

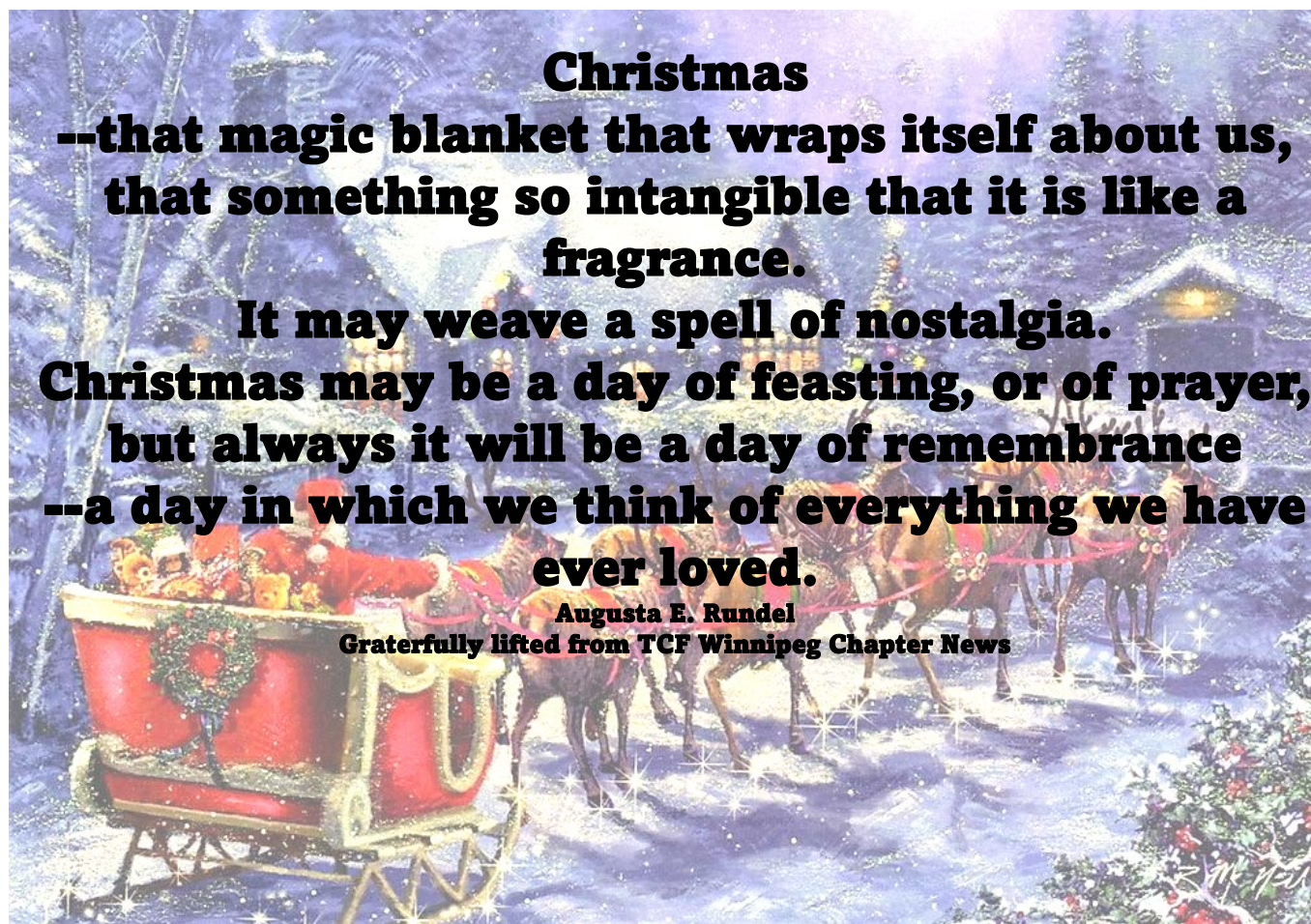
# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated  
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER No: 210

DECEMBER 2025 JANUARY 2026



## Christmas

**--that magic blanket that wraps itself about us,  
that something so intangible that it is like a  
fragrance.**

**It may weave a spell of nostalgia.**

**Christmas may be a day of feasting, or of prayer,  
but always it will be a day of remembrance**

**--a day in which we think of everything we have  
ever loved.**

**Augusta E. Rundel**

**Graterfully lifted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News**

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

**RETURN ADDRESS**  
**72 TOTARA STREET,**  
**NEWFIELD,**  
**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 021 2155279, or TCF, Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru or by e-mail [tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz](mailto:tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz)

Some of us live in a land where the time has come to start the holiday festivities.

We are surrounded by holiday ads, music and hustle and bustle of shopping.

A difficult road lies ahead for those that are grieving the loss of a child.

We may try to put a smile on our face but in our hearts the grief will remain.

You will be in our thoughts in the coming days ahead.

Our children will never be forgotten their memories will last forever.

