



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated  
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 172

JUNE JULY 2019



"There is a sacredness in tears.

They are not the mark of weakness, but of power.  
They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.  
They are the messengers of overwhelming grief,  
of deep contrition,  
and of unspeakable love."

— Washington Irving



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](mailto:tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz)



Your Wings Were Ready  
But My Heart Was Not

Winnipeg Chapter News



## Our Children ... Remembered with love

### Forever Young

### Forever Loved

### Forever Longed For

Matthew Alexander Birtles	Born 17/6/2004	Claire Benicarke (Mary Schiehsel)	Died 10/6/2004
Richard Cowie	Born 1/6/1974	Stefan Francis Cockill	Died 28/6/1994
Sophie Kate Elliott	Born 11/6/1985	Heath Neil Colina	Died 1/6/2002
Hayley Robyn Galpin	Born 29/6/1968	Matthew William Ross Dryden	Died 24/6/2005
Daniel James Gillies	Born 22/6/1986	Ian Peter Foley	Died 24/6/1987
Robbie Knight	Born 9/6/1975	Allan Stephen Hobbs	Died 27/6/1998
Claire Jillian Taiaroa	Born 25/6/1978	Callum Warwick Langley	Died 15/6/2006
Brendan James Vass	Born 30/6/1986	Keryn Sarah Langley	Died 15/6/2006
		Shaun Matakai	Died 27/6/2003
Mitchell James Beaumont	Born 13/7/1976	Jessie Adelaide Neaves	Died 5/6/2006
Heath Neil Colina	Born 18/7/1981	Claire Jillian Taiaroa	Died 19/6/1997
Te Ahu Aroha Foley	Born 2/7/1975	Melissa Jane TeHuia	Died 21/6/1998
Ben Paul Gillanders	Born 13/7/1977	Ben Watt	Died 3/06/2005
Matthew David Innes	Born 27/7/1987		
Jake Lucas	Born 10/7/1978	Terry Barnfather	Died 11/7/2000
Anna Ruth Iris Moore	Born 9/7/1974	Matthew Alexander Birtles	Died 1/7/2007
Brent Allan Stenton	Born 19/7/1974	Marcus Fitchett	Died 18/7/1996
Julie Barbara Warren	Born 9/7/1961	Te Ahu Aroha Foley	Died 2/7/1975
Timothy James Williams	Born 6/7/1980	Vicky Knight	Died 1/7/1980
		Aidan Samiel Konise	Died 23/7/2009
		Sara Loo	Died 19/7/2010
		Robert Shane McLaughlin	Died 4/7/2001
		Kirsten Jane Maydon	Died 23/7/1989
		Marie Anne O'Neill	Died 21/7/1985
		Julie Barbara Warren	Died 14/7/1985

Dear Friends,

Isn't the artwork below stunning and John Maddox has certainly summed up the feeling of being a bereaved parent.

For myself though I no longer feel "emptiness all the time". I do still sometimes feel the emptiness when I think about Ben, however it is no longer the all consuming feeling. Often many times now when I think of Ben it is with happy memories, and thinking about some of his exploits definitely brings smiles and laughter. However even with the laughter there is that underlying emptiness shown below.

While putting this newsletter together it struck me reading the article "what they don't tell you" which is on Siblings page is so true and much of what they talk about was how I felt in those first dreadful years. But these days it is only when I read articles like this that I recall just how I felt and what I thought then. I know that once I did feel and think most of what this article describes most days, but now many of these no longer apply or at least, do not cause the intense pain and grief they once did.

However even today, 16 years after Ben's death, there are still a few of these which continue such as thinking about Ben and the circumstances surrounding his death and the days leading up to it while driving, and also the fear of something terrible happening to my youngest son is still there, although these days I am better able to hide this fear. And of course "new joys always bring the worst pain" I think will always be there. Special occasions, especially those celebrating family members, where Ben is always missing and the thought that we will never celebrate those occasions for him, will forever bring sadness and grief.

But as I have said, life is now once again full of joy, laughter and happiness. It is certainly a life worth living and I try and live every day making the most of what we are so lucky to have, and in this way honour Ben who certainly made the most of every day he had during his short life.

For those who are early in their grief, it can be hard to believe that how you are feeling, and the thoughts and emotions you are experiencing now, will ever change, but believe me they do. Keep this assurance and hope in your mind during those hard times and trust and believe that you too, one day, will once again have a life worth living.

Take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Lesley.

July is Bereaved Parents Month.

John Maddox posted this powerful photo with the following quote, "We may look as if we carry on with our lives as before. We may even have times of joy and happiness. Everything may seem "normal". But THIS, "Emptiness" is how we all feel...all the time."

♥☐ God Bless those who have lost a child. (The artwork is called Melancholy by Albert György & is on display in Geneva, Switzerland) Read more about the piece and artist here --  
> <https://totallybuffalo.com/a-sculpture-that-creates-intens.../>



## Central Otago Compassionate Friends

Kia ora koutou.

Half way through the winter season.....according to me!!! We have had some very gloomy weather along with some lovely blue crisp days. Just like life, I reckon. The good, the bad and the ugly. My hope is that you are all able to cope with the miserable moods when they occur. If you need to ring for a friendly ear, please remember that Jan Johnson and I are available for phone calls as are Jan Pessione and Wilma Paulin. Or you may want to express your sorrow and sadness via email. Or you may want us to visit and sit in your living room while you mourn and try to make sense of your grief. Or you may want to meet over a cup of coffee somewhere. There are several options. Compassionate Friends is just that, friends who will listen compassionately because they know the heartbreak of having a much loved child die.

Sorry to talk about struggle! I am trying to think of something cheerful and uplifting to finish with! My grandchildren are coming to stay for the school holidays. I am going to harass them for cuddles and kisses. Poor kids!

