



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 191

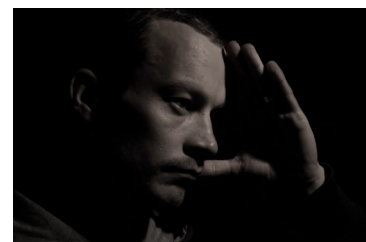
AUGUST SEPTEMBER 2022

MASKS

I am growing oh so weary
of the many masks that I must wear
It protects all others from my pain
yet seems just so unfair
The anguish and the tears
must show so they might understand
My world has changed forever
I'm alone in a far and distant land
No one understands my language
or how I hurt so deep inside



When I lost my precious daughter
it was not just her that died
I pray you'll never walk
my path of heartache, loss, despair
But I beg you'll try and understand
show compassion and that you really truly
care



I have to live with my loss
but I will never get over it.

- Derek Watt, TCF/Winnipeg

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

If we choose to move forward
Acknowledging the sorrow and sadness
But also the love and laughter
Then hope travels with us

Lovingly lifted from Topeka Chapter

Our Children ... Remembered with love

Forever Young

Forever Loved

Forever Longed For

Brian Thomas Booth
Sashi Coulter
Michael Barry Duke
Kirsten Jane Maydon
Stefan David Maydon
Trinity Lea Taylor
Eddi Te Arihana Tutaki
Peter Gregory Warren
Dan Wells

Born 4/8/57
Born 6/8/91
Born 25/8/68
Born 26/8/68
Born 14/8/72
Born 31/8/82
Born 1/8/74
Born 31/8/62
Born 13/8/86

Brian Thomas Booth
Jason Bradley Burford
Christopher Burke
Andrew Meldrum Cox
Henare Wiremu Fielding
Sharyn Maree Jones-Sexton
Hayden Ivan Pope
Brendan James Vass
Haydon Ross Whitaker

Died 26/8/58
Died 25/8/13
Died 22/8/00
Died 15/8/68
Died 2/8/02
Died 29/8/01
Died 11/8/08
Died 8/8/05
Died 19/8/04

Terry Barnfather
Richard Craig Bell
Jason Bradley Burford
Christopher Burke
Bevan Andrew Hookway
Greg Holley
Erica Kewish
Hollie Jay Kirk
Gordon Legge
Pauline Anne Newall
Cameron Smith
Gary Brendon Thompson
Ryan Ashley Thompson

Born 3/9/1953
Born 11/9/1987
Born 25/9/1993
Born 12/9/1998
Born 9/9/1990
Born 12/9/1978
Born 11/9/1995
Born 11/9/2012
Born 22/9/1976
Born 10/9/1962
Born 25/9/1999
Born 27/9/1968
Born 30/9/1985

Greg Burns
Sashi Coulter
Michael David Cox
Quinntin Albert Jason Crosswell
Nicholas Evan Hood
Hollie Jay Kirk
Anthea Gail McDowell
Logan Scott O'Hara
Georgia Rose Poplawski
Thomas John Poplawski
David Massey Reid
Cameron Smith
James Wing

Died 21/9/2004
Died 6/9/2006
Died 20/9/1996
Died 22/9/2004
Died 23/9/2004
Died 11/9/2012
Died 2/9/1987
Died 28/9/1999
Died 2/9/2005
Died 2/9/2005
Died 13/9/2000
Died 23/9/2015
Died 6/9/2000

A BEAR HUG FOR FATHER'S DAY

Posted on June 17th 2022

As Father's Day approaches, we are reminded of the significant contributions and unique love of fathers and stepfathers. Their defined role, after the death of their children, is to support their wives and surviving children. But their pain is deep.

Men, by their true nature and in response to our society's expectations, do not usually grieve as openly as women. They do not talk as candidly about their loss. They generally do not reach out to others for comfort. They are, after all, the rock, the solid centre of the family. Their wives pain supersedes their pain because women are fragile. Or so we are told.

Yet, as I look into the eyes of so many bereaved fathers, I see a deep, gripping pain. The tears left unshed, the words that are never spoken, the anger, guilt and agony...all remain in the eyes of the bereaved father.

