



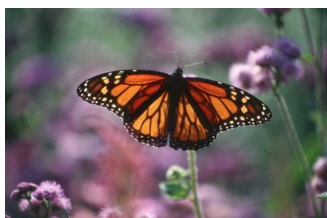
# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated  
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 183

APRIL MAY 2021



## Like the butterfly

It fluttered above my head  
 Weightless in the soft breeze.  
 I reached up my hand,  
 It lit on my finger.  
 Waving glistening wings gently,  
 It looked at me for timeless moments.  
 I smiled, reaching deep and  
 Finding all those cherished memories.  
 As it flitted off through the sunlit morn,  
 I knew we had said hello once more.

Leslie Langford, TCF North Platte, NE  
Reprinted with love from TCF Minneapolis chapter newsletter



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 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)

## Hope

Hope is not pretending that troubles don't exist.  
It is the trust that they will not last forever,  
that hurts will be healed and difficulties overcome.  
It is faith a source of strength and renewal,  
that lies within,  
will lead us through the dark to the sunshine.

--Author unknown

Lifted with love from TCF South Bay LA newsletter

## Our Children ... Remembered with love

### Forever Young

### Forever Loved

### Forever Longed For

Andrew Meldrum Cox	Born 16/4/68	Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Died 6/4/02
Jack Stephen Dyer	Born 24/4/07	Rebecca Clare Halkett	Died 20/4/03
Nicholas Ian O'Hara	Born 17/4/74	Greg Holley	Died 6/4/85
Caren Amanda Phillips	Born 16/4/81	Matthew David Hubber	Died 30/4/00
Alan Bruce Scoringe	Born 26/4/66	Sally Verone Kitto	Died 23/4/01
Anthony Mark Staite	Born 5/4/74	Robbie Knight	Died 18/4/96
Jonathon Upton	Born 15/4/68	Jake Lucas	Died 26/4/77
		Nikolaas Remmerswaal	Died 1/4/12
Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Born 9/5/1978	Gary Brendon Thompson	Died 9/4/96
Nicholas Evan Hood	Born 12/5/1985	Hayden Watson	Died 11/4/97
Vicky Knight	Born 21/5/1980		
Paul John Nicolaou	Born 21/5/1964	Paul Graham Albrecht	Died 19/5/2004
Cindy Parish	Born 25/5/1965	Michael Barry Duke	Died 20/5/2005
Liam Vettors	Born 1/5/2005	Ben Henderson	Died 15/5/2003
David Jason Eugene Walker	Born 7/5/1993	Erica Kewish	Died 14/5/2014
James Wing	Born 31/5/1980	Thomas Craig McDonald	Died 25/5/2008
		Maryann Gaye Pearce	Died 27/5/2000
		Wayne Edward Summers	Died 9/5/1999
		David Jason Eugene Walker	Died 13/5/ 2000
		Peter Gregory Warren	Died 17/5/1998
		Dan Wells	Died 13/5/2003
		Timothy James Williams	Died 29/5/2005

I must reconcile courage and surrender in equal measure.” [Charlton Heston]

Let’s look at the concepts of “courage” and “surrender” in the context of the loss of a child.

“Surrender” carries connotations of giving up, of failure, of cowardice. Certainly there are many times during mourning when we succumb to all that, and more. We are drained, at times quite dysfunctional as we grapple with the shock of loss and the aftershocks of trying to find acceptance of that reality and the very real need to continue to live while we might be longing to die too.

Surrender is not always negative though. To surrender, for example, to your yearning for rest and solitude, or to open up your heart and mind, or to walk a different road from your familiar paths, is healthy and sensible. When surrender means self-preservation it can only be good, for you must now consider your wishes and requirements through your days and nights of living with and, eventually, recovering from sorrow. That impulse to mourn fully and not to allow social constraints to restrict your grieving takes courage as does every day’s routines, every step taken to progress beyond the pain of now towards the promise of a happier later.

We tend to equate courage with stupendous acts of bravery, but often fail to acknowledge that the hesitant moves to regaining a balance in our lives are as valiant. To venture into shops again, to return to work, to just continue daily living when everything seems so disturbed takes enormous strength of character and will. There are no ribbons or medals or commendations for those who tread that long and arduous grief road, unless we count a gradual development of a renewed equilibrium as our recognition and reward.

Much love Rosemary Dirmeik

Taken from the book String of Pearls and reprinted in TCF Johannesburg Chapter Newsletter

## Self-Care whilst Grieving Strategies to Improve Sleep

Sleep problems are common for those who are grieving. Here are some helpful strategies

- Exercise more during the day: gentle walking, swimming, gardening
- Keep your bedroom dark and cool
- No Caffeine and limit sugar after 4 pm
- Limit Napping
- No visual media after 8 pm (no texting, TV/computer, within 1 hour of bedtime)
- Write next days to do list one hour before bed - don't worry in bed
- Keep a diary, two hours before bed write down your worries. Then write three things you are thankful for.
- Bedtime and wake time should not change by more than 1 hour between weekdays and weekends
- No exercise within 2 hours of bedtime
- Avoid large meals or beverages right before bedtime
- Eat a high-protein/high-fat snack 1 hour before bed (2 peanut butter crackers or a boiled egg)

If serious symptoms of insomnia continue after using these methods:

Consider discussing sleep concerns with your primary physician.