Karen Cantrell, TCF/Frankfort, KY

## Our Children ... Remembered with love

### Forever Young

### Forever Loved

### Forever Longed For

Glenn Arscott	Born 12/12/81	Richard Cowie	Died 11/12/90
Stefan Francis Cockill	Born 12/12/57	Shane Elliot Davis	Died 13/12/84
Rick Daysh	Born 27/12/81	Jack Stephen Dyer	Died 6/12/07
Kirsten Patrice Flynn	Born 26/12/92	Gordon Legge	Died 30/12/96
Ryan Joseph Frost	Born 9/12/81	Leonard Donald McLaughlin	Died 1/12/84
Laura Johanna Hood	Born 31/12/89	Caren Amanda Phillips	Died 30/12/01
Matthew David Hubber	Born 10/12/78	Esme Caitlin Millais Stewart	Died 23/12/03
Daniel Philip Innes	Born 13/12/85	Ryan Ashley Thompson	Died 20/12/01
Keryn Sarah Langley	Born 2/12/98	Eddie Te Arihana Tutaki	Died 2/12/00
Jessie Lineham	Born 27/12/89	Ayla Rose Whitaker	Died 9/12/06
Andrew John Manson	Born 8/12/75		
Shaun Mataki	Born 2/12/83	Richard Craig Bell	Died 21/1/05
Maryann Gaye Pearce	Born 21/12/73	Simon Charlton	Died 14/1/08
Craig Noel Campbell Radka	Born 23/12/75	Sophie Kate Elliott	Died 9/1/08
Nikolaas Remmerswaal	Born 5/12/96	Ryan Joseph Frost	Died 16/1/99
Esme Caitlin Millais Stewart	Born 27/12/91	Laura Johanna Hood	Died 21/1/00
Wayne Edward Summers	Born 14/12/75	Tara Louise MacPherson	Died 14/1/05
Ben Watt	Born 28/12/87	Peter John Oxley	Died 6/1/96
Dion Wells	Born 5/12/61	Corey Ryalls	Died 13/1/99
Hayden Ross Whitaker	Born 12/12/86	Anthony Mark Staite	Died 19/1/98
		Dion Wells	Died 1/1/01
Claire(Mary) Benicarke(Schiehsel)	Born 10/1/75		
Randell Stuart Coster	Born 29/1/82		
Nicholas James Cox	Born 15/1/70		
Ricky George	Born 16/1/87		
Ben Henderson	Born 6/1/89		
Steven Micheal Jack	Born 21/1/71		
Kai Klein	Born 22/1/62		
Shane Parish	Born 21/1/70		
Corey Ryalls	Born 4/1/76		
Nicole Leigh Templer	Born 28/1/91		





Dear Friends,

With Christmas fast approaching, and then a New Year coming soon after, this is a time where a lot of us reflect on the year almost gone, of what has happened and on things we may or may not have achieved. It is also a time when we reflect and remember loved ones who are no longer with us, not only those who have passed this year but all those who are no longer with us. For bereaved parents and siblings the absence of our beloved children and brothers and sisters are often foremost in our minds.

Its interesting for me now, 22 years after Ben's death that 95% of the time life just goes on. It's good, actually a lot of the time it's great, but the other 5% is still so hard. I think of all that we have lost, not just Ben's physical presence but all the fun, laughter and memories which we never got to make, because my beautiful son, at 13 years old died—yes died. He didn't leave, he didn't pass, he died. It was really hard 22 years ago saying 'died' and now I can say it easier, so long as I don't really think about it. But even now, if I think about it and think about what that truly means it still devastates me. If I really think about it, tears, sobs and unbelievable sadness are just below the surface. And I know that many reading this will know exactly what I'm talking about.

But these feelings, these emotions, this anguish and heartache are what make us human. They are what love is all about. If we didn't love, didn't have these deep connections to our loved ones, we would be much poorer both emotionally and spiritually. Our lives would be lonely and barren. If we open ourselves up to loving and caring about others, we open ourselves up to losing.

I know that our lives are richer through having our children, even for a short time, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to have had Ben for the 13 years we did. And this Christmas as we gather we will reflect and talk and laugh about the many happy memories and years we were blessed to have him in our lives and no doubt he will be watching from above and laughing along with us as we remember some of the crazy things he got up to.

Merry Christmas Ben and all our children who will be watching over us.

Christmas blessings and wishes of peace love and hope to all my Compassionate Friends.

Love Lesley



## 10 Tips to Support Grieving Children During the Holidays

Grief during the holidays creates a perfect storm where joyous memories crash against reality and expectations. This emotional clash can be especially tough when the person grieving is a child. Parents and caregivers may wonder how to balance the holiday spirit while honoring the complexity of grief. Supporting a child through holiday grief isn't about making things perfect. It's about creating space for their emotions while fostering comfort, connection, and even moments of joy. Here's a compassionate guide combining practical strategies and meaningful activities to help children cope with grief during the holidays.