What can a father do? Talk with other bereaved fathers. Read books written by bereaved fathers. Talk with spouses, private counsellors and close friends who are not as structured in their "male" societal roles. Try to attend three meetings of Compassionate Friends. You don't have to talk. But you might decide to express a single thought or idea, logically presented, to the small group. You might find peace in this place, and then again, you might not. But, as my own dad often said, "Step up to the plate and see what happens." He was a pretty wise man....a child of the depression, a football player, Greatest Generation, WW II Marine, a fighter, a provider, a protector....a man's man. He endured much in his 78 years and I only saw him cry a few times.

But when his friend lost a child, my tough dad was the first to reach out with a bear hug that wouldn't let go until the tears began to flow. They both cried. They both knew the agony of losing a child was far worse than the horrors of war. Together, they cried.

Happy Father's Day....May your bear hugs be many and your memories become sweeter with each passing year. May your child live forever in your heart so that peace embraces you always.

Annette Mennen Baldwin, in memory of my son Todd Mennen and my father, James M. Mennen.

Dear Friends,

As always at this time of year, this edition is filled with articles from bereaved Fathers, Step-fathers and partners. Those men who often bear the brunt of bereaved Mothers grief, the anger, the rants, the constant questions of why. They are there in the middle of the night when a mother needs a pair of loving arms, a shoulder to cry on or just be held. They are the ones who are there, when in the early days we wake, hoping and praying that it has all been a dream and give us comfort and support when we realise that it's not. The men who are generally expected to be the strong ones.

Luckily it seems that society is changing somewhat and there is now more acknowledgement that men too, experience the deep grief that women do when their beloved child dies. There is more support and understanding that crying is OK, acceptance that they often need a place or person to talk with and that they don't only need to be there for mothers.

The more men open up about their feelings and emotions, the more society will understand and accept what is normal. Fathers can experience the thoughts they have failed to be the protector they always thought they would be more than Mothers as that was the role they have always be told is theirs. Of course we know that our Fathers did all they could, just as we Mothers did, but it's harder to tell the heart that.

So this month, please be kind to Fathers, let them know how grateful you are for their support and love. Let them know that there is no blame, no expectations that they will always be strong. And express and show your love.

To all Fathers I wish you happy memories, peace and hope on Fathers Day and every day.

Lesley Henderson

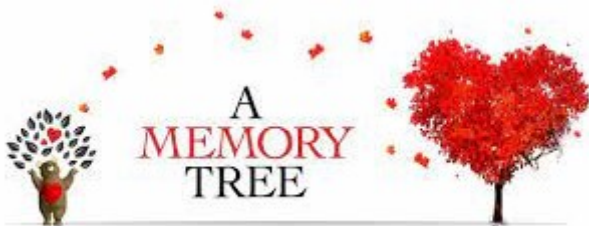
Hi! everybody greetings from Central Otago Compassionate Friends.

We had a wonderful get together yesterday over in Arrowtown at Millbrook where we all gathered for a lovely lunch and an informal chat. Thank you so very much to those Compassionate Friends amongst us for your amazing contribution to sharing what has helped you in your journey of dealing with grief and also to those amongst us who shared how they were feeling. It was very beneficial to some of our Compassionate Friends and I'm sure as we continue to help others with our love and support we are also helping ourselves.

Our next get together is 25th September 2022 12.00pm- 4.00PM at the Community Hub Wanaka. Address 34 McDougal Street, WANAKA. TEA & COFFEE PROVIDED.

Also please mark on your calendars our A.G.M. Monday 17th October 2022. 7.00pm-9.00pm. Alexandra Community House. Room A. We hope to see as many of you as possible.