### Practice Deep Breathing for Stress Management

Deep breathing helps you deal with stress, tension, anxiety, and anger. It can be done almost anywhere. It is also called diaphragmatic breathing. It helps in many ways.

Steps for this exercise:

Find a quiet place where you won’t be distracted. You may want to sit in a comfortable chair or lie on the floor with a pillow under the small of your back.

Breathe in through your nose, slowly and deeply, pushing your stomach out as you breathe in.

Say the word "relax" silently as you breathe out. Picture your stress and tension begin to leave as you breathe out. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, letting your stomach come in.

Repeat these deep breaths 10 times.

You will notice how much more relaxed you feel after a very few minutes of controlled breathing.

Do this 5 times a day

Reprinted from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter

## Central Otago Compassionate Friends.

Kia ora koutou,

Brace yourselves .....winter is just around the corner!

We are trialling informal coffee "drop in" afternoons, beginning next Wednesday 28 April, 2.00pm in the side room of Monteiths, Alexandra. The informal arrangement will be for the last Wednesday of each month.

There is also an opportunity for coffee and comfort every Thursday afternoon at Living Options, Ngapara Street, Alexandra, 2.00pm onwards.

Our next group meeting will be Monday 3 May, 7.00pm, at 8 Bodkin Road, Alexandra. Our guest speaker will be Sue Tait. Sue is one of our bereaved parents and she will speak about the job that she has at the moment as a Connector during the COVID period. Sue has also had several years of involvement with Victim Support, so I am sure that there will be a lot that will be interesting for us.

We had a wonderful visit with some of our Arrowtown/Queenstown parents earlier in the month. We met at Millbrook for lunch on a very stunning, autumn day and some of us didn't want to return home. However, no-one volunteered to pay the expensive overnight rates for accommodation!!!

Looking forward to meeting again,

Louise

## Getting On With Life—What Does It Mean?

Of all the statements and spiritual platitudes quoted at me since my son Daniel's death, the phrase that I hear most frequently makes me squirm the most. "You have got to get on with your life." Recently I quit squirming long enough to ponder the meaning behind this phrase that is usually said to the bereaved in the form of a command. Exactly what does this phrase mean? What are people implying when they say it?

I was pregnant when Daniel died, and three months later I gave birth to a baby girl. Wasn't that getting on with life? I nurtured my three children, took them to school, the park and birthday parties. Now wasn't that going on with life? I even cooked dinner at least four times a week!

At first after Daniel's death, I would have liked to literally stop my life and be buried next to my son, but I kept existing. Like a plastic bag tossed about by the wind, I was fluttering, being carried by the events of life. Seasons came and went. In the spring, I planted marigolds and tomato vines. In the autumn, I jumped in fallen leaves with my children. I continued; I am still continuing to live.

Now I may be bereaved, but I am by no means a fool. As I ponder the meaning behind "getting on with life," I know exactly what those who say this have in mind. "Forget your dead child. Quit grieving. You make me uncomfortable!" Getting on with life means don't acknowledge August 25, Daniel's birthday, anymore. Forget how he slid down the snowy bank in the recycle bin, sang in the van and ate Gummy Bears. Forget he had cancer, suffered and died at only age four. Don't see the empty chair at the dinner table, don't cry, just live!

Some who are more "religious" would like to believe that a bereaved parent can claim, "My child is safe and happy in heaven. Therefore, why should I yearn for him?" Perhaps I pose a threat to certain types because I have let it be known I question God.

I weep. I have been angry. I miss my Daniel. Maybe old friends feel if they hang around me too long I might convince them that a few of their illusions about life are just that, illusions. As my cries of anguish are heard, there are those who can only think how to make me be quiet. To stop my heartfelt yearnings, they say quite sternly, "You must get on with your life."

I am living. I do move on with life with Daniel in my mind and in my heart, although he is not physically here as I continue to live and to love. To sever his memory totally from my life would cause destruction and damage that would ruin me. To push Daniel out of my life and not be able to freely mention his name or write and speak about who he was on earth would only bring more pain to my life. I'd shrivel up. Comfort for me comes in remembering with smiles how he drew with a blue marker on his sister's wall, ran outside naked and picked green tomatoes.

For the reality is, getting on with life means continuing to cherish Daniel.

--Alice J. Wisler, Bereavement Mag. 9/10 2000, Colorado



*May 2nd 2021 is International Bereaved Mother's Day*

**The Sunday before Mother's Day is.....**

**International Bereaved Mother's Day.**



**On this day** - to all those who carry a child in their heart; we see you and hear you and think of you today.



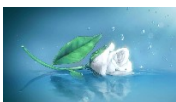
**On this day** - we hold space in our hearts for grieving mothers who have endured the unfathomable loss of a child



**On this day** - please keep mothers mourning the death of a child in your thoughts. Reach out to them with a word, flower or note.



**On this day** – if you are a bereaved Mum we honour your courage. A mother's grief is as timeless as her love.



**On this day** – we remember you for your strength -for there is no stronger person than a grieving mother that wakes up and keeps going every morning.