### A Story From a Grieving Child During The Holidays

I know this firsthand. On October 18, 1977, my uncle Doug died by suicide. I was seven years old. While I don't remember the specifics of the Thanksgiving and Christmas that followed, what stands out is that everyone tried to act normal when our situation was anything but. Even though her son had died just a month earlier, my grandmother cooked a full holiday meal, invited the whole extended family, and tried to carry on. That was her choice, and maybe doing something "normal" brought her some comfort. But I now know that her lifelong coping strategy for my uncle's death was denial, and I sense that staying busy was her way of avoiding deep pain. I wish it could have been different for her—for all of us—but it wasn't. My main memory of that holiday season is feeling confused and sad—mainly because no one was really talking about Doug. I wanted to talk about my uncle, and it felt strange that he was hardly mentioned. My mother and I discussed him in private, but as a family, there was no acknowledgment of the person who was no longer there. I find it interesting that National Children's Grief Awareness Day falls just a week before Thanksgiving. That's exactly when I could have used it most as a kid! In honor of this important cause—and for the grieving child I carry inside and the heartbroken families navigating a difficult season—this feels like the right time to reflect on ways we can support children through their grief during the holidays.

### 7 Ways to Help Grieving Children During the Holidays

#### 1. Acknowledge Their Grief and Emotions

Children may struggle to express their grief, especially when surrounded by holiday cheer. Letting them know it's okay to feel a range of emotions—sadness, anger, joy, or confusion—helps normalize their experience.

- **Validate Feelings:** Use reassuring phrases like, "It's okay to feel sad or miss someone this holiday season."
- **Normalize Mixed Emotions:** Help them understand it's normal to feel both happiness and grief at the same time.

**Model Emotional Honesty: Share your feelings appropriately to show them that grief is a shared experience.**

#### 2. Create Safe Spaces for Conversations

Children may worry that talking about their loved one will upset others. Reassure them that it's safe to express what's on their minds.

- **Storytime Conversations:** Read age-appropriate grief-related books together to spark dialogue.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Gently prompt with questions like, "What's something you miss about [loved one's name]?"

**Heart-to-Heart Time: Create space for quiet, one-on-one chats during calming activities like coloring or crafting.**

#### 3. Involve Children in Meaningful Activities

Creative activities can help children express their feelings and stay connected to family traditions. Engaging in thoughtful projects fosters a sense of inclusion and comfort.

- **Memory Wreaths:** Write favorite memories on strips of paper to create a meaningful wreath.
  - **Craft Keepsakes:** Make ornaments featuring a loved one's photo or favorite colors.
- Baking Memories: Prepare holiday cookies or meals their loved one enjoyed, sharing stories while you bake.**

#### 4. Honor Their Loved One with Special Traditions

Honoring a loved one's memory through traditions can create comfort and connection during the holidays.

- **Memory Jar:** Write memories on slips of paper to read together or save for future holidays.
- **Special Ornament or Stocking:** Add a personalized ornament to the tree or hang a stocking filled with messages and notes.

**Place of Honor: Light a special candle at the holiday dinner table or set an honorary place.**

### 5. Allow This Year to Be Different

The holidays after a loss will never be the same—and that's okay. Allow yourself and your child to create new traditions or skip activities that feel too difficult this year.

- **Skip or Modify Traditions:** Let children choose which traditions to keep and which to change.
- **Start Something New:** Create a fresh tradition like a memory walk, lighting a remembrance candle, or writing holiday letters to their loved one.

**Give Permission to Opt-Out: Let children know it's okay to take a break from holiday events if emotions run high.**

### 6. Maintain Routines While Allowing Flexibility

Familiar routines can offer comfort during the holidays, but it's also essential to adapt schedules if they feel too overwhelming.

- **Keep Key Traditions:** Continue traditions that feel meaningful but modify them as needed.
  - **Offer Choices:** Allow children to decide which holiday events they'd like to participate in.
- Be Flexible: It's okay to skip certain gatherings if emotions run high. Focus on creating a safe and supportive holiday experience.**

### 7. Understand Developmental Perspectives

Children process grief differently based on their age, maturity, and understanding of death. Recognizing where they are developmentally helps you provide the right kind of support.

- **Young Children:** Use simple, clear language and reassure them that they are loved and safe.
- **School-Age Children:** Offer space for questions and discussions, while involving them in family rituals.

**Teens: Be open to deeper conversations while respecting their desire for independence or privacy.**

### 8. Practice Mindfulness and Emotional Expression

Mindfulness can help children manage grief by encouraging emotional awareness and fostering calm.

- **Memory Drawing:** Invite your child to draw a favorite moment with their loved one.
- **Journaling Prompts:** Use prompts like, "I remember when we..." or "I feel close to them when..." to encourage written or artistic expression.

**Breathing Breaks: Teach simple breathing exercises for emotional regulation during tough moments.**

### 9. Don't Pretend Everything Is OK

Children are incredibly perceptive and will notice when something is off. Pretending everything is fine may confuse them or make them feel they need to hide their emotions.