Kind regards,

Louise McKenzie

## Sometimes

Sometimes in the middle of the night as I read, wash dishes, fold clothes, or sit quietly and pontificate about this or that, I hear your voice. The sound is so clear - "Mom," you say. Sometimes I answer back in an automatic response. I wait for a brief moment and then your voice is gone. I am startled and I freeze in place, not moving, not breathing, not blinking, just listening.

Sometimes I think I see you in a store or on the street, walking that unique walk that was yours alone. I look twice and realize it is not you. But it was a brief moment of joy to see that special walk.

Sometimes I think I have lost my mind. But most of the time I am thankful for these little reminders. Perhaps it is my mind giving me a sense of you. Perhaps the keeping of you in my heart brings this peace to me.

Sometimes when I come home from work, I find something on the counter that wasn't there that morning. A sock, a small socket wrench, a matchbox car. I ask my husband if he came home during the day. He didn't, of course. I wonder about these things, but then I also get comfort from them.

Sometimes I wish I could talk to you just one more time. I would simply listen to your voice, your excitement, your disappointment, your happiness, your enthusiasm, your concern....whatever you might be feeling. That would be enough. I don't need great revelations, just a conversation, just your voice.

Sometimes I could just scream at the inequity of your death. You, my only child, the one who gave purpose and meaning to my life, are gone forever from this plane. But then, I get a grip on my sanity and stop thinking negatively.

Sometimes I meet a newly bereaved mother and I see myself. I know her heart, I understand her torment, and I feel the pain that has wrapped her in its horrible, crushing grip. I listen to this mother whose world has been gnarled into a grotesque shell of life, and I ask about her child.

Sometimes I accept my reality, sometimes I don't. But I always keep you in my heart, taking you into the future as far as I, myself, will go. And that has to be enough. I cannot change the past. I can only live today and plan for tomorrow.

Sometimes, though, I am glad that my mind allows me these little forays into a parallel reality. These give me peace. In this world, peace is as ethereal as a fine mist near a waterfall.

Sometimes, reality is just too harsh.

Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF/Katy, TX In memory of my son, Todd Mennen  
Reprinted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

## A Bridge Between 2 Worlds...

Since losing our beautiful Phoebe almost 7 months ago, I have found myself caught between 2 worlds. Desperate to find a glimmer of hope, my first reaction was to seek out other bereaved parents hoping that they would be able to reassure me that I would be able to survive this loss and perhaps one day even thrive again. Support and encouragement is there, but sometimes the bleakness can be overwhelming and certainly my initial experiences left me feeling lost and wondering where to turn. I wondered whether I was better off spending my time in the "normal" world? However, although the support we have received has been invaluable, and as much as I appreciate everything our friends have done and continue to do, I cannot function fully in the normal world nor can I draw all the strength I need from it.

As a result of losing our girl, I'm an outsider and I can only live on the fringes. It's like being in a glass bubble, in a transparent prison; I can see people enjoying their lives; I wish I could step out and enjoy it with them, but I can't and I don't know if I will ever be able to.

So I have found myself needing to alternate between the 2 worlds and sometimes needing to take my leave from both. Neither provides everything I seem to need so I have set up camp on a bridge that I have built in between. My husband Ralph joins me here sometimes; overall he prefers to live mostly in the world of the non-bereaved, using it as escape, but when we do achieve a rare moment of retreat together on our bridge it is intensely reassuring.

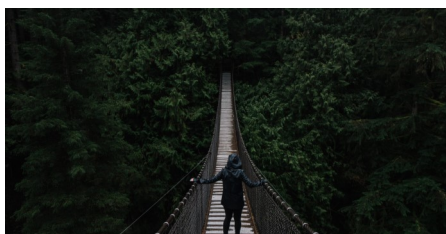
I suppose living on a bridge could feel somewhat precarious. When this analogy first came into my mind I visualised pictures of a medieval London Bridge before the great fire, complete with houses and shops, perilously balanced over the Thames. But, many modern bridges are amazing structures, like those featured on Megastructures in National Geographic; the Penang Sea Bridge in Malaysia, stretching 13.5km between island and mainland across the Penang Strait, The Oresund Bridge joining Denmark and Sweden and the Rio-Antirrio Bridge in Greece joining the Peloponnese peninsula to the mainland.

It gets very choppy and scary out here on the bridge, sometimes I am paralysed, I don't know to which side to run as I stand frozen to the spot trying to deal with the crashing waves of my emotions. But just like these aforementioned feats of engineering, I try to bend and sway through the rough seas, even if sometimes, it feels like I am only managing to cling on with just my finger nails, so intense is the pain. I googled to see if I could find any wise quotes about bridges and found this one: "If you are good at building bridges, you will never fall into the abyss", by a Turkish playwright, Mehmet Murat Ildan. I know nothing about him so please excuse me if he is of no particular note or even controversial, I just liked the words. I have increasingly felt so close to the abyss and where it not for words like these and the image of my bridge in my mind, I think the risk of falling in and being swept away would have been infinitely greater. A little more googling and I fell upon lyrics from a song from Pocahontas 2, "And we'll build a bridge of love between 2 worlds". I know it's only a song from a Disney sequel, so we can go with Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" if you prefer, but words like these and from the aforementioned quote give me some hope, that all important hope...