# A Mother's Chorus: Grieving a Child on Mother's Day

*A letter published on 'What's My Grief' – composed by a chorus of mothers blended from their responses when asked to share one thing they wanted people to know about their grief on Mother's Day*

Dear Friend, I miss my child every day. This grief of mine will never leave me, and honestly, why should it? I love my child more than I ever could have imagined, and yes, I do mean present tense “love”. It is excruciating knowing that my child will never return to my arms. However, a mother's love for her child doesn't require physical presence; this can be proven by the fact that most mothers love their children well before they are even born. I will love my child forever, and therefore, I will grieve my child forever. This is just how it goes.

I know it's difficult for some people to understand my ongoing grief, I guess because they want me to “get better” or return to normal.” However, I actually am normal. I'm just different now. I believe those who say they want to support me on difficult days like Mother's Day, but part of this is accepting me as a grieving mother who will always love her deceased child. Again, this is just how it goes.

My grief is like the weather. Somedays it's calm, quiet, maybe even a little sunny. Other days it's a devastating storm that makes me feel angry, exhausted, raw, and empty. I wake up in the morning and wonder – “Am I even alive at all? And if so, how am I supposed to make it through this day?” This is why when you ask me how I feel about Mother's Day, all I can say that it depends. Of course, I'm going to try my best to cope with the day, but while you're hoping that your Mother's Day picnic doesn't get spoiled by actual rain, I'll be praying that the grief storms stay at bay.

Like many things in a grieving mother's life, Mother's Day is bittersweet to the 'nth degree. On the one hand, I feel immense joy because I was blessed with my child and I feel gratitude for every moment I was given with them. On the other hand, the pain of missing my child – my greatest happiness, my life's purpose, and my best friend – is intense.

Bereaved mothers live with so many of these confusing contrasts. They are like undercurrents that tug at and toss about our hearts and minds. I am the mother of a child who is not alive. Perhaps a child who you've never met. You can't ask me about their school year, or how they're liking piano lessons, or whether they've chosen a major in college. In my mind, I've imagined my child doing all these things. People don't realize that I grieve each of my child's milestones, knowing they didn't get the opportunity to experience these special days.

Most people don't know how to validate my child's place in the world or my ongoing role as my child's mother. This is a difficult concept for others to grasp. Heck, sometimes even I grapple with the answers to questions like “Do you have children?” and “How many?.” I know many bereaved mothers, like me, long for these questions to have straightforward answers.

Sadly, mothers who have experienced the death of their only child may even wonder whether they get to call themselves a mother at all in broader society. So, in addition to the pain of grief, these mothers have to cope with a sense of being left out, forgotten, and ignored. Can you imagine how that might feel? I think it must be like being stabbed through the heart and when you turn to others for help they say “What blood?” “What knife?”

Then, for mothers who have surviving children, there is this gem of a comment – “Don't forget, you're lucky to have other children.” Please let me assure you, a mother does not forget any of her children. This mother loves each and every one of her unique and special children in unique and special ways, but one of her children has died and so her love for this child looks a little untraditional. Mothers do not have a finite amount of love to be shifted, divided, and spread around depending on the number of children they have on this Earth. So please be careful with your comments, because it's difficult enough for grieving mothers who often feel torn between feeling joy and happiness for their living children and grief for the child who has died.

All that said, you asked me what it's like to grieve a child on Mother's Day, so here's what I have to say: This day will forever be hard for me. I live with an emptiness that no one can fill; so I may be sad, I may be unsociable, and I may need to take a break to be by myself in a quiet place. Whatever shape my grief takes on this day, please allow me to feel the way I feel and please follow my lead.

Beyond that, acknowledge me as a mother. It makes me feel forgotten and as though my child has been forgotten when people act as though my child never existed. Also, I can sense that people feel uncomfortable talking about my child and I constantly feel like the elephant in the room, but it doesn't have to be this way. Honestly, I find it really comforting when someone talks about my child. I love hearing their name spoken out loud! I love hearing stories about them. Maybe you know a story I've never heard, or maybe I've heard it a hundred times before, but it really doesn't matter to me.

Your acknowledgment alone is one of the greatest Mother's Day gifts you could give me. I guess while I'm offering my two cents, I also have something to say to my fellow bereaved mothers. No one has it all figured out, but I've learned a few lessons along the way. If you're worried about Mother's Day, you're not alone. Try not to get overwhelmed or wrapped up in anxiety. You may actually find that the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself. You may want to plan a whole day of activities just to stay busy, or you may feel like doing nothing at all. There is no "right" way to handle Mother's Day – but do try to plan ahead a little. You may want to reach out to others who are struggling with the day and, if you can, it always helps to face the day with people who love and support you.

Whatever you do, believe you will make it through the day. With time, the grief storms will grow smaller and less frequent and you will find a little more balance and room to breathe. Believe you will be okay and have hope that in the future you will find yourself in a place where you can grieve and celebrate on Mother's Day all at the same time.

Let's take care of each other.

