I married I inherited two children from my husband's first marriage. I use to get a kick out of telling people I had teenage children, and waiting for the flabbergasted protestations to follow.

I was 33 when Nicholas died: I'm 36 now. Lately when I tell people that I have a 20 year old daughter no one bats an eyelash! Certainly no protestations – not even a "My you must have started young!" More like "Oh that's nice."

How old do I look anyway? What happened to me in those three years? I have a theory; that we don't get lines in our faces and grey in our hair and stress-related illnesses from the time we spend thinking about our child, crying and freely expressing our hurt and anger and guilt. We get them from the time we spend trying NOT to. Because we feel we cannot or should not break down before co-workers, friends, acquaintances, and many times, even family, we keep that upper lip as stiff as possible, and all of our emotions reined in as tightly as possible. Kept up long enough, without any release, and our faces take on that pinched look and the gut finally protests with a message of its own.

It's not that I seriously care about whether or not I have wrinkles or grey hair. I mean comparatively speaking, it's a minor occurrence. The point is, is that the outside tells the story of what's going on inside. I wish sometimes we could take "before and after" pictures at TCF meetings. So many times someone has walked into a meeting for the first time, and I've found out later that that person is much younger than I thought. Several months down the road, after sharing their child and expressing their grief, I'll notice a change – the same person looks ten years younger, his or her actual age. Grief is a very physical emotion. We should not keep it inside us it shows.

Think of how you feel when you really let go...let the tears fall freely, or let the rage out by screaming or beating a pillow. The face softens and the body relaxes. It exhausts us. Cure for sleepless nights? Don't wait till bedtime to do your grief work.

Grief needs to be expressed and released. There will always be situations where we feel it is appropriate to keep our emotions in check. That's fine. But also remember to do your grief work whenever you can. It's the most important thing you can do right now for your future. So the next time they tell you to "keep a stiff upper lip," simply ask; "did you know that is causes wrinkles?"

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– Linda Offutt TCF/Tacoma WA Reprinted from TCF Johannesburg Chapter newsletter



Sibling Page



When it's Grief, Not Depression

One sleepless night, I tiptoed down the stairs, slipped outside and stared up at the low-hanging moon, so close to me it looked as if it had been pinned against the black canvas with a thumb tack. I reached out a hand to snatch it from the sky, tuck it inside my heart, feel its warm steady glow burn through my body, filling the empty places my brother's death left behind. Perhaps I'd be able to float, or fly into the midnight sky, join him there in the crook of a star, swing our legs and whisper all that he gave to me in his short life. How he inspired me. Expanded me. I'd tell him my favorite parts about being his sister and the infinite ways he changed my life and is changing it still. I'd tell him how he taught me about love by giving me the gift to love and lose him in this lifetime.

Love, the lightest and heaviest four-letter word that keeps artists sweating and panting as they attempt to capture this elusive emotion in words, in brush strokes, in haunting notes strummed on an acoustic guitar. To open the chambers of our hearts to real intimate love—love for our children, our parents, our best friends, our lovers and our siblings requires courage. The courage to be vulnerable. The courage to allow another human being to tread into our shadow side, that sacred, secret space where our fears, our hurts, our unrealized dreams curl up and cower. Many of us let our loved ones halfway in, or three quarters of the way in, but protect the lady-slipper fragile parts that belong only to us. The last quarter of who we are as reassurance we'll remain whole and standing and alive when we inevitably lose someone we love.

At least this is the way I lived my life, I just wasn't aware of it until my brother Rocky died. Grief lit up those dark protected corners like someone shot a flare through my heart. Those fears, past hurts, unrealized dreams surrendered with their hands in the air. There was no more hiding. There was only me and my cracked-open heart, gazing bleary-eyed at the pieces of me I'd shoed into the shadows, said, "Keep quiet. I will keep you safe."

Three months after Rocky died, after my travels to Asia, after watching his ashes glint under the Balinese sun and drift away from me and his beloved wife and daughter and brother, after the memorial service in the states, after there was nothing left to distract me, nothing left to keep my mind from re-living that nano-second when my life blew apart as if I'd swallowed a hand grenade, I offered up a gift to my brother. I offered up a gift to me: to allow myself to dive into the deep river of grief.

I was terrified I'd drift away to some remote semblance of myself, but I was sure if I wanted to arrive somewhere new, it was necessary. I've known my sibling for forty three years. I remember when my parents brought him home swaddled in a blanket. I want to feel the loss. I want to because it honors what we had. It honors the sister/brother bond we shared. It honors the love we had between us. It honors my brother's spirit.

Moving through grief is a choice. I'm not talking about the aftershock, or the endless days, clutching photographs to our chest or breathing in the scent of our loved ones clothes or the desperate dire need to join them on the other side. I'm not talking about remaining stuck in the stages of grief. I'm talking about being present in the process, moving with it and through it so we can rejoin the living and hear the sound of our own laughter. Real laughter. Guttural laughter.

I'm talking about giving ourselves the space, the time to feel into the murky depths of our grief without the numerous assistants eager to numb the edges of our emotional discomfort: valium, anti-depressants (when it's grief, not depression), street drugs, alcohol and business.

Why is it we want to numb our pain? Where do we think it goes when we don't allow ourselves to feel it, breathe into it? I've witnessed it over and over as a therapist, the "assistants" and "distractions" that keep us from feeling love and losses fully. We would not know one without the other.