- **Be Honest:** Use age-appropriate language to explain what's happening and why things might feel different this year, allowing their questions to guide the conversation.
- **Acknowledge the Hard Stuff:** Say things like, "I know the holidays feel different without [loved one's name]. It's okay to feel sad."

**Reassure with Love: Let them know it's okay to feel sad and still find joy. Both emotions can coexist.**

### 10. Seek Extra Support When Needed

Some children may need additional help to navigate their grief, especially if they're showing signs of distress beyond typical grief responses.

- **Behavioral Changes:** Watch for prolonged withdrawal, aggression, or trouble concentrating.

- **Persistent Sadness:** If they seem stuck in sadness or unable to engage in daily life.
- **Professional Support:** Consider grief counseling, school counselors, or local bereavement programs. Your local hospice will have a list of community resources, and may even have programs for children no matter how your loved one died.

Most of these tips are useful for grieving children, not only during the holidays but throughout the year. Keep in mind that, other than loving them and allowing them to share their memories and needs, there are no hard and fast rules, just guidelines. To learn more about this subject, listen to [Children & Grief: How To Help Kids Cope With Loss Early In Life with Jana DeCristofaro, LCSW](#) on the Mindfulness & Grief Podcast.

### Help Yourself First When You are Helping Your Child

Supporting a grieving child during the holidays can be emotionally draining, especially if you're grieving too. I want you to remember that taking care of yourself isn't selfish—it's essential. You can't pour from an empty cup, and your well-being directly impacts the comfort and stability you can offer your child.

Take small moments just for you—whether it's stepping outside for fresh air, calling a supportive friend, or simply sitting with a warm cup of tea. Prioritizing your emotional health not only strengthens you but also shows your child that it's okay to care for themselves, too. You're doing the best you can—and that's enough.

If you need extra support, please join me in [Awaken, my online grief support group](#).

Grief is a journey, not a task to complete. With your steady presence and loving support, children can honor their loved one's memory while discovering hope and meaning in the holidays—and beyond.

[heatherstang.com/7-tips-to-support-grieving-children-during-the-holidays](https://heatherstang.com/7-tips-to-support-grieving-children-during-the-holidays)

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Thoughts from the Chair  
Dear Compassionate Friends

And so it has arrived again. The winter, the festivities that come with it, the hustle and bustle that accompanies this time of year; and all I want to do is hide under a duvet. You too? Yes, I thought so.

While the rest of the world appears to be getting ready for “the most wonderful time of the year” we are bracing ourselves for the grief triggers to hit us and developing our coping strategies. What is it for you? I've ordered more wool than is seemly and will be knee deep in crochet projects for the duration.

The most common advice we hear is “Be kind to yourself. Do what feels right for you”. This, on the face of it, sounds like good advice, but how do you balance the conflicting needs and expectations of your family and friends with your own at such a complicated time of year? Or do you just escape? Is there any escape? In the second year, I was at the hairdressers and the topic, inevitably turned to the Christmas plans. I said that I would like to escape the whole thing if that were possible but I couldn't see how. Bless her, while my hair was being treated, the kindly girl went off to her phone and googled “escape from Christmas” and came back, very pleased to give me a list of places that I could go where Christmas wasn't celebrated. “I'll come with you if you like”, she said. Her kindness and thoughtfulness touched me. Of course, there is no escape really is there. All we can do is navigate it as best we can.

I was contemplating whether I could give any realistic advice on the things that people are troubled by the most at this time of year. Do you accept that kindly meant invitation? Do you make a polite excuse and decline? Do you satisfy the needs of those around you at the cost of your own? Do you stick to old traditions or do you do it completely differently? Cards or no cards? How do you sign them. Do you include your child's name or not?

The perplexities are endless and sorry, but this next paragraph doesn't contain the answers to those questions. We all do it differently and we may change our minds from year to year. One year, you



may feel more robust and find that you can cook a big meal and have a family day of sorts. Another year you may not be able to face it and retreat to your own space for a while. It is, quite literally, a movable feast.

The important thing to remember is that it doesn't matter. There are no rules. In the bigger picture, the only thing that matters, surely, is that we find a coping strategy that gets each of us through this time and out the other side. Most of us have done it before and will do it again.

But what advice would I give those for whom this is the first time? I remember my first Christmas. The pain was tangible and I found that I could barely breathe. I hadn't yet found The Compassionate Friends and looking back on it, (what I can remember for it is a bit of a blur really) I was quite literally lost. I remember thinking that I should try. That people would expect things from me. So I did. I went to a shopping centre and broke down sobbing in a department store. I might not remember much about that first Christmas, but I certainly remember the assistant trying to help me in that shop and how painful the whole experience was for me and must have been for her too. Why did I put myself through it? To comply. That can be the only explanation for what I was doing. Placing myself in a busy shopping centre buying gifts for people when all I wanted to do was scream. Why? Who needed a gift that badly for pity's sake? But, I wanted to be what everyone expected me to be and I was hurting myself in the process. I still can't explain why I thought I could achieve such a mammoth task. I guess it was because I didn't give myself the freedom to "do what's right for me". I didn't give myself permission to "do it differently" and I certainly wasn't "being gentle on myself" because no-one had told me I could or should.