Lifted with love from TCF Focus NSW

### **Bent But Not Broken**

To the Mother who has lost her only child, or has no surviving children, the thought of Mother's Day sends a stabbing pain that only the ones of us who are in this situation can understand. We begin to notice Mother's Day cards slipped in right after Valentine's Day along with the Easter cards. Even before Easter the TV advertising starts. We try to blot this all out but our subconscious keeps reminding us, the day is coming closer. For the first two years we celebrated Mother's Day for my mother and sister very quietly. The third year after my daughter Shawna's death, we decided to go to a local restaurant featuring a nice buffet. We arrived early hoping to avoid the crowd. A very flustered hostess greeted us and found a table for us. The tables had been pushed close together to accommodate more people. It was already becoming very crowded. She asked the question, "How many Mothers?" It was then we noticed the flowers she was carrying. Someone managed to stammer out, three- three- Mothers. She handed us each a flower, while glancing around to find a table for the next group of people. She didn't notice the one she handed me was pretty battered. My sister wanted to give me hers or get another. "No, it's ok," I said. The stem was bent, but not broken completely. A wilted tired flower was hanging from the stem. I brought it home and propped it up in a glass of water to revive it. You see, I could identify with that flower. As a Mother without my child, I have felt so bruised and battered. Somehow through all the pain, tears, and loneliness, like the flower, I have been bent but never quite broken.

Donna Frechec, TCF Enid, OK Lovingly reprinted from TCF Minneapolis Chapter 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.

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## One of the Hardest Questions “How many children do you have?”

This is invariably awkward to answer when you are a bereaved parent. If I am in a social situation and a stranger asks me this question, I usually make a quick assessment. Should I deflect it? Or answer it honestly and wait for the silence that will follow, as I am well aware that the enquirer will have no idea what to say.

Over the years, I have perfected a stock response, one that I feel comfortable with ... most of the time. I avoid a direct answer because if I say I have two children, but one is ‘no longer with us/died/passed away’, I know that the lightness of the mood will be lost. So I say something like, “Well, we’re a bit of a blended family and the children and stepchildren are grown up with their own families now. How about you?” I then get to hear all about this other person’s children. It may be a bit of a cop out, but sometimes it is easier to deal with the opening gambit inviting you to tell them about your family, being turned around to hearing about theirs.

Yet, part of me feels guilty about betraying James by denying his existence in this way. I justify it with a silent apology to him in my mind. Bereaved parents constantly find themselves in this situation when they meet new people, whether at work or socially. Perhaps an unexpected bonus of Covid restrictions is the limitation of social interaction and an avoidance of such circumstances. If you do answer the question honestly, people are invariably shocked and upset. Several people, intending to be kind, have applied the scenario to themselves. “Oh, you poor thing, how dreadful!” they say. Then, “I couldn’t bear it if I lost one of my children ... I would just die.” In these cases, my internal voice asks, “How on earth do I respond to that? Does it mean that because I am still here and I didn’t die from my grief, that I don’t love my child as much as you love yours?” I have in the past said quietly, “No, you wouldn’t actually die, you would just carry on ... because you have no choice”.

Of course, I want to keep the memory of James alive and I do so in a multitude of significant ways: by writing about grief; by campaigning for water safety, by public speaking and by saying his name and talking about him with friends and family. But it saddens me that we have not yet evolved a way of talking about the children we have lost, in casual everyday situations. I think I usually get it right these days, assessing whether it is a good time to share what happened to James, with a group of people whom I don’t know well. After the initial stunned silence, I find that people take their lead from me, and if I can bring myself to talk easily and naturally about James, and other members of my family, then that makes it easier for them.

In the early days of loss, I would not have had nearly as much consideration as to how my bombshell of news would affect others, but the passage of time helps to put a more generous coating on the bitter pill of my personal tragedy. Often, someone will share a confidence with me about their own loss, once they know about James, and that is encouraging.

One lesson you learn over time is that although your loss remains at the forefront of your memory ad infinitum, those around you can soon forget. A few years after James died, a colleague who had attended his funeral, asked breezily if I was looking forward to Christmas. “I’m sure I’ll get through it”, I replied, and when he asked why I was looking so gloomy I had to remind him that I’d lost my son. “Oh yes, and I guess you still miss him”, he replied lightly, and the crass insensitivity of his remark, stunned me. The implication that one day I may not think about James any more, particularly at Christmas, was deeply hurtful. I suppose that only parents who have lost a child can understand the profound depth of the grief; the sense that the natural order has been disrupted and life will never again resume its old course.

In some ways it is liberating not to be pre-judged or made allowances for, because I own this particular status. In certain scenarios, I am accepted simply as Andrea, not ‘Andrea, that poor lady who lost her son’. And when we moved to Devon three years ago, it was a while before I shared my story with others, preferring to have that liberation in various situations until I felt comfortable with sharing. But not speaking of James feels wrong too and when I get the balance right between the telling and the not telling, that is when I feel I am progressing along the path of grieving under my own impetus and control.

During the course of 15 years I have encountered many responses to James’s death. After the initial shock, fear is a prevalent reaction. I call it the contagion of bereavement. People might think, “Oh my God, if it happened to her, it could happen to me”, and they figuratively step away, not wishing to know too much. Others say, “I didn’t like to ask about James. I feared it would upset you”. They do not realise, though, that I have faced the worst a parent can endure. Nothing can ever hurt me more than my son’s death.

Over the years I have thought long and hard about how best to find the right balance when having conversations about bereavement of all kinds. In the case of child loss, I believe the best reaction is simple. If a parent tells you their child has died, simply respond that you’re very sorry to hear it. And if you want to know what happened, just ask them. Know too that no offence will be taken if you don’t. But don’t be afraid to say their name in subsequent conversations. Please don’t flinch, when I say the name, James. Grief is a conversational minefield, but we should learn to negotiate it with tact and delicacy. And the more open and uninhibited we can be about discussing it, the better it will be for all.