These words reassure and remind me that while I may not be able to reside completely in either world, I don't need to. I don't need to pressurise myself and I can live up here, in between, on my bridge, for as long as I need to. Having built my bridge, I can therefore choose on a day to day basis to which side I want to travel (or not) to draw strength, whatever the weather, and maybe, just maybe, over time the seas below will calm. But seeking out hope has kept me going and I have now been able to find beacons of hope via TCF, meeting brave parents who strive each day and through the dark moments to champion hope and grab onto what life still has to offer in a whole range of different ways. I have met them at the retreat for Newly Bereaved parents which I went to with my husband, Ralph in January, online as part of the TCF Loss of a Child forum and most notably at the warm, welcoming and accepting TCF Bolton group from where I have drawn inspiration, comfort, confidence and encouragement to grieve for and honour our beautiful girl, Phoebe, my way... Hope is there, I know it, I feel it, I trust it.

Claire Casson

Lifted with love from Summer Compassion UK chapter newsletter



**Reminders:** Sorting through possessions after a death Carefully dispersing loved ones' objects aids the grieving process.

**URGENCY CLOUDS DISCERNMENT** After a death, the memorial service must be planned, people travel to gather together, the house or apartment may be full of family, and people feel urgency about getting back to their lives, often elsewhere. But the stuff remains. Family members would say, "This exquisite china and crystal. Surely someone in the family wants it. What about Katie?" Often the younger person in question lives a different lifestyle, and the family furniture, tableware, art and rugs don't find a home. Some jewellery may be dispersed to friends and family, while much remains. A few items of clothing may be carefully saved, but most must be given away. A few books, records, CD's and scrapbooks find homes, but often people don't have room or the desire to acquire more possessions. I look back and wish I had saved a few more items from my sister, mother, father, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. But we were hurrying. We did the best we could under stress.

**CONSULT, COMMUNICATE AND RESPECT DIFFERENT WISHES** My brother and I decided, the next summer after our father had died, as well, that if anyone wanted to postpone a decision, or to keep an object, we would respect that. No exceptions. If no place remained for the object, the one who wanted to wait, or keep it, must find a place for it. We decided not to box china, flatware, linens, or fishing gear, art, and clothing to put in storage, hoping the younger members of the family might someday want them. We follow a "no-guilt-tripping" policy. If the niece says no, that means no.

**INTEGRATE INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE** I'm not a fan of "box it up and store it." If possible, integrate the remainders of a loved one's life into your own or others' everyday life. Grandmother's rose depression glass sits in my china cabinet. My sister's jewelry takes its place among my own. I can easily turn to one of my Dad's sermon manuscripts since I placed them in several binders on my bookshelves. When I sew on a button, I use Mom's sewing kit. My husband stores his Dad's screwdrivers in his woodworking shop; every time he reaches for one he remembers objects his Dad crafted for him. I often come across Granddad's one published novel, on Texas history, on our history bookshelf. My sister's tee shirt, silver sparkles on robin's egg blue background, remind me of the days just before she died. While too small for me, I touch it with a smile as I sort through my own shirts.

**REMAINDERS ARE REMINDERS** I learned that I could take pictures of treasures that I needed to release. This practice has helped me let go of objects. I know that as a baby boomer, soon I will decide what to do with treasures I have acquired in my lifetime. This is no time to add to my life footprint. I look at my own objects with a knowing eye, these days. As we go to dinner one evening, my husband comments, "That lapis pendant looks great with your new shirt." "It's Janice's," I reply, "as are these earrings." Janice was my younger sister. Wearing her jewelry helps me feel close to her. I could not wear her clothes either, since she was a petite size 2. My husband gently says, "Remainders are reminders that we loved them." We must let go of most of their objects, as we learned to let go of those we loved.

Below are five opportunities to build resilience after loss when dispersing loved ones' items.

**Frame their handwriting** – Frame a handwritten recipe or locate your loved one's signature on a letter, car title, or passport. Doing so not only gives you the chance to sort through these items, it provides new opportunities to talk about your loved one when family and friends come to visit.

**Upcycle clothing** – Reimagine your loved one's favorite sweater, shirt, or pair of jeans. Gather a few pieces and transform them into teddy bears, throw pillows, or bean bags. Pieces of fabric can also be used to create one-of-a-kind quilts. Read my post on upcycling and how I created a quilt with my dad's neckties.

**Curate a gallery** – Gather your loved one's official documents (college ID, driver's license, military papers, business cards, etc.) and turn them into decorations around your home. To create a cohesive look, frame objects in like-colored mattes and frames. A collection that spans multiple generations often works best, no need to arrange documents in chronological order.

**Approach textiles creatively** – Show off and enjoy meaningful fabrics – table linens, towels, ties, scarves, even curtains. Frame a portion of a wedding dress or display a religious garment or uniform in a case. Wrap a love-worn tablecloth around a large canvas and mount it on a wall.

**Donate objects** – Items of all types are of potential interest to museums and historical societies. Giving objects to professional preservationists and curators helps ensure the individuals who owned them will never be forgotten. Consider what types of objects you have and find organizations that maintain vast collections of them. By donating these items, you may also alleviate any guilt that bubbles up from parting with your loved one's possessions. Giving yourself permission to toss or transform your loved one's possessions accomplishes two distinct and complementary goals. One, it decreases the likelihood the items will become a burden; and two, it increases the chance that what's left will make you smile. Embrace this process as an unrivaled opportunity for healing and renewal

## Living Life Is Still An Effort

My husband's family held a reunion in July. We planned to attend and told the family to count on us. But when it came time to buy the tickets and make a commitment, I found I couldn't do it. I simply did not want to deal with the hassles of travelling, leaving home, getting out of my daily rhythm.

I am a different person since my child died. I am a different person than I was six months after my child died. And, I will be a different person in another year.

I find that I am evolving; my basic personality is still intact, most of my mind works well enough, my perception of life, love, people and events is probably heightened but fairly unchanged. Still I am a different person.