I resolved then that things needed to be put into perspective. That I needed to find a way to balance the needs of others against my needs and to be proportionate. That's one piece of advice.

The other is the one I live by the most. Don't be quick to take offence. Remember, the non-bereaved speak a different language to us and a lot of what they say can get lost in translation. They also don't have the same knowledge as we do so they don't really know what to do for the best.

So for what it's worth, my advice is to take deep breaths and shrug your shoulders. I'll give you an example. We used to get hundreds of Christmas cards before. Then, the year that James died we got 6; one of those said "chin up" and another said "we hope that you are feeling better now". As if we were recovering from a cold! It really isn't worth getting upset about these things. People need educating, yes of course. That is why the work we do here at The Compassionate Friends is so important. We can inform people but of course what they do with that information is really a matter for them. As for us, the bereaved? Well we have enough to cope with without worrying about some Victorian traditions and how people apply them to us in our fractured world. Breathe, and shrug your shoulders.

Above all, hold on. We are all in this together and we will get through it together. The Facebook groups and Forum are good places for support and the Helpline stays open even on Christmas Day thanks to the dedication and commitment of our army of volunteers. If you need us, we are here for you.

Lastly, and most importantly, find some space for you. Allow yourself to lean into the grief, the missing and the longing for your child. Honour them and keep them close. We don't need to pretend. Who are we pretending for? The memories of Christmas past may sustain you in Christmas present. Let them come crashing in and allow yourself a smile remembering those happy times. We need them.

One moment, one breath, one memory at a time. I hope that the coming weeks are gentle on you all and I send you my sincerest wishes for a peaceful Christmas holiday season.

Maria (James's mum)

Winter 2018 - Compassion | [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)



## Coping with Christmas and other seasonal events—TCF UK website

The last months of the year are marked by a range of events, including Diwali, Hanukkah and Christmas, and then New Year's Eve or Hogmanay. For those of us bereaved of a child or children, grandchild or sibling, the arrival of this winter season of celebrations can leave us feeling anxious, overwhelmed or alone.

It can seem like there is no escape. Christmas in particular is all over the shops and streets, on TV, radio, in magazines, on the web and social media. The emphasis on all things joyful and life-affirming can leave us bereaved parents feeling even more isolated by our grief. The 'happy greetings' we receive from other people may seem insensitive when we are so devastated. On the other hand, this season could also give us welcome pause from the daily grind of life.

Some bereaved parents find that the run up to the event, with all the accompanying anticipation, can be more difficult to cope with than the actual day itself. In addition to Christmas and other seasonal events, the New Year celebrations looming in the background may also be unwelcome and even dreaded. This is all part of the landscape of our life now and something else to find our way through.

### Finding our way

Figuring out how to manage these times and events, especially in the early years of our bereavement, is likely to be an ongoing challenge. For instance, coping with a family reunion when our beloved child will not be with us may intensify our yearning for them. On the other hand, finding ways to acknowledge them may bring a little solace, especially if other people join in.

We will also need to cope with other people's expectations of us. We may find the anticipation and stress of what other people seem to feel that we 'should' be doing hard to deal with. When everyone else seems to be feeling positive and uplifted by the season, we can feel additional pressure not to come across as negative, gloomy or bringing down the mood. Additionally, if we have young children or grandchildren, we will want to consider their needs. For their sake we may choose to continue with our usual traditions, even if this is difficult for us. This season can be hard to bear, but it's worthwhile remembering that we won't always feel the same.

Most of us develop our own ways of coping with our grief. It is not always so intense. As the seasons unfold, year by year, we find our way through. In time, we will feel more confident making our own decisions. We will feel able to decide for ourselves whether or not to give presents, send greeting cards, decorate the home, put up a tree, attend a place of worship, join others in a meal or a time of fasting, or go to a party. We may still have our ups and downs. There may be times when we feel numb, but there may also be times when we actually enjoy ourselves – something perhaps hard to imagine early on in our tragic bereavement.

### If our child died at this time of year

It is particularly difficult for parents whose child died at this time of year. Planned celebrations will have been abandoned. Presents may already have been bought. Having to inform relatives and friends of the death of our child was doubly cruel. Now, as the season comes around again, we may find it forever associated not with celebration but with mourning. Every year we have to face people's expectations. Every year we have to find our own way of managing our private grief in contrast to the buoyant mood of the world around us.

## IDEAS FOR MANAGING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Here are some ideas, based on the experiences of bereaved parents, that we hope will be a help as we approach the holiday season:

### Doing what feels right for us

- We can try not to allow other people to dictate how we should get through this difficult time of year. We don't need to feel we have to go to the work parties or festivities if we can't cope with them. There is no right or wrong way with grief. We can listen instead to what feels okay for us at the time.
- We can avoid doing things because people are pressuring us, or perhaps feeling bad because we're not doing them. Whilst it's okay to be okay, it's also okay not to be okay.