Andrea Corrie [www.tcf.org.uk/news/tcf-news/hope-of-finding-the-mourning-light-through-the-mist](http://www.tcf.org.uk/news/tcf-news/hope-of-finding-the-mourning-light-through-the-mist)  
Reprinted with love from TCF UK Compassion



## THE silent ANGUISH of WISTFUL moms

I'm guessing you don't know how many of us are out here. Before I became one myself, I had no idea. We are the "Wistful Moms" for countless reasons; our dreams and our realities never crossed paths. We hoped, wished, and prayed for that "perfect" little bundle of joy, but those silent but wholehearted requests went unanswered. Some of us have come to terms with it, while still others struggle

... but we all wonder.

When you tell us you are expecting, we will congratulate you, hug you, ask how you are doing, and exclaim over and over about how wonderful it is and how excited we are for you. We will be there for you when morning sickness hits, we will tell you how much motherhood agrees with you when you most need a lift, we will listen with rapt attention to your favorite names and nursery themes. Heck, we will probably even throw you the best baby shower you can possibly imagine

... but through it all, we will wonder.

We will wonder what it must be like to hear that we are, indeed, pregnant. We will wonder if you immediately feel an attachment to that tiny little cluster of cells that will eventually be a baby or if the bond takes some time. We will wonder what it would be like to know we are carrying life along with us wherever we go. We wonder if we should just give those fertility treatments one more try . . .

When the pregnancy has been moving along without a hitch, and you are well into your third trimester, we will listen to you complain about swollen ankles, how difficult it is to sleep, and how you just wish that the little one would come a little early to put an end to your misery. We will listen and offer what sympathy we can

... but through it all, we will wonder.

We wonder what it really feels like to carry a child for so long. We wonder how comforting it is to know that if labor were to begin at any moment, your child would be strong and healthy. We wonder what secret you know that we weren't aware of for staying pregnant until your child was ready and able to survive in the outside world . . .

When the kids are driving you crazy with childish bickering, and wearing you out with their endless stream of activities, we will listen and offer to help in any way we can. When another lamp is broken after an indoor wrestling match, and the youngest decided to help you decorate with crayoned artwork in the family room, we will tell you it will be okay and will help put things back in order. And when the endless thump-thump of a basketball in the second floor bedroom and another pair of muddy, grass-stained pants with holes in the knees make you want to tear your hair out, we will lightheartedly remind you that "kids will be kids"

... but through it all, we will wonder.

We wonder how amazing it feels to hear your child call you Mommy. We wonder what a house full of mobile, high-spirited, active children sounds like. We will wonder if there is something wrong with us for being envious of minor childhood bumps and scrapes, not because we wish injury on a child, but because it means that child is

running, jumping, and playing as all kids should. We will wonder what could have been, had we never been given that heartbreaking diagnosis . . .

When you complain that your children are outgrowing clothes every other week, we will go shopping with you and surround ourselves with all of those "big kid" outfits we will never buy. When the first date rolls around and you are not so sure you are ready for this chapter to begin, we will tell you to take a deep breath and remind you that you have taught your children well, and they will carry your influence wherever they may go. When it's time to plan a wedding and you fret over the outrageous cost, we will tell you it will all work out and we will help find ways to make that dreamcome-true day possible

... but through it all, we will wonder.

We will wonder what our angels would have looked like today, instead of remembering them forever frozen in that single most devastating moment we ever faced, however long ago it happened. We wonder where they would have gone on those first dates, where they would have gone to college, what career path they would have chosen, how many grandchildren we will never have the chance to spoil. We wonder what we mourn most . . . our precious children, or all that will never be for them.

Whether it be through infertility, miscarriage, premature birth, a disabling diagnosis, or the death of a child far too early in life, we all wonder. We are all human, and even when we witness these moments of frustration, fear, anger and annoyance, we don't fault you. You are undertaking the most important and most difficult task known to woman; you are raising a child. But, we wonder if you see them for the amazing little miracles they are. We wonder if you ever stop to think about how many billion possible genetic mutations there are and how, with just a micro-measurement's difference here or there, you could have very easily been in our shoes. We wonder if you ever stop to recognize how truly and incredibly fortunate you are . . . because you have that perfect, healthy child we all so covet. We know it isn't always easy, but every now and then, we hope you see it and take that moment to cherish your precious child.

*Theresa Raker is a wife and full-time mom with a six-year-old son with special needs; his identical twin passed away two years ago at the age of four. In her spare time, Theresa enjoys pursuing her interests in photography, gardening, and cooking and enjoys volunteering at the Center for Disability Services in Albany, New York. She also writes a blog about her experiences as a mother titled: "Hello from Holland." Theresa Raker We Need Not Walk Alone, 2015*

Reprinted from Winnipeg Chapter News with thanks.

## How We Survive

If we are fortunate, we are given a warning. If not, there is only the sudden horror, the wrench of being torn apart; of being reminded that nothing is permanent, not even the ones we love, the ones our lives revolve around.

Life is a fragile affair. We are all dancing on the edge of a precipice, a dizzying cliff so high we can't see the bottom. One by one, we lose those we love most into the dark ravine. So we must cherish them without reservation. Now. Today. This minute. We will lose them or they will lose us someday. This is certain. There is no time for bickering. And their loss will leave a great pit in our hearts; a pit we struggle to avoid during the day and fall into at night.