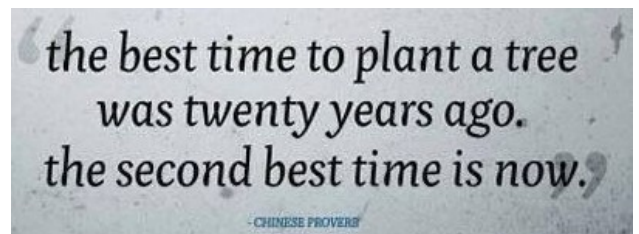
For any enquires please feel free to ring me Pauline (Central Otago Compassionate Friends Co-ordinator.) Ph.0273960611



On the 1st August 2022 the Whanganui Chapter of the Compassionate Friends planted a Memory Tree at our local Aramoho Cemetery in the "Babies Rose Garden" in the Baby Loss Area. Last year our 10th year anniversary event was missed due to COVID so the group used some of the promotion funding [supplied by the Whanganui Community Foundation] towards a Memory Tree, which will be a beautiful permanent reminder of our children briefly known forever loved. Springvale Garden Centre sourced a beautiful white flowering cherry [Prunus Shirotae Mount Fuji Cherry] and it was planted by our Mayor Hamish McDouall and Council Parks staff.



This tree will blossom in October of each year and will be a joy to see. The leaves will colour and fall in autumn, a reminder of loss and then there will be a spring renewal providing growth, shelter and shade reminiscent of the seasons and years of grief shared without a loved child.



We were reminded of an old Chinese proverb

Display Associates Whanganui made a weatherproof TCF contact sign to go by the tree.



It was very poignant that at the same time as we were preparing for the planting a wee babe Eros was buried by her bereft family just a few meters from the tree.

Anger and Grief

Developed from *Journeys with Grief: A Collection of Articles about Love, Life and Loss*, edited by Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., MDiv., copyright Hospice Foundation of America, 2012

Many who grieve say, “How can I be angry at my beloved for dying?” They know they couldn’t help dying. Aghast or ashamed at the idea of blaming them, these feelings get stuffed down and denied. Nonetheless these feelings exist, whether expressed or not. Many people do in fact feel angry when someone we love dies. Angry at being abandoned, angry at the extent of the pain, angry that our life is changed, angry that managing grief feels difficult, and angry that the world suddenly feels different—empty, unsafe, or lonely.

Swallowed feelings don’t disappear. Instead, they may become the basis for unresolved grief, depression, anxiety, and even chronic physical symptoms. Allowing your feelings, whatever they may be, is essential to coping with grief. Our culture is not always comfortable with anger. Yet the feeling of anger itself is natural and not destructive; it’s a feeling like any other. Still, most have not learned to accept anger as a natural part of human experience. People do get angry, and still they are good people. This is just one of many varied and intense emotions in response to losing someone you love.

Intense feelings need to be expressed, not denied. Being able to say out loud, “I am angry,” may be all that it takes to dissipate this intense emotion. Then again, you may need to say, “I am angry” and express aloud all the stories and feelings that follow before the feelings resolve or disappear. To fully release anger, you may need to have some safe physical way to express it, like pounding a pillow, chopping wood, or yelling loudly in the privacy of your bathroom or out in the woods somewhere. Anger can make a griever feel powerful in the face of experiences like loss, where one naturally feels pretty powerless. Some may prefer to be angry so as not to appear vulnerable, openly tearful, or sad.

You can help someone else who is grieving by listening. Simply saying, “Tell me about your anger,” instead of running away from such emotions can help. You may feel more comfortable hearing anecdotes about the dead person than the intense emotions around loss. However, listening to another’s pain without offering judgments or advice is a rare gift to give. Remember, anger is a natural part of grief. Suppressing or swallowing feelings delays coping and moving forward. Voicing your feelings, expressing anger and any other emotions, is empowering, strengthening, and helps us cope.

Gratefully lifted from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter

FOR ADOPTIVE DADS

Reading the post of Father’s Day and the difference between Step-Fathers and Fathers I would like to say one thing. Any man can Father a child but when a child looks to a man with love and says, “I want to be just like you” and calls you “Daddy” that is what makes you a Father.

Love does not come from the genes but from the heart.

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter

*The links of life are broken but the links of love and longing never break.
Grief only becomes a tolerable and creative experience when
Love enables it to be shared with someone who really understands.*

by ~Rev Simon Stephens Founder of TCF

‘We keep him close, always’: how I survived the loss of my teenage son

Seven years ago, my 14-year-old son, Kadian, was killed in a road accident. This is the advice I’d give myself back then

Thomas Harding



When I was asked recently to speak about my “grief journey” to a group of bereaved parents, my first reaction was that it wasn’t such a good idea. I was very worried that it would trigger something in me. Because seven years ago, I watched my 14-year-old son Kadian ride down a hill on a bicycle, and into a road where he was struck by a truck. He died in front of me.