Now I work at living my life. I make myself do the things that I once took for granted....such as getting dressed each day, going to work, handling a number of responsibilities I have chosen to accept. I make myself laugh at silly jokes. Sometimes I even have to force myself to really listen to others. I am surprised when I laugh spontaneously, smile for no particular reason or say something "prophetic". What is going on here? Who am I? Why has the joy of life disappeared?

I believe I have found the answer to these questions and even to questions I haven't yet asked. It lies in the nature of losing one's child to death. Initially we work very hard to maintain sanity. Gradually we expand the boundaries of our lives. Carefully we add events, people, responsibilities and simple enjoyment. But our progress is measured in months and years, not days and weeks. My awakening to this new reality came at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends. It has been rekindled at each meeting since then. I learn about myself by observing others. I note the change in their voice, their body language, their perspective. I see the sorrow in each parent. I see parents whose children have been gone for many years still weep openly and later talk about a special event they are planning. Then I see parents whose loss was recent yet they appear to be normal, controlled and sociable on many levels and they suddenly and mysteriously crumble before my eyes.

That's the journey. We set our own limits as to what is acceptable for us. Over time we shift from minimalist boundaries to a good representation of the person we once were. We have major setbacks: birthdays, holidays, death anniversaries. We sob, we scream, we withdraw. But we do go on. With the help of our Compassionate Friends, we move forward and are supported when we suffer a setback. We each deal with the many facets of our grief. We learn from others. We teach others. We grow from the dialogue. Our kindred spirits bring questions, answers and peace. Who am I today? A fairly well-balanced mother of one beautiful child who no longer is alive. I am where I should be. When will I stop evolving? Probably never.

Annette Mennen Baldwin In memory of my son, Todd Mennen TCF/Katy, TX  
Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Newsletter

### VOICES

A book of poetry

Written by

Margaret Gillanders and Sandi Legg.

Poems which feature in our newsletter from time to time.

Margaret and Sandie have given us 100 copies of VOICES to sell

with all proceeds to go to TCF.

To order your copy send \$5 to

TCF

C/- Lesley Henderson,

76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D.,

Windsor

Oamaru

I have personally found that many of my friends and family have appreciated reading this book as it explains so well the many feelings and emotions

I have experienced but been unable to explain.

Thank-you Margaret and Sandie.

# The many lessons of my teacher, grief

Grief is a long and arduous process. Grief is also a teacher, which has imparted some pearls of wisdom to me, along the trek I am making through its challenging path.

Here are some of the things I have learned:

Grief is not a four-letter word. It's a normal response to loss.

Death doesn't just happen to other people. Grief is an equal opportunity offender. Every death is sudden.

Grief teaches you that time doesn't heal all wounds. It is what you do with time that heals.

Do not be afraid to ask for all the support you can muster in grief. You will need it.

Grief is not a problem to be solved. Grief is a feeling that must be felt.

You cannot postpone grief. If you do, it will bite you where the sun don't shine.

Crying immense and copious tears is important.

There is no expiration date or shelf life on grief.

It is more than okay to laugh while you are grieving.

In grief you lose your status, your identity, and your trust. But with self-compassion, you can rebuild trust and identity. Status takes a bit more perseverance and a lot of understanding friends.

Normal and grief should not be used together in the same sentence.

Grief will change your inner circle of friends. You are not the same person. Your grief and healing process will bring you closer to some people and distance you from others.

You will NEVER be the same person after your loss.

You will grieve your past, present, and future with your loved one.

Life's milestones will always be tinged with bitter and then hopefully, bittersweet emotions.

Grief gives you the power to say no.

Exercise is key to getting through the pain of grief.

Ask for all the hugs you need.

Grief teaches you that you are stronger than you ever envisioned.

Grief doesn't come in five neat stages.

Grief is unbelievably tough and very messy!

The pain of grief is universal but your journey is unique.

Grief teaches you not to judge others in their grief and be more compassionate.

Grief informs you that no matter how much time you had together, you always want more.

Grief instructs you that you are not in control in your journey of grief. Grieving helps you to find control again.

The marker date of the death of your loved one is not an anniversary. It is another hurdle to go through and check off.

Your attitude is key in grief. It takes a while to get to the point where you can invest in the process fully, which is a requirement towards your restoration.

Grief teaches you to be authentic.

Grief teaches you to bend flexibly into the pain so you don't break.

Grief shows the way toward self-compassion.

You will never stop grieving your loss. By allowing the grief process to continue, you honour your loved one, which is healing by default.

It does get better.

By Laurie Burrows Huffington Post

Lifted with thanks from Focus TCF NSW Newsletter

*"I have learned that some pain cannot be healed, but must be endured. I believe our Higher Power will help us to endure and find peace. I loved the boy with the utmost love of which my soul is capable and he is taken from me, yet in the agony of my spirit in surrendering such a treasure, I feel a thousand times richer than if I had never possessed it."*

William Wordsworth 1812

Lovingly reprinted from Childless Parents Newsletter UK



## Losing My Only Child

Q1. WHEN AN ONLY CHILD PASSES AWAY, HOW DO YOU KEEP GOING?

A1. My child Jai passed away on the 18th of December 2007. At first I didn't see any way through the grief and how I was going to pull through life and survive.

It has taken many years to come to a place of a different thinking. There are times I feel lost without Jai and I miss his physical presence constantly. However, I have decided that in order to keep going, keep living, I need to have fun, I need to do all the things that bring me happiness, I need to look after my physical wellbeing, I need to be kind and smile to all who pass my way.

I do all these things effortlessly, they have become a part of the change in me. They help me feel good about me and about living. Life is a gift and I have learnt to remain present and live with its turbulence.

Q2. HOW MUCH DID YOUR LIFE CHANGE AFTER LOSING YOUR ONLY CHILD?