Some, unable to accept this loss, unable to determine the worth of life without them, jump into that black pit spiritually or physically, hoping to find them there. And some survive the shock, the denial, the horror, the bargaining, the barren, empty aching, the unanswered prayers, the sleepless nights when their breath is crushed under the weight of silence and all that it means. Somehow, some survive all that and, like a flower opening after a storm, they slowly begin to remember the one they lost in a different way...The laughter, the irrepressible spirit, the generous heart, the way their smile made them feel, the encouragement they gave even as their own dreams were dying. And in time, they fill the pit with other memories, the only memories that really matter.

We will still cry. We will always cry. But with loving reflection, more than hopeless longing. And that is how we survive. That is how the story should end. That is how they would want it to be.

Mary Rickerby, TCF/Okanagan

Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News

## We All Think About It

How old is your child? Do you miss him or her for the child they were or the child they would now be?

Isn't it confusing when you see a child 3 years old? He reminds you of your little Timmy; same color hair, same build, same mischievous grin. You think of your son and you miss his sweet little arms around your neck.

Then you realize Timmy wouldn't look or act like this anymore; he wouldn't be 3, Timmy would be 8 now. Not climbing on your lap, but climbing trees. Not a toddler, but a little man.

You wonder how he would look, what his voice would sound like, who his friends would be. Would he be a Cub Scout, or playing soccer?

Then your mind swoops back to reality, the little boy that reminded you of Timmy is gone. You're glad you noticed him, it feels good to think of Timmy. But there's confusion in your thoughts about him also.

Of course the pain mixed with the warmth of his memory is confusing enough. But that reoccurring wondering about what your child would have been like today is even more confusing. And you're wondering if you should even think about it... he's not 8 ... and he's not 3. He's in heaven and he's not here.

But he's in our memory and he's in your heart and its OK to remember him as he was ... at 3. It's OK to think of him as he would be ... at 8. It's OK to think over this confusing feeling of the loss of both of the Timmys you miss. The toddler at 3, and the boy at 8.

It's OK to think about it. We all think about it.

--Connie Miles , TCF St. Louis , MO

# 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.

Is That You?

Is That You?  
The falling star in the night  
So pure, so bright.

Is That You?  
The breeze gently blowing through my hair  
Telling me that you are still there.

Is That You?  
The golden ball rising in the East  
Bringing hope that with a new day,  
The sorrow will ease

Is That You?  
Setting in the West  
Bringing a night of peace and rest.

Is That You?  
Who dries my tears  
As I gaze towards my future fears.

Is That You?  
That makes me smile at life's irony  
That other people often cannot see.

Is That You?  
That gives me strength to carry on  
Even though you are gone.

Is That You?  
Yes. It is you.  
You are with me always.

—submitted in memory of Marni Dean  
Lovingly lifted from TCF/Vancouver Island

## Your Granddaughter Asks What You Think of Tatoos – Kristin Henry

Careful, you tell yourself, careful.  
This may be some teenage test you can't afford to fail.  
She's seventeen, and full of surprises.  
Her mother – your daughter – is four years gone.  
And mostly the two of you bear this injustice quietly,  
as though somehow grief is your guilt.

Careful, you tell yourself,  
Do not judge.  
on no account sound old.  
Aim for neutral, fall back on the law;  
Tell her she must wait at least a year.  
I know, she says, and smiles.  
But do you want to see?

And for just a breath you hesitate  
on another question you're not sure how to answer.  
Life has shown you too many wrongs  
which can never be corrected.  
Do you really need to see another one?

But your eyes widen on a miracle  
when the girl lifts her shirt to show  
The small blue message curling across the ribs  
beneath her heart.  
You recognise the writing,  
know the slope and shape of every letter  
Because it is your daughter's.  
Among her mother's things  
the child has found a journal,  
and copied precisely a line,  
then had it etched into her flesh,  
and her memory and her future.

In her mother's hand, her mother's words –  
This delicate, elastic, indelible truth –  
I will love you always.

Gratefully reprinted from NSW TCF Focus newsletter

*I will love you always*

## My Champion Me – Let's Talk Self Compassion

*On Tuesday 16th February TCF members assembled via Zoom to hear Sangeeta Mahajan's second talk about her personal journey of grief: My Champion, Me. Let's Talk Self-Compassion. As in her first talk, her amazing serenity and calm wisdom were instantly evident. How can it be only six years since she lost her beloved 20 year old son Saagar to suicide?*

Describing the horrific and cataclysmic shock of losing her son she spoke of how instantly everything that she was and had been came into question. Her role as mother, doctor, friend, wife was now utterly threatened. The guilt and self-recrimination were total, not just things she perceived herself to have not done before Saagar's suicide but indeed every decision she had made about him since he was born. It did not matter that others were trying to comfort and support her, she thought it was all her fault, and, as she said "You are always with yourself" 24 hours a day and the self-torture is unremitting.

I think this resonated with many of the audience who commented that they are still struggling with this guilt many years on. Gradually Sangeeta began to be aware of the difference between her attitude to herself, and that shown by others to her. She saw that the compassion shown by others constituted a sensitivity to others' feelings and a commitment to doing something to alleviate another's suffering. She realised that her recovery depended on being able to do this for herself. She began asking herself "Am I a friend to me?".