Sometimes we won't know what we will feel like doing until the last minute. It could help to let people know in advance that we may need to decide on the day and we will come if we feel up to it, but may well not be able to. We might want to say that we will come for a short time only.

- We may want to tell people that we want to have our child acknowledged by others at this time. Family and friends remembering our child with a toast during a festive meal can mean so much. We could tell our family members and friends that we'd like to hear our child's name being spoken or memories shared. People often worry about getting it wrong or making us sadder. Sometimes it is up to us to let them know what we want, although this does not always work.



### **Managing this time when we have other children or people we are responsible for**

- For surviving children or grandchildren, having a 'normal' celebration can be important. Their peers at school will be celebrating, and they may want to as well, even though this can be painful for us parents. For their sake, we may need to suspend our own feelings for a time.
- We may have other relatives who rely on us, for instance to transport them to a place of worship or to organise a meal. If we are really struggling with our grief at the moment, perhaps we could try to make alternative arrangements. On the other hand, in years to come we may look back and be glad we were able to do what was needed, even if it came at a personal cost.

### **Coping with other people**

- We can make our own decisions about sending festive cards. Some bereaved parents choose not to. Others like to include their child's name – for example - "Love from x x and x and always remembering xx". Our friends may pick up on this and then include our child in their own greetings in future.
- It may help to talk with our family and friends about how we are feeling and our wishes for this time. Having even one person we can confide in can make a real difference, because unfortunately, not everybody in our circle will be sensitive to our pain.
- We should not put too much pressure on ourselves regarding visits. If there are difficult relations who expect to visit or for us to visit them, let's try to make things easier on ourselves. Perhaps we can tell them we can't do it this year or introduce a time limit - "We'll come over for a quick drink but will only stay an hour."
- During social occasions and visits, it can help to take moments away when we can. We might want to go for a short walk alone or with an empathic friend or family member. Going off to another room for periods of time to rest from the effort of making an effort could also help us gather our strength. Then we can re-join the event when we feel able to.

### **Allowing ourselves to feel happy, if that's how we feel**

- It is not being disloyal to our child to feel okay or happy at times. We might find ourselves enjoying a special meal, a drink, the good company of friends, songs and music. We may find comfort in familiar rituals or religious services. Adjusting to life without our child means that hopefully, in time, we will find more joy in living, and not feel guilty about this.
- Looking for creative ways to pass the time can help us get through the season. Enjoyable activities can be a good distraction. For instance, we may want to start a craft project, go on an organised walk, do a jigsaw puzzle or read up about a place that we'd like to visit in the future.

### **Getting through the season**

- Taking some gentle exercise every day is generally a good idea. This helps boost those much-needed endorphins.
- Volunteering can be a positive distraction, and also provide us with company if we don't have other family. For example, there are many charities that serve meals to the elderly or the homeless at this time of the year. But we should not feel that we need to take on anything we don't have the energy or motivation for. Let's try as best as we can to be kind to ourselves.
- Some parents try to avoid celebrations by going away and doing something completely different. We will need to be aware, however, that sometimes being away from supportive friends or family can be more difficult and the jollity of strangers may be painful. Christmas, in particular, is celebrated in different forms in many countries.

### **The arrival of a new year**

The turning of a year can feel like we are moving 'further away' from our child. The gap is getting bigger and bigger since we last saw them. It can also herald the start of a year where there would have been significant celebrations like starting/ finishing school, graduating and special birthdays.

New Year's Eve festivities can also be difficult. The celebrations of others, wishing us a 'Happy New Year', can intensify our yearning and grief. We can feel isolated from and resentful of the happiness of others. It might help to have a plan for the evening of December 31st – whether that is to be alone, or with understanding friends or family, who will allow us to be ourselves and remember our child at this time.

### **Wishes for the season**

After the death of our child, the winter holidays may continue to be difficult for many years and perhaps even forever. There will be a natural yearning for what might have been, an added poignancy to these occasions. However, we bereaved parents do survive these days, difficult as they are. What matters is that, as far as possible, we are able to do whatever feels right for us. In time we find our way to make new choices about how we spend the season. We may create new traditions to include remembrance of our child. We will always carry their memory with us, and alongside that, in their honour, we try to live the best lives we can.