A2. Initially after losing Jai I felt quite lost, lonely, angry, and very very sad.

I felt displaced, having moved from interstate to be close to him and then he was gone.

I felt stripped of my title of mother and that it no longer referred to me. I was a mess emotionally and tried to survive the best way I knew how. I needed a lot of emotional support and eventually ended up moving back to my parent's home where I felt safe and supported.

I have come to recognise the importance of living life to the fullest, stop procrastinating and take the stance that this is the chance I have now, to be the best I can be and enjoy all that I want.

I have learnt that I am important and my wellbeing is paramount to me.

I now know that I remain a mother no matter what, physical presence of my child or not, I am still a mother and so grateful to have had this opportunity in life's journey.

I am continuously working on becoming a better listener, more tolerant, more mindful and bring as much peacefulness into my life as I can.

Q3. WHAT HAVE YOU DECIDED TO DO WITH YOUR WILL, NOW THAT YOU DON'T HAVE A CHILD TO LEAVE IT TO.

A3. This is such a good question. All I have done with my will is rip it up. I haven't as yet delved into this part of my journey of loss.

Sarah Nola Bereaved mother of Jai (20) TCF Victoria Chapter

## WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

When a grieving family attends a TCF meeting, they may be so full of emotional pain that they can only sit and listen. To talk might require more emotional composure and energy than they possess. Others, fresh in their grief and quite possibly still residing in shock might choose to talk non-stop; others may choose to hide their tears and actually find ways to joke about life. All of those ways are considered normal and acceptable. But, either way, talking or listening, laughing or crying, dialog with other families who know and understand what you are going through will eventually be of extraordinary benefit.

Sometimes parents attend a couple of meetings of The Compassionate Friends hoping for a ninety minute miracle. Then, when the pain remains, or actually becomes more intense as it surfaces, they decide not to attend any more meetings, where painful memories might evoke tears. Sometimes the newly bereaved just don't have enough physical energy to attend a meeting. They struggle just to make it through the day. Others assume the mistaken belief that if you just don't dwell on it, it will get better with time. These parents may try to force the grief down deep inside, and some people carry the unexpressed pain inside for years, where it continues to simmer and fester until it manifests in serious physical consequences.

Unresolved grief does not go away. It can be eased or masked for a time with drugs, and often a parent turns to tranquilizers, anti-depressants or other medicinal chemicals with unknown risk, seeking permanent relief from the emotional devastation. But true healing occurs through a long process involving time, love and understanding of others, and by acknowledging, discussing and ultimately learning to accept all the feelings and experiences which surrounded the loss.

It takes inordinate courage to confront the Demon of Death and the loss of a child. It also requires a certain amount of love and care for your fellow human beings to continue to share with other newly bereaved. But ultimately, when we decide to walk this walk with The Compassionate Friends, the love and support we offer to one another - as together we travel the road to healing - brings comfort, strength, understanding and finally, a newfound sense of purpose in our life. We are not alone, and by truly caring for one another, we can help each other go way beyond "just surviving". We are truly sorry for your loss and we extend ourselves to you with compassion and love.

# Creating A New Map into Uncharted Territory

## The Journey of Bereaved Parents

From the moment we found out you were coming into our lives, we felt electric: a mix of excitement, adrenalin, and a dose of fear for good measure. We dutifully began plotting the course of our lives together - starting with milestones like kindergarten, puberty, graduation, career, wedding, grandchildren, etc. Then we began making our maps more detailed with our hopes and dreams for you. We prepared as well as we could for your arrival.

On the day we welcomed you into our lives, we held out our loving arms and said softly, "Welcome. We've been waiting for you." We stared into the vast universe reflected deep within your eyes with awe and wonder. You were a part of us; an extension of our very being. As you stared back into our eyes, a feeling of intense love for you took hold in every cell of our body. This was true, unconditional love with no boundaries and no end.

Our lives were more meaningful with you in it. You gave us a greater sense of purpose and a profound sense of responsibility. Your life was ours to protect; ours to mold and guide. We needed to teach you all that we knew, and try to help you avoid the mistakes we made. We wanted to afford you every opportunity to make your unique mark on this world. We wanted to make sure your life would become better than our own. In return, all we asked from you was your continued unconditional love, because it felt wonderful. Better than anything else in this life of ours.

We did the best we could as parents. We weren't perfect. We made plenty of mistakes intermixed with our successes. We got off-course of our map here and there and had to identify some new routes. But the destination was always the same: we would take care of you until one day you would take care of us. At that point we would say goodbye and leave you to be on your own. By then you would have a family and be following your own map. We'd leave happy in the knowledge that we made the world a better place by bringing you into it.

But then the impossible happened: you died before we did.

On the day you died, our hearts shattered into a million pieces, as did the world around us. We were left in a dark, unfamiliar place where pain filled every cell of our body where love once lived. The air around us was now hard to breathe. Gravity was stronger than before, and the simple act of sitting or standing used up all of our strength and energy. Our map had disintegrated and we were hopelessly, utterly lost in the darkness of horror and misery.

Amid the darkness, familiar hands grabbed ours. Voices of family and friends guided us as we fumbled about in this strange new world, not knowing what to do. These family and friends all gathered around us to ceremoniously say goodbye to you. And yet we couldn't. The words never made it to our mouths. We were sure this was all a mistake - a nightmare that we would wake up from and find you standing over us smiling and laughing. We cried out for you, but got no answer in return.

As our family and friends left us to be on our own without you, the familiar world we once knew began to reappear around us. And yet it was very different than before. We could interact with it, but we couldn't touch this world because we were trapped in a bubble of despair. And yet most people couldn't see our bubble. To them, it looked as if we were the same person we were before you died - maybe sadder, but basically the same. They expected us to quickly go back to our old routines and be our "old selves". But they couldn't see our bubble, and that we had fundamentally changed.