She gave us a practical exercise to do, describing a time when she had left her house unlocked and she had arrived back to find thousands of pounds worth of belongings had been stolen. Firstly she asked us to write down what we would have said to Sangeeta, and everyone replied with positive and supportive comments. She then asked us to write down what we would have said to ourselves if it happened to us. It was astounding how critical, dismissive and unkind we were. What a powerful way of exposing our inner critical voice!

Sangeeta quoted the Buddha's saying that when we suffer misfortune two arrows fly our way. The first, the actual event, hits us without warning and we are unable to avoid it. The second arrow is more insidious, it is the self-torture and blame we mete out to ourselves because of the first arrow. We do not have to accept the second arrow because this time we have a choice. She says that there are three pillars of Self Compassion that can help us to deflect the second arrow, these being the very framework of our recovery and journey to peace. This resonated so clearly for me and it felt almost joyful to hear them described:

### Self-kindness

This is the bedrock of physical compassion. Just as you would rock a crying baby, holding, stroking, soothing, this self-kindness speaks to our inner child, maybe our five-year-old self, reassuring and loving, promoting endorphins and oxytocin that calms and protects. As others have probably tried to do this for us, we can do it for ourselves. Our bereavements have created such a brittle and harsh space within us, self kindness is something that can soften and lighten our souls. There were comments from the audience about how difficult it is to go from self-blame to self-approbation, and Sangeeta said it needs practice but does become much easier with time.

### Common Humanity

This is the antidote to the disconnectedness we can feel from the world and our history. If we realise that everyone suffers in some way we should reach out to others, knowing that we have a common and nurturing bond. This is part of self-compassion. Our mind causes pain by judging others as we judge ourselves. We need to break down the barriers that stop us from engaging because a lack of connection is judgement.

### Mindfulness

This gives us the ability to slow down and go into ourselves. This can be done via meditation or just sitting quietly, chasing away thoughts and centering on our hearts. This allows our parasympathetic system to soothe and calm us, to allow us to become more connected to ourselves and to connect to others. Sangeeta emphasises how important it is to stay with ourselves, even when the pain is intense, and that to experience it and observe it stops us from judging. Incredibly she says that in this way we do not have to see our pain as bad. It just is, and by being fully present we feel part of a greater universal whole.

Sangeeta not only spoke with incredible poise and dignity but seemed to be really living her truth. Despite the excruciating pain of her loss, she demonstrated a calm commitment towards self-compassion and to those around her. She said that compassion is not complete if it does not include yourself. She then referred to the title of her talk and said that the three elements described above help you towards being your own champion. A champion is someone who not only supports but fights for their cause, and this is what we

should do for ourselves while connecting with others. She gave the analogy of a strong enduring tree outside her window, always present in all weathers, surrounded by different people and animals, ever connected to other trees via a network of underground roots.

I think everyone was both hugely moved and educated by Sangeeta's talk. Her wisdom and strength and perception were outstanding. At the end many people asked how, being stuck in pain and guilt they could suddenly become more self-compassionate. Sangeeta replied that focusing on the heart rather than the head, always being kind and supportive to ourselves and others is a habit that needs dedicated practice, but ultimately our pain is universal, and knowing that we are part of a greater whole and we are linked helps us. Sangeeta represents a beacon of light and hope to those of us on our bereavement journey and I think we all benefited hugely from listening to her.

Review by Lisa Mayland. You can listen to both Sangeeta's talks hosted by TCF on our YouTube channel at [tinyurl.com/r9k5up84](http://tinyurl.com/r9k5up84)

Gratefully reprinted from UK TCF Compassion Spring

## **Mother's Day Brings Joy and Pain**

Mother's Day used to mean special times, great moments, sweet gifts and acknowledgment of the deep bond that Mothers share with their children: I have many happy memories of Mother's Days past. Their value is incalculable.

But that was before ... everything now is measured in "before" and "after." When I lost my only child, Mother's Day changed. Now Mother's Day has a different meaning ... one that is not as happy as it once was, but one that still reinforces the many years I shared with my son on this earth.

I was considering this strange paradigm, this shift in my thinking over the past six plus years, and I have come to the conclusion that eventually bereaved parents begin to accept the death of their children on a subconscious level. But before that happens, our subconscious minds wage war on our conscious minds and we experience such terrible emotional lows. It's an internal fight for each of us. Along with the fight to survive, to acquire the will to continue living, we are battling internal forces that must resolve themselves. Once that internal war ends, our healing begins. We will always love and miss our children. We will always shed copious tears for no reason. But something inside of us has shifted, shaping our perspective from this point forward.

So, this Mother's Day I will acknowledge my beautiful son, the wonderful life that he lived, the joy I received in raising him and the wisdom I acquired through the gift of my child. We learn unconditional love when we become mothers. We learn foresight, gentleness, joys in the simple elements of life. I will remember past Mother's Days and think of the wonder that is my only child. I will remember him with much love, more than a few tears and a special sense of thankfulness that his life graced mine for over 35 years.

I will honor the fact that I am a mother. Although my son does not share this earthly plane with me, he is forever my child and I am forever his mother. This is a bond that time, space and death do not alter.

Quietly, with serenity and peace in my heart, I will mark this Mother's Day doing what I want to do. I will know what that will be when I get there. Live in the moment ... that's another element of life that I learned from my son. We are each unique on our grief journey, and we will each mark this Mother's Day in a different way.