I was also anxious about making generalisations – after all, everyone’s experience is different. There is no blueprint or boilerplate for how to cope with such a calamity. I didn’t want to cause anyone additional pain.

I decided to take a pass.

Later, I took my dog out for a walk in the hills behind our house. And there, up in the yew tree forest, I thought some more. What if I had heard someone speak on this subject seven years ago? What would I have liked them to say? What would have made a difference to me back then?

So, here is what I came up with.

The first thing I would say to my seven-year-younger-self is this: I am so sorry for your loss. I am so, so sorry for your loss.

There are some people who will struggle to say this. Who will be awkward and embarrassed and overwhelmed. But not me. Plain and simple, this is a catastrophe. It is horrible. Terrible. Disgusting. Awful. Life-changing and unfair.

I am truly sorry.

The second thing I want to say is that I am still here. Seven years later. Still breathing. Still standing. Still talking. There is a future ahead. I didn’t always see it that way.

One of the worst moments for me happened after I had just seen the ambulance take Kadian’s body away. I found myself in a car on my way back to my parents’ house, where my daughter Sam was waiting. She was 13, and I had to tell her about her brother. That he was dead. It was an impossible task. When I told her, Sam collapsed to the floor. I held her. We cried together for a long while. And then she said something that had an immediate impact, and has stuck with me ever since. “We must live every moment to the full,” she said, “because Kadian can’t.” And so I made the commitment, then and there, to live every moment to the full. It’s been a guiding light for me.

Then there was Graham, our neighbour, who had lost his teenage son in India four years earlier. I asked him how he was doing, and he said that he was “accommodating” to it. I thought about this a lot. Accommodating. Not getting over, or moving beyond, or turning the page – all of which sounded wrong to me, almost disloyal. But accommodating. It sounded strange to say, but it felt right.

A few days later, I saw a tree growing in a hedgerow near our house. I looked closer at its large roots, extending down around an enormous boulder and into the ground. And this is what I realised Graham meant by accommodating. The large boulder lies there for ever, cold, inert; but somehow the tree had found a way to build a life around it.

And so we began to rebuild our lives around this awful event. And one of the first things I learned was that our son’s death had changed the key relationships around us. This was both unexpected and unnerving. The profound trauma and shock amplified our existing relationships, so those that were good were now great, and those that were not so good were now appalling.



Thomas Harding with his wife, Debora, and children Kadian and Sam in 2011. Photograph: courtesy of Thomas Harding

Fortunately, my sister Amanda had said something just after we lost Kadian: “You have permission to do anything that makes your life better.” This get-out-of-jail-free card was incredibly helpful. Whereas in the past I might have worried about hurting someone’s feelings, now when my wife and I made decisions, our only concern was how it would protect us and our daughter. As a result, we avoided those family and friends whom we now found toxic. Seven years later, we have reconnected with some of them, but the relationships are different, more shallow, more managed. Most we have not, that’s OK.

For a while I was mad. I cried a lot. So did my wife. One breakfast, our daughter asked us if we could try to limit the crying hours, perhaps to daylight hours. She said it so nicely that we laughed. Mostly we succeeded.

At first, my wife and I tried to do everything together. It felt safer. I could take care of her, she could take care of me. And then we realised that this was actually making things worse, that we had different needs at different times. This was a big moment for us. To keep our sanity, we had to walk the journey close, but separate.

Such strategies helped, but still I was unable to avoid the triggers that kept on coming: seeing Kadian’s body in hospital; receiving his death notice; reading a sensational headline in the newspaper; shutting down his mobile phone account; going out for dinner and then seeing the fourth chair empty; attending a family occasion where all the grandchildren were there, but him. Each time feels like a punch to the stomach, like being told for the first time that our son had died.

And then there was that awful question, which came up in conversation when I met strangers: how many children do you have? At first I said “two”. Then I was asked their ages. I would pause and give Sam’s age – 13, then 14, then 15, now 20. Then I would say that we also have Kadian. He was aged 14 – when he died. And this almost always exploded the conversation. Typically, people would not know what to say. Most changed the subject, some even turned away. A few would be curious. How did he die, they would ask? Or the real shocker: was he wearing a bicycle helmet? Why did they ask this? Did they want to establish guilt? Of course he was wearing a helmet.