Inside that bubble, everything felt overwhelming. Our reactions to common sights and sounds were different than before. Laughter and joy made us angry and sick to our stomach. We were filled with resentment that the world itself hadn't ceased to exist when you died. Happiness was now out of reach, and we felt as though we'd never get it back. Some of us didn't want it back if you weren't there to share it with us. Even when we were surrounded by people outside our bubble, we felt hopelessly alone and misunderstood.

We became excellent actors worthy of an Oscar. We learned to pretend we were better and back to normal for the benefit of those around us. "Fine" is how we mostly answered the question of, "How are you?" We looked desperately around us for people who actually wanted to hear the truth. We were not fine. When you left us, you took a part of us, and the void it left still ached with a pain so unbearable, we couldn't find adequate words to describe it.

A few people could see our bubbles; most of them lived in bubbles themselves. Unlike the majority of people in the world around us, these people had the ability to reach inside our bubble and embrace us with understanding. We didn't have to pretend to be ok around them. We could break down and cry as loud and long as we needed to without worrying about making them uncomfortable. We found a sense of community that we had lost when you died. But none of this made the pain go away.

Over time, small cracks began to develop in our bubbles. These cracks let more light into our dim world. The air that came inside was easier to breathe. The gravity lightened a bit. It still hurt to be alive in a world without you, but we began to learn how to adjust to it so that it wasn't as debilitating as before.

Many of us learned to pry open the cracks in our bubbles a bit more to let in even more light and air. This changed the chemistry of the atmosphere inside our bubble from that of despair to a mix of memories and longing for you. We learned how to feel happiness and joy once again, even though it never made the pain deep within us subside. We began to learn how to better function in the world around us while still in the confines of our bubbles.

Our bubbles never fully go away. They change over time and may shrink considerably, but the pain will never leave us. This is because the pain was created by - and coexists with - the love that invaded every cell of our body when we stared into your eyes that very first time. And sometimes, we can momentarily release the feeling of pain by focusing our attention on the love that lives with it. The secret is to focus on you and the love you gave us that still lives in our bodies. You remain with us and a part of us.

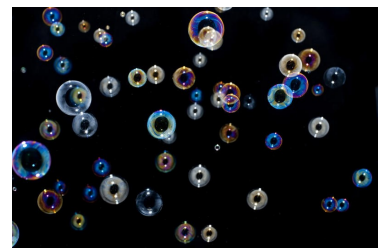
The fact is we would have died for you. We would have gladly given up our own lives in a heartbeat if it meant you could have continued living. But no one has ever learned how to go back in time to make that sacrifice. So we are left to live and breathe in a world without you. We have to create a new map that takes us into uncharted territory. We do this in your honor. We do this in honor of our family and friends that remain by our side.

We will continue down this new path until we take our own last breaths. And when we leave this world and head into the unknown, we hope to see you there with open, loving arms and hear you say softly, "Welcome. I've been waiting for you."

Maria Kubitz, TCF/Contra Costa County, CA

In memory of Margareta Sol Kubitz and all of our children who left us before we were ready.  
Originally published on [www.aliveinmemory.org](http://www.aliveinmemory.org).

We Need Not Walk Alone



## We Were Together: The Unique Loneliness Of Loss A Still Standing Contributor : Sakhi Vyas January 29, 2019

Weeks after losing my 12-week pregnancy, I'm overflowing with loneliness. It's odd. Exploding and imploding all at once – my hollow shell seeking peace through a lonely, thorny, erratic existence.

I've surrounded myself with the poetry and stories of other mothers with empty arms and slack torsos. They tell me that what I'm feeling is normal. Grief will hit me in waves. No one understands, and yet, so many have walked this exact path. And I argue with myself. How can this be normal? How has humanity survived when so many of us are consumed with grief, death, sadness? What is the key to this endurance? Hope seems impossible. And what is even the point of hope? What is the point of bringing someone into this world – this world full of grief, death, sadness? I guess I'm just being hit with one of those waves of grief. Can this sadness please just "ease with time" like everyone keeps promising?

My normal sucks right now. I can rationalize some of it: I feel sad when a friend, then two friends announce their healthy pregnancies timed nearly identical to what was my own. My child was going to have two other friends with mid-summer birthdays – our families were going to share trays of cupcakes and melty popsicles on the warm Lake Michigan beach, celebrating our kiddos together. I know I'll be sad and just a bit jealous. Especially at their springtime baby showers, especially when photos of squishy faces take over our group texts in early summer, and especially when no one can get together anymore because they all have fresh little ones to bathe with love. It's torture, but it's okay. It's normal.

And yet. I did not expect to be brought to tears because the rainy smell of wind last night smelled the same as the brisk wind that slapped my teary cheeks just moments after seeing that sonogram with "no cardiac activity." I walked home yesterday feeling empty in my heart and enraged that time hasn't moved fast enough to erase that memory. Is this normal?

I didn't expect to be sad every time I see the drying rack full of wool socks in the bathroom – it gives me the same uncoupling that I felt on the day I miscarried. Like it was yesterday. Like time froze and now I have to re-live the exact horrific moment – sitting on the toilet, looking at mismatched socks as a massive blood clot dripped down my thigh. This can't be normal.

I didn't expect a lump in my throat at the sight of a random box of blueberries or apricots at the grocery store, or a hummingbird flitting outside. My pregnancy app had compared my little one's size to those things, documenting its growth as I marvelled at my child's spectacular presence. Not knowing that I'd blankly stare at this real hummingbird, and wonder how much time would have to pass before I could once again marvel at its iridescent throat without seeing a wavy black & white sonogram overlaid on its tiny wings and body. What even is normal anymore?