Only a few months into my own grieving process my doctor wanted to put me on anti-depressants. I said, "But I'm not depressed."

He said, "Well it's situational depression." I said, "No. It's grief."

We don't, as a culture, want to feel the depth of emotion that sears through the heart like a fire through a parched field. We want to slap some salve on the rising blisters, cool the hot, raging ache. But those blisters need to rise. They need to pop, scab over, and scar. I don't believe we ever "heal" from profound loss or that grieving has an end point. Overtime, our grief transforms into something new. Something different when we allow ourselves to feel our way all the way through it.

And even if it's not our pain, but that of a friend, a loved one, it's no easier. A human being in suffering bleeds an energy that is thick, and palpable. It cups its mouth over yours and siphons your breath. We don't want to suffer and we don't want others, too either. It hurts because we, me, you are powerless to transform those blisters into scabs.

As I stood motionless that night, just as my brother had done in a photograph where he and his two college pals tilted heads toward the sky, mesmerized by stars or the moon, maybe both, I thought about how that picture captured his spirit, the way he lived his life one moment at a time, immersed in the wonder of it all. My brother taught me about love, about loss. He showed me there's beauty in both. My blisters are not scars yet, I'm not even sure they've scabbed over, but I welcome them because the beauty in the pain is that I had the chance to love him in this lifetime. And that I'd choose over and over and over again.

Written by Susan Casey

Lovingly reprinted from TCF Queensland Newsletter

When Siblings are grieving...

Don't over protect us. We are trying to fit back into our lives, and overprotecting us makes it harder. Many feel that being stoic is being strong. Don't hide your grief from us. Show us that you grieve too, so we will come to you when we are hurting.

Information is important. We want to know what has happened or is happening, but we are afraid to ask for fear of hurting you more than you already hurt. Please give us the opportunity to ask questions, and please answer....truthfully.

We often feel we are being ignored when we are left with other people, especially when these people won't talk to us about what is going on. (Parents and family members can help us when they help others to be open).

Grief is an individual experience; it is full of ups and downs. Sometimes we're happy when you're sad, and sometimes we are sad when you're happy. Help us to accept that is all right.

Advice and easy answers to difficult philosophical questions don't help. Don't tell us something just to say something. It's alright to tell us that you don't have all the answers.

Don't tell us that we won't understand when we ask questions. We understand more than you think we do.

The Sibling Group TCF Acadiana Chapter, Louisiana. Reprinted from TCF Johannesburg Chapter newsletter

MY FEELINGS ABOUT DRUNK DRIVERS

My brother was killed by a drunk driver. His name was Stephen Bruce Slaughter. He was 12 years old. I do not understand why drunk drivers can mess up a family's life and get away with it. If they only knew what it does to a family.

I wish my brother's killer could have been there the night my family went home from the hospital soon after we learned that Stephen was dead. I wish he could have heard my parents screaming and crying for their son to come back and wanting to know, "Why their son?" I could only lie there in bed not knowing what to say or do. Maybe they should let people who drive while drunk, but who have not yet killed someone, witness and hear the cries of my family. I believe those people would never drink again.

The pain, anger, and hurt never go away. I now have three children of my own, and I pray to keep them safe. As long as there are drunk drivers, however, no one is safe. I pray that soon drunk drivers won't be able to kill others and not be punished for it.

[Denise Lewis, TCF, Atlanta, GA]

Lifted with thanks from TCF Johannesburg Chapter newsletter



MISSION STATEMENT

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance self-help organisation offering friend-ship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

The primary purpose is to assist them in the positive resolution of grief experienced upon death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings. The objective is to help those in their community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers and professionals to be supportive.



Do you need to talk? Our telephone friends are willing to listen.. Telephone Friends

DUNEDIN	Anne Lelena (Son Colin 22yrs Suicide)	03- 455 9274
DUNEDIN	Ngairie Penny (Marlene, 18yr old daughter MVA Nov '91)	03- 455 5391
DUNEDIN	Alexis Chettleburgh (22 yr old son, suicide.)	03-4777649
	Corinda Taylor (Son, 20 years, suicide)	021 2930094
CENTRAL OTAGO	Wilma Paulin (Son & Daughter, 6yrs & 3mths)	03-4493213
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Pessione (16 yr old daughter, accidental)	03-4487800 janpessione@xtra.co.nz
QUEENSTOWN	Arlette Irwin	03 4510108
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Johnson, Adult son, Neville, cancer	03 4488360
CENTRAL OTAGO	Louise McKenzie (David, 14yr, accident) Central Otago Co-ordinator	03 4486094 louise.mckenzie@xtra.co.nz
INVERCARGILL	Linda Thompson. (Ryan, 16yrs, Cardiac Failure. Dec 2001) Southland Co-ordinator*	03-2164155 027 390 9666
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	04 9387212 lorrained@paradise.net.nz
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI CENTRAL NORTH ISLAND	Marie and Ron Summers (Son, Wayne 23yrs, Suicide)	07 8954879
WANGANUI	Nina Sandilands (Debbie, 16yrs, Brain Virus)	06 3478086
WANGANUI	Keren Marsh (Simon, 23yo, car accident)	06 3443345 wanganui@thecompassionatefriends.org.nz
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

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