## Speaking from the Heart January 2015

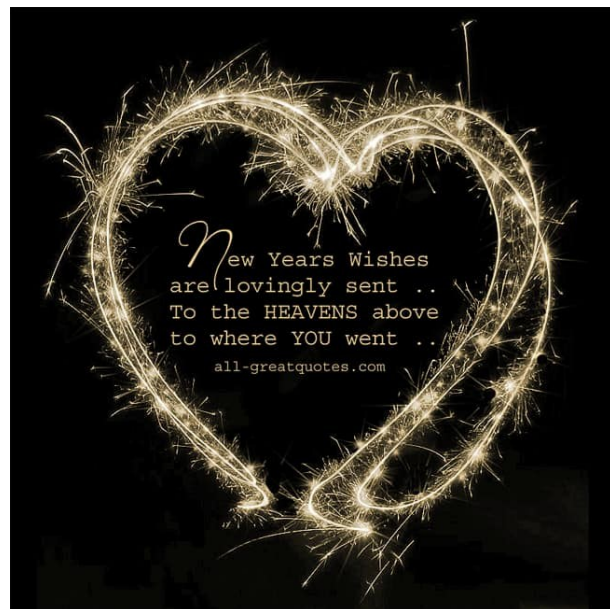
One of my New Year's resolutions was to not write my January column about the obvious topic of New Year's resolutions. Besides that, most of my resolutions have already been broken. What made me think I could swear off ice cream for 365 days anyway? That one didn't make it a week.

After scratching my head in search of a creative topic to write about, I decided that for this month, there will be no topic. This article will consist of random thoughts rattling around in my head, some musings my mind has collectively stored and are leftover from 2014.

1. We are making progress - The subject of grief and loss are becoming a little less taboo every day. I see a slight uptick in how our society views grief and how the media covers grief. While change is slow, I am optimistic things are moving in the right direction.
2. People are amazing - A good friend of mine who operates a non-profit foundation in honor of his son provided food and beverages for 17 TCF chapters in his home state to serve at their Worldwide Candle Lighting events in December. He did this under the radar, not seeking recognition. TCF has thousands of amazing people doing amazing things every day.
3. Grief is the great equalizer - At a recent TCF event I was sitting with a group of folks for an extended period of time. Each of us knew about the others' children who died and could recite the others' story. What was amazing is that among that group there was a multi-millionaire business owner, a taxi driver, an airline pilot, a school teacher, an unemployed software engineer, an ex-convict, and a Methodist minister. Where else but in TCF would you find such a diverse group sharing stories, tears, hugs and laughter? Nobody in that group cared how much money the other made, what type of house they owned, or what car they drove. We interacted as a family whose primary bond was the love we share for our children, grandchildren, and siblings.
4. There is hope - A television reporter recently asked me "what is it like leading a grief organization?" My answer was "I don't see myself running a grief organization, I see myself running a hope organization." In all that we say and do at TCF it is important to recognize and acknowledge the deep hurt and pain we experience, but we must also never forget that there is hope. I see it every day in the stories of those who have sought out our services feeling hopeless and have come to find hope once again.
5. Spring will come. The seasons are a great metaphor for our journey in grief. As surely as winter leaves a frozen blanket across the horizon as far as we can see, we know that in time spring will come. Even though our world appears to be lifeless in the harshest days of winter, our TCF family who have travelled this road for many years remind us that in time the flowers will bloom, the sun will shine, and our world will burst with color once again.

Grief work is life work - I used to think that my daughter Ashley's death meant I would have to work through my grief. Today I understand that I have to let my grief work through me. We are forever blessed by the experience of loving our children, grandchildren, and siblings who have graced our lives. We are forever changed by the experience of grieving their death. TCF allows us to fully experience the pain of loss and the joy of their memories.

Alan Pedersen, TCF Executive Director Gratefully lifted from TCF/Central Iowa and reprinted from Winnipeg Chapter 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.

It can't possibly be Christmas without her  
being here.  
Yet the world is singing round me, joyful  
tidings and good cheer.  
Though I try to put on armor and brave the  
sights and sounds,  
a few moments worth of shopping, and the  
tears are spilling down.  
I pray for strength to do it, find a path  
through holidays,  
look for shortcuts, good ideas,  
some directions through the maze.  
Then I find at last the answer:  
I'll include her symbolically.  
And the giving becomes perfect; her love's  
flowing down through me.

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry From Stars in the  
Deepest Night— After the Death of a Child  
TCF/Kamloops, B.C.