This profound loneliness overwhelms me. Not because others don't share this experience. One in four, they remind me — #1in4. I stand hand in hand with all you strong women – our eyes a bit watery, shoulders slumped in surrender, humbled out of our joy. We all understand. But there's another void.

It's the unique loneliness that comes from of having shared my body in the delicate magic of two lives sheltered under one skin. We were together when I slept and when I woke up when I showered and patted the small hillock between my hips, whispering words of love and encouragement. The watery sensation of butterflies fluttering deep inside my core compelled me to turn up the symphonies and turn down news of hate and terror on the radio, a vain attempt at giving my little passenger a more loving world. We shared every bite that I ate, every drop of water, and every sip of coffee that I guiltily craved but rationed for the sake of the tiny beating heart.

It is such exquisite loneliness – losing that tiny little companion, and all the hopes that it carried. And now what? I just don't know. Time keeps moving at its strange pace – too fast that I forget those fleeting, sweet sensations, yet too slow to ease the pain of loss. I'm exploding with loneliness. Unexpected smells and sights interrupt my rational brain, ripping to shreds the emotions that I work so hard to balance. And this is just how normal looks now.

"Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."

–Vicki Harrison Lifted with love from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter

## MESSAGES BEYOND THE VEIL A compassionate friend shares their story

Four years and 10 months ago my world was forever changed when I found my son Elliott in his room and unresponsive. There is a lot to be said about that day and the ensuing weeks, months and years of court cases regarding the people responsible for my beautiful sons death. However there is also so much more to Elliotts story than his passing and I focused on that for so very long because it was burned into my being.

It's taken me this long to begin to remember all that he was and start to rejoice in the fact that I had this wonderful child, boy, man in my life for 24yrs, how lucky am I. He was my everything, my only child and we were as close as two people could be... we were soul connected. Let me rephrase that we ARE soul connected. From a tiny tot he always told me he had superpowers and over the years that evolved into his friends naming him Elliottman, little did I know he really did possess powers. I could talk for days about Elliott, as all of us can about our beloved children but I'd like to address the issue of grief in this letter.

Strangely my grief has just turned a corner recently but it's taken a great deal of effort and it's not fool-proof, I still crash and cry regularly. The difference is that Elliott has given friends, family and myself, even strangers, signs that he's still here and I've only just begun to believe. All of our children have those little peculiarities that are specifically theirs, numbers, songs, sayings, a myriad of things that's speaks to you of your beloved child in spirit and how many times have you thought it a coincidence that these synchronicities keep popping up, sometimes when you need it most.

I decided to stop doubting and start believing and in doing so, it seems Elliott is able to make connections with me more often... or am I just paying attention. At this point I'd like to give an example of one in hundreds of signs from Elliott that indicate he's still right here. His 19yr old cousin has moved in with me and after a recent trip to Melbourne he excitedly relayed his story. While walking through the city he heard a song that we played at the funeral and everyone that knows Elliott realizes this is specific to him, he followed the tune til he arrived at a building with an enormous 88 on front (that being the street number) and by the way Elliotts special number has always been 88. Upon reaching the buskers who were sitting on the steps of this building, he glanced at a sign they had displayed and they were called THE ELLIOTTS.. same spelling as well. The song, the number, his name, no coincidence as far as we're concerned.

Just like every other parent associated with this group, I've had many friends and even family drop away because I'm not and never will be who I was before the loss of my child. It's hurtful of course when we're already so dreadfully broken but I'm sure we've also all experienced that kind stranger who is able to lift you up at the worst of times. Those people have taught me to believe in angels even though I'm not religious, it has renewed my faith in humanity. Believe me there are many who think I'm a kook, but this is MY journey and having something that provides even the smallest modicum of peace in this nightmare I can't wake up from, is a blessing. I would love to hear any similar stories from parents who think they may have received a message from their child beyond the veil.

Written by Kaye Watts

Lovingly reprinted from TCF Queensland Newsletter

**Grief clouds the mind So if I forget to call you back  
If you see me wearing slippers at the grocery store  
If I have lost my keys for the hundredth time  
If I can't remember appointments or when I last ate  
If you find me not paying attention to movies,  
conversations or TV Please forgive me  
Know that I am not crazy I am grieving**

Tanya Lord Lifted with thanks from Winnipeg chapter news



# Sibling Page



## Surviving Siblings & the four basic emotions

Whether your sibling died recently or long ago, you may find you still have significant emotional energy around specific issues. This page describes the four basic emotions and what often triggers these emotions for bereaved siblings. The four emotions are actually families of emotions, often referred to as “Mad, Sad, Glad & Bad (guilt and anxiety).”

### MAD

Why are bereaved siblings still mad—days, months or even years after the death of their brother or sister? Here are some of the reasons.

The loss of their brother or sister was not acknowledged by parents or other relatives, or friends. The manner in which they got the news of the death did not feel right. Others expected the surviving sibling to take care of the parents or to make up for the loss. How they were treated immediately after hearing the news. Some were ignored, some were sent to stay with a relative, some were not given any information.... Their peers had no awareness of the reality of life and death, so they felt as if they were now different from them. Because life went on as normal. They were not allowed to grieve or were encouraged to feel guilty for grieving. No one talked about the death and the dead sibling was never mentioned. They didn't get to see the body. The sibling's spouse doesn't seem upset. They don't agree with some aspect of the funeral, burial site, or gravestone. They don't feel the sibling got the appropriate care while in hospital. They saw the body in a broken and wounded state, after a car accident etc. They were not allowed or encouraged to go to or participate in the funeral. They didn't know how to deal with their feelings. They weren't informed about the severity of their sibling's illness. Someone else survived who was involved in the accident that killed their sibling. They had to babysit, clean house, or be responsible for other chores while parents were at the hospital, sheriff's office, funeral home etc. No one ever asked how they were feeling. They often heard “how are your parents?” They had to grow up overnight. They were blamed for acting out and trying to get attention, when they were too young to understand what was really happening. They were over-protected after the loss. They were expected to “become” the dead sibling. They didn't get a chance to say Good-bye. The dead sibling's belongings were given away or disposed of without their consent.