For a while I told people I had one child, but it felt so unbelievably disloyal that I stopped almost at once. Now I give a limited amount of information, and if the inquiry moves in a direction I wish to avoid, I simply say, “I do not wish to talk about that,” and move the conversation gently on.

But there’s another question people ask: how are you and your wife doing? I know where it’s coming from, because one or two people went further and mentioned a statistic that the stress of losing a child leads to breakups. At first, I responded with anger. How dare they challenge my marriage, which I rely on every day just to get by? Then I found numerous studies that undermined the bogus child-bereavement-leads-to-marriage-breakups claim, and quoted these at anyone who dared bring the subject up. But I quickly realised that the questioners just looked at me as if I were crazy, which I was. Now, when people ask, I keep it simple. My marriage to Debora was always strong. We met when I was 18 and she was 23. But the death of our son has brought us even closer. I loved my wife before Kadian died. I love her even more after.

A few weeks after we lost Kadian, my instinct was to go back to work, to keep busy, to distract myself, and so that’s what I did. I helped a friend with his book-keeping, and ran a real estate brokerage. At the same time, I had just sold my first book to a publisher and was about to start a round of edits. I hoped that by trying to return to some semblance of normality, it might give me comfort in a world that had become, overnight, abnormal, uncontrollable and unreliable.

Just Another Day

This year Father's Day is likely to be quite surreal for the entire population. I'm sat here writing this piece for the TCF in mid - April, we are locked down because of Covid-19 and looking at the calendar, the travel restrictions could well still be in force by Father's Day in mid-June. Even if they've been lifted however, it is likely that the loss of life across the country will be so significant that it will dampen down the usual Father's Day celebrations.

For me, Father's Day will pass just like any other day. We never really marked it before Evie died; a card and that was it. The kitchen is my territory anyway, so I'll be cooking dinner as usual. I'm not actually sure that Patsy knows where the kitchen is. It will be my third Father's Day without Evie, and just like the previous two, I expect to feel utterly rubbish once again, a heightened feeling of loss on a day when I should be with her. I've said in previous writings that I don't feel like a father any more, just a bloke. So, Father's Day is a real contradiction, full of complex emotions.

I have sat and thought on many occasions how other bereaved fathers with surviving children may feel. They must be truly conflicted. I can't offer advice or comment simply because it feels a world away from my own experience.

Father's Day brings the feelings of loss into sharp focus for a bereaved father but in reality, it is little different from any other day of the year. The commercial aspects of the day shine a spotlight on it and serve only to ram the point home. Evie's gone, never to return. How do we survive it? Part of me wants to recognize that I am still a father, but another part just wants to push through and get the day over with.

I do believe that whether we like it or not, the vast majority of people focus on the emotional impact of a child's death on the mother because for generations that has been what we did. Men's mental health has always taken a back seat. Call it what you like, stoicism, stiff upper lip or just a societal expectation. I also believe though that as fathers we are also guilty of perpetuating that view. Take a look at the TCF Facebook pages and compare the number of men and women on there. Look at the paucity of posts from father's compared to mothers. Why is that? Even the bereaved Dad's page is 'quiet'.

I'm not saying that it is right or wrong, just illuminating it saying what most blokes are probably thinking but haven't said out loud. I think what that does is mask what fathers are really thinking and feeling, so we have no idea of the true position. Are we uncomfortable being open and honest? Do we see it as a sign of weakness? I don't, but I imagine many do.

On an average day I will be wearing full body armour, keeping me safe from the outside world. It comes off for very few people because there is only a small handful of people that I can be open with, the rest will buckle under the pain that flows when I talk freely. Father's Day will be no different, with the possible exception that I'll keep out of everyone's way. For the last 2 years, on Mother's Day friends rang, texted or emailed to see how Patsy was coping. On Father's Day no-one got in touch. There is a wider expectation that I'll be fine. This isn't a plea for people to ring so please don't, it's a statement of fact. That is our world. If it bothered me enough, I would do something about it.