Whatever your choice might be, make it your day ... your day to celebrate the eternal bond between mother and child. There is nothing more beautiful.

--Annette Mennen Baldwin TCF Katy, TX

Page 13 TCF Otago April May 2021

Lifted with thanks from TCF South Bay, LA newsletter



# Sibling Page



## Helping Yourself Heal When an Adult Sibling Dies

Grief isn't an emotional experience, its an entire paradigm shift. When something bad happens that's beyond a person's control , like the death of a loved one, they often re-evaluate their entire understanding of the world and their role within it. If the world is erratic and unpredictable, then what does that mean about your ability to control what happens to you and your loved ones?

Whether your sibling was younger or older, whether the death was sudden or anticipated, whether you were very close to your sibling throughout your lives or experienced periods of separation, you are now grieving. To grieve is to experience thoughts and feelings of loss inside you. If you loved your sibling, you will grieve. To mourn is to express your grief outside of yourself, over time and with the support others, to mourn is to heal.

**Consider your unique relationship** Brothers and sisters often have strong and ambivalent feelings for one another. Sibling relationships tend to be complex, characterised by a mixture of anger, jealousy and a fierce closeness and love. What was your relationship with the sibling who dies? I bet it wasn't entirely simple Sibling relationships are so complex because while we are growing up, siblings are both friends and enemies, teammates and competitors. We play with our siblings and we fight with them. We share our parents' love and we compete for our parents' love. We enjoy being part of a family and we struggle to become individuals. Sometimes we carry our childhood rivalries and differences into adulthood and our ambivalent feelings toward our brothers and sisters remain. Sometime we separate from our siblings completely as adults, and sometimes we become very close friends with our grown up brothers and sisters.

**Yet no matter what your present day relationship with our sibling was his or her death is a blow.** You shared a long history with your sibling your stories began together and were intimately intertwined for years. Know that sibling grief is important The loss of an adult sibling is often a significant one. I have had the privilege of companioning many sibling mourners, and they have taught me that they often feel deep pain and profound sense of loss. Yet our culture tends to under appreciate sibling grief. When an adult dies, the myth goes, it is the parents, spouse and children of the person who dies who suffer the greatest loss. We seem to think that siblings are affected less. Yet the truth is, the more deeply you feel connected to someone, the more difficult his or her death will be for you. And Siblings - even when they have not spent much time together adults - often have profoundly strong attachments to one another.

**Yes your grief for your sibling is very real.** And it may be very difficult for you. Allow yourself the time and the support you need to mourn. Accept different grief responses. There is no one right way for you to mourn. Neither is there one right way for other family members to mourn. Each of you will mourn differently. If you have surviving siblings, you will find that each will mourn this death in his or her own way. While you might have anticipated some of your sibling's responses (for example, your emotional sister has probably been emotional). Other responses may have surprised you. Try not to let these differences alarm you or hurt your feelings.

If your parents are still alive, they too, will have their own unique responses to the death. You can help by facilitating open and honest communication with them about their grief and yours. Feelings will naturally run high in your family in the weeks and months after the death. The best approach is to be open with one another without blaming.

**Embrace the healing power of linking objects** Linking objects are items that belonged to or remind you of the sibling who died. Photographs videos, CDs, ticket stubs, clothing, gifts you received from him or her—all of these connect you the sibling who dies. items may bring sadness, some happiness, some sappiness (i.e. when you hare happy and sad at the same time). While linking objects may evoke painful feelings, they are healing feelings. They help you embrace the pain of your loss and move toward reconciliation. They may also give you comfort in the weeks and months ahead. Whatever you do, DO NOT get rid of linking objects that remind you of the sibling who dies. If you need to box some of them up for a time, do so. Later when you are ready, you will likely find that displaying linking objects in your home is a way to remember the sibling who dies and honour your ongoing feelings of love and loss.

**Honour the Sibling who died** Sometimes grieving families ask that memorial contributions be made to specified charities in the name of the person who died. Consider your sibling's loves and passions. If he or she were still here, what would you make him or her proud to have their name associated with? Some families have set up scholarship funds. Some have donated books to the library or schools. Some have donated park benches or picnic tables inscribed with an appropriate plaque. Some have planted gardens, you might also choose to carry on with something your sibling loved to do or left unfinished.

**If you are a twin, seek extra support** If you are a twin whose twin brother or sister has died, you may be especially devastated by this death. Twins often report a sense of being halved after their twin has died, without their twin, they simply do not feel whole. Your grief work may be particularly arduous. I recommend that you seek the support an experienced grief counsellor if you are struggling. The wonders website [www.twinlesstwins.org](http://www.twinlesstwins.org) and the resources this organisation offers may also be of help.

**A final word** To be 'bereaved' literally means 'to be torn apart' and 'to have special needs'. When a sibling dies, it is like a deep hole implodes inside of you. It's as if the hole penetrates you and leaves you gasping for air. I have always said that we mourn significant losses from the inside out. In my experience, it is only when we are nurtured (inside and outside) that we discover the courage to mourn openly and honestly. Remember—you are not alone, and you are not forgotten. No your love does not end with the death of your brother or sister. You can and will carry your sibling with you into the future, always remembering your past and what he or she brought to the dance of your life

Source: Centre for Loss (author: Alan D Wolfet, Ph.D) published 15 December 2016\\

Reprinted from TCF NSW Focus 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.



## **D**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	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
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 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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