Reprinted from TCF Winnipeg



## Mother, Here I Am!

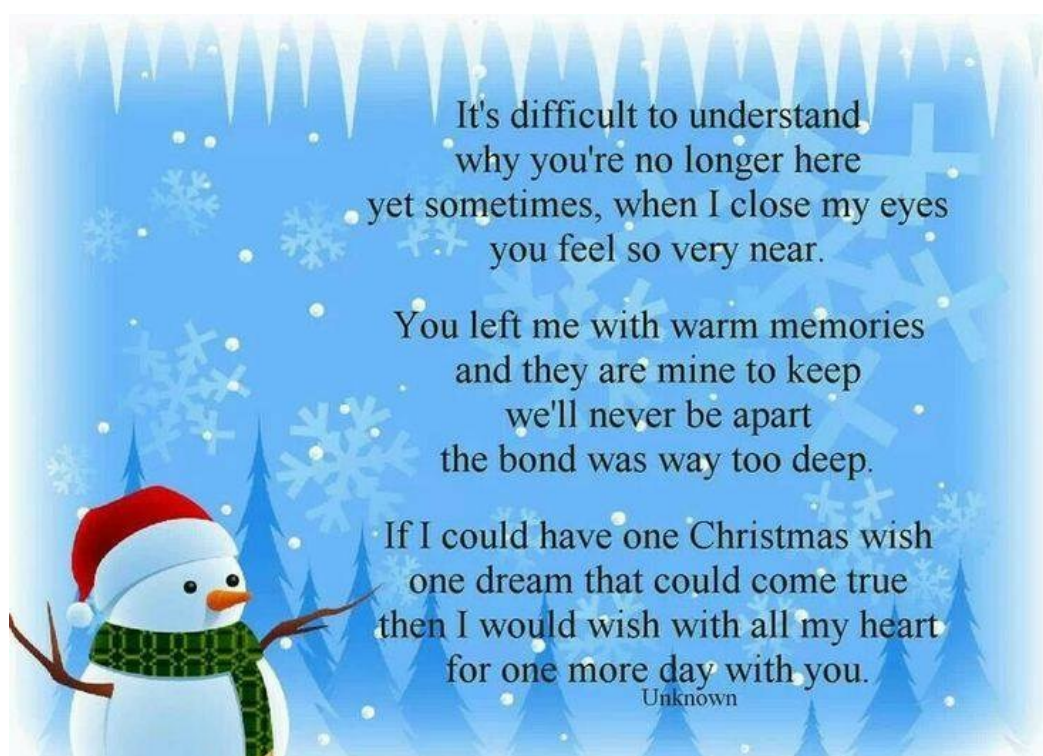
The tree is decorated  
The lights are hung  
Carols are sung  
Christmas has come  
But where, oh where,  
Are you, my son?

Mother, here I am  
In the Christmas star on high  
In a child's bright, wondrous eye  
In a grandmother's prayer  
And a bustling mother's sigh,  
In all the memories of  
wonderful Christmases gone by!

Judy Bonura, TCF/New Orleans









## Merry Christmas from Heaven

Throughout the Christmas season,  
 don't fall into despair,  
 Relive the special times we shared,  
 I promise, I'll be there.  
 You'll find me in the stories,  
 of loved ones who stop by,  
 I am the flickering candlelight,  
 My spirit did not die.  
 Continue with traditions and gather  
 around the tree,  
 I want you to be happy. . You were  
 everything to me!  
 So fill the house with laughter,  
 and know that I'm a part,  
 Of all the joy the season brings,  
 Here ALWAYS in your heart.



www.facebook.com/MissingLovedOne



A light like yours  
 can't go out.

And even though  
 I can't see you,  
 When I look at  
 twinkling stars,

I know you are  
 still shining  
 somewhere  
 too.

Princess Sassy Pants & Co.™

*Although it's sad to reminisce on Christmases we knew,  
 this year I shall celebrate in memory of you.*

*I'll put aside my sorrow with every unshed tear,  
 and concentrate on all the joy we shared when you were  
 here.*

*Our time together taught me what Christmas time is for,  
 and that's what I'll remember until we meet once more.*



loveliveson.com



# Sibling Page



## My Angel

When you died, sister, my world crashed around me.  
 My other half was ripped away from me.  
 Suddenly there was a gaping hole in my heart.  
 My days were dark without the light of your presence.  
 But you proved me wrong, for you are with me.  
 You show me your presence in many ways.  
 When I cry and ache for your presence.  
 You visit me in dreams, giving me a taste of Heaven.  
 You heal my broken heart with your smiles  
 Through my dreams, I know you are trying to  
 Help me pick up the pieces of my life.  
 Your presence is felt in other ways.  
 The scent of your perfume, an echo of your voice.  
 When I am angry or saddened over unanswerable questions  
 I receive an answer from the wisdom of a friend.  
 When I am alone and my heart is still,  
 I am filled with an inner peace and joy that can only be from you.  
 Though you're physically gone.  
 you live with me in my heart.  
 I know I have an angel to watch over me,  
 For that angel is you.



Colleen Burgess, TCF/Austin, TX  
 Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News









## 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.**



o you need to talk? Our telephone friends are willing to listen..

## Telephone Friends

DUNEDIN	Anne Lelena (Son Colin 22yrs Suicide)	03- 455 9274
DUNEDIN	Ngaire 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	Pauline Trotter (Andre, 25yrs, Car crash)	0273960611
INVERCARGILL	Josie Dyer Vanessa Young (Jaylene 6yrs chemical poisoning) Southland Coordinators	0276321742 0273562271
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	021 688504 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
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
WHANGANUI	Nina Sandilands (Debbie, 16yrs, Brain Virus)	06 3478086
WHANGANUI	Keren Marsh (Simon, 23yrs, car accident)	06 3443345 marshkandb@gmail.com
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

[www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz)



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