Thankfully, in mid-April, few children have died from COVID-19, so the number of parents joining our exclusive club is not growing rapidly. But thousands of families up and down the country are reflecting on the loss of a brother, husband or father and grandfather. It will be a different beast. For us bereaved father's, or at least for me, it is just another day to get through without breaking. I'm not fighting for change, or trying to raise awareness of a father's view. I don't want to change the world. But I do want people to stop and think.

If the churches are open again by Father's Day. I may just go along and light a candle for Evie. I'll certainly go and visit her grave. Talk to her for a bit then go home for a G&T. I'll raise a toast to all bereaved father's. Bryan Clover, Evie's Dad

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

Fathers' Day – quotes from www.whatsyourgrief.com

Mike and I were best friends – Bob Maxwell –

“I am an Amputee – a father without a son” Now, though it has been 9 years since he passed away at the age of 21, I still feel like I am only half a human. I am an amputee – a father without a son. That is my new normal. I do laugh, there are times I am not dwelling on my loss and that I actually find some measure of fulfilment in my job. However, do not scratch the surface – you will find pain and anger. Do not think I want to hold someone else’s child or grandchild – I can do it, but it is no kindness to me.”

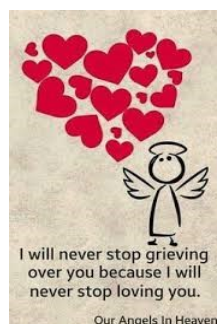
I may look the same – Mark Myers –

“That is the thing I hope people understand: that I’m radically different in this grieving life – take me or leave me.” I may look the same as before Kyle died, but I am a different man altogether. I will love you more fiercely and respect the good and genuine in you and others. But I will no longer tolerate meaningless and petty attitudes and pursuits. I won’t waste my time on things that don’t matter. I don’t fear death because part of me is already dead. I miss her every day even when I laugh and smile.”

Losing my son – Dan Noordman –

“The weight of loss never goes away, we just learn how to carry it.” Losing my son was more than losing a piece of me. My son thought of me as his hero. He said he wanted to be the dad I was for him when he had his own kids. I failed him. I couldn’t save him and be the hero he thought I was. The natural instinct to protect ones off spring runs through virtually every species on earth. And I failed to protect my son. There is nothing I can do now except share his story. We were not able to donate our son’s organs in order to save a life, so I donate his story in hopes that it saves a life and someone else can be a hero.”

My Enemy named Silence – Paul Sanders – “There was nothing I could do...about any of this” Being slightly introverted my entire life, I always wanted silence. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts, or no thoughts at all. Since we lost Milo, I loathe silence. It brings with it the memory of the lack of sound in the OR when they removed him from the warmth of his mother’s womb (I will always be haunted by this moment. I would almost call it PTSD). We knew he was gone before this, but anyone who has been through this knows that you illogically pray for and crave to hear that cry. You want their arms and legs to wriggle. You expect it, regardless of what science, logic, and sanity dictate. So, in silence, I watched them clean him off. He was motionless, much like I probably was. I wanted to look away and forget that any of this ever happened. I wanted to hide away with my thoughts of the mundane things in my life. Sports. Weather. Something silly our 4 year-old said. I tried, unsuccessfully to wall myself off from this horrific, cold void that started with the bad news and was now widening exponentially. I looked down at the inexplicable sorrow that filled my wife’s face. There was nothing I could do... about any of this. You always want to help the ones you love, and I knew there was absolutely nothing I could do for her, or for Milo, or myself. I wanted sounds. I wanted congratulations all around from the staff, family and friends. That wasn’t coming. Everyone agreed that he was beautiful. He was and is our beautiful boy. Having a finite amount of positive things that people can muster to say about your baby is hard to deal with. You want to hear more of the word ‘and’ between compliments. Those few comments come from everyone, and then they stop, and we are left with...silence. More silence. When my wife referred me to this post I wanted to write something semi-uplifting. Something filled with pride, especially with Father’s Day approaching. I’m sorry the above/below is so dark, and I’m sorry for what may seem like rambling thoughts. You have caught me/us on a dark day. I got to meet him exactly nine months ago. My wife met him long before that. I miss him. His weight in my arms during the time we got to hold him. That ever present feeling of wanting to protect him, even though nothing could hurt him anymore. That’s such a contrast to our daily lives. We hurt continuously, in waves of shallow and deep sorrowful waters. There is no more standard happiness for me. It’s adjusted. The scale has been modified. I have happy moments and days, but it’s not the same, and it never will be. Sometimes that’s ok. Sometimes it really, REALLY isn’t. Today is not good. My heart goes out to anyone reading this that has been affected by tragedy, whether it be of this kind or not. Be well.