### SAD

Bereaved siblings still feel sorrow and sadness from the many losses associated with the death of a brother or sister. The loss of companionship and a future with their sibling. Loss, at least for a time, of the parents while they were grieving. Loss of parts of the self that were projected onto the deceased sibling. Loss of innocence. Missing out on peer related activities. Feeling left out. Not getting the attention they needed to deal with such a profound loss. Being lonely. There is a hole when they visit their other siblings, because it is then obvious that one is missing. The presence of other family members reminds them forcibly of this fact. Sorry that they can't go back and make up for something they did or did not say.

### GLAD

Yes, bereaved siblings emerge from the experience glad about a number of issues. Not every bereaved sibling has the same experience, but here are some of the reasons...

They are able to be with others who are grieving, and listen. They appreciate life and relationships. They have a deeper spiritual life. They still feel connected to the deceased sibling. Life is more real to them. Some say they no longer fear death. They have the sense of being guarded by an angel. When troubled in other relationships, they feel that their deceased sibling is always on their side. When they engage in activities once shared with their sibling, they feel the presence of that sibling.

### BAD (GUILT & ANXIETY)

Fear of doctors and hospitals. Fear of doing whatever the sibling was doing that led to the death – swimming, driving, horse riding etc. Fear of their own children's death. Watchfulness for symptoms related to the sibling's illness. Belief that life will never be the same again. Having the sense that they will not live long. Anxiety about their parent's death. Guilt about fights with the deceased sibling. Guilt about how they acted at the time of the illness, for example, going out with friends instead of staying with their sibling. Thinking they should have prevented the death, or that they caused the death. Guilt about going on with life, surviving at all, or for being happy. A fear that something else terrible is going to happen, not trusting life. Thinking they should be a perfect and never complain. Guilt about a number of things they did or didn't do prior to the death.

*Reference: The Sibling Connection Queensland newsletter*

## What They Don't Tell You

*Inspired by TCF Sibs and TCF family members who lost a loved one to suicide.*

They don't tell you that there aren't five stages of grief, but an infinite amount that you revisit on a minute-by-minute basis, and then go back. They don't tell you about all the group chats. They don't tell you that you will relive the night you found your daughter's lifeless body every single day. They don't tell you that your schedule changes to hear your brother's truck pull in the driveway. Or that explaining death to a four-year-old without scaring him is nearly impossible. They don't tell you that the greatest reminders that you are living in grief happen when you're driving, or making dinner. They don't tell you that everyone is afraid to say your loved one's name, or share memories, or pictures. They don't tell you that your blood boils when people joke about suicide. They don't tell you it will take months for the physical symptoms of grief to subside. Or that your mother quite literally loses it when she can't get ahold of you. They don't tell you that your new joys also bring the worst pain. They don't tell you about all the ridiculous assumptions made. They don't tell you that you will begin to question and even doubt everything that you once believed in. They don't tell you that people will roll their eyes when you mention him because they are tired of reminders and want you to "move on." Or that family and friends will step into the shadows and not know how to support you when you need it most. They don't tell you that when you see his name carved in stone it's that 1st day without him all over again. They don't tell you that a part of you dies inside because you will never take another picture of them. They don't tell you that you will only remember things in the time frame of before they died and after they died. They don't tell you that you will struggle every. single. day to survive. Or that you will never be the person you were before and you have to learn to be a different version of yourself. They don't tell you that even the littlest things can break you and bring you to tears. They don't tell you that you will flinch every time someone says, "hang in there." They don't tell you you'll feel guilty when you laugh. They don't tell you that your grief would become stronger and deeper as time would pass. Or that you will never be able to open a random door again. They don't tell you that you're going to scream at the top of your lungs "I WANT HIM BACK!" .

Tiana Schwandt, TCF Sibling Group, Minneapolis, MN

## EVERYTHING IS A FIRST A compassionate friend shares their story

Everything is a first. Many moments must be faced. There are the first holidays, the first anniversary, the first birthday. Thoughts about my brother Dave will always be with us. It's never more than a sentence away from me-NEVER! The ordinary cannot be ordinary. A certain phrase, a look, or an article of clothing can trigger thoughts and emotions. The joy of my senior year in college was interrupted by sad reality. Forget? How is this possible?

The days and months following my brother's death were filled with grief. Flowers and food were everywhere-love and concerns were translated into strength that kept me moving one step at a time. People don't know what to say-nothing is NORMAL. Tragedy has brought seriousness to my life. Thoughts about the meaning of life and the unimportance of a lot of things I have previously found important are circulating in my mind. I think about my own funeral now. When will it be? Tomorrow, next week, next year, before or after my parents?

There are good days and bad days. I am learning to deal with all of this. People ask me "how are you?" Here is my answer: "I am mad Dave died at the age of 17. I am angry that my parents have to go through this. I am confused about my role in the family. I am jealous of other families. I am sad. I am fearful about the future. I am hopeful things will get better. I am courageous. I think about my brother every day. I will be strong.

Written by Lisa Ann Jones (Lifted from TCF Victoria 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
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	04 9387212 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI	Marie and Ron Summers	07 8954879
CENTRAL NORTH ISLAND	(Son, Wayne 23yrs, Suicide)	
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)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1493888227582838/>

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