But I found there were some things I could do and others I could not. I learned that I could not deal with people. I responded badly to tension and conflict. Any problem, however minor, triggered a massive anxiety attack.

So I gave up everything except my writing, which suited me fine. I was by myself, working in a safe environment that I could control. My wife also found that she could no longer stay in her job. Between us we had lost 80% of our income. Before long, not only were we having to deal with the traumatic loss of our son, the emotional impact on our daughter, PTSD and social alienation, but also the real prospect of losing our house.

So, what would I tell my seven-year-younger self about this? I certainly would not deny how hard it is. Nor would I say, everything's going to be fine – because it is not. But I would say, you'll find a way to get through it. And when you can't, you will need to find people who will help. Which in my case is a hard sell, for I am not someone who finds it easy to ask for help. But sometimes you have no choice. So I would tell myself to get over my pride. And that it's OK to borrow money if you need to – you will find a way to pay it back. And that those people who love you will want to help you if they can.



Thomas Harding with his son, Kadian, when he was a toddler. Photograph: courtesy of Thomas Harding

I would also say that it's OK to lie on the couch and watch TV, if that's what makes you feel better. And I would tell myself, it's fine to drink whisky. But I would add, be careful. Try not to drink too much. If it doesn't make you aggressive or depressed, and doesn't give you a headache the next day, fair enough – but still, watch out.

And I'd also say, at some point you may want to speak to a therapist. But give yourself permission to say that this person is not the right fit. Because a therapist is like a girlfriend or boyfriend – the chemistry has to be right. And when it is right, listen to them.

Even then, it's not easy. It wasn't easy when my therapist said I should consider taking medication. "I'm not that kind of person," I said. "What kind of person is that?" my therapist asked, kindly. "Well, someone who is broken, traumatised, grieving, lethargic, unable to perform basic functions, lying on the couch all day watching box sets, drinking too much whisky." And of course, I realised I was that kind of person. So I took the pills, and this helped me get through. Until it was time to come off, which I did, slowly and carefully, and again with help. And now I'm not on them, though I still like watching box sets. I still give myself permission to take time out when I need it, because sometimes the world's just too much.

And then I would say to seven-year-younger-self: enough of all that. Please tell me about Kadian. Because that's one of the ways to keep him close. So here's a story about Kadian...

Two months after he died, his art teacher came to our house, holding a bag. She explained that Kadian had been working for weeks in pottery class on a project. He was going to give it to me for my birthday. It was a white ceramic cube with a pedestal inside, which was turned by a stiff crank. Above the top was carved his favourite slogan from Apple: "Think different". There was so much about this that was Kadian: generous, inventive, creative, artful, thoughtful, kind.

He and I had recently painted his bedroom silver in honour of Apple, which had been a wonderful father-son time. We laughed a lot, our faces and arms covered with silver paint. And now here was this object, magically arriving at our door. Impossibly arriving, after he was no longer here. Because though Kadian is gone, he is still very much here, at least in part.

How do we keep him with us? We tell stories about him to our friends and keep pictures of him around the house. Each year we take his birthday off and go for a walk. Each summer, we go camping with

friends and family, eat good food and drink good drink and melt marshmallows over the fire and fly kites and remember Kadian as we go. We keep him close. Always.

And though we grow older, and he died at 14, somehow he is ageing with us. Of course, he is not here, and to tell you otherwise would be a lie. More than anything, I don't want to lie. I say again, his death is, was, will be terrible.

So, my dear younger self, my hurting, confused, troubled, broken me. If you can, try to be grateful for your time together. Be angry, truly angry, for what you have lost. Shout at the sky. Smash some plates. Scream at the world. Why would you not? But remember the good times. The laughs, the hugs, the moments of joy. The special, private moments that only you know. Write them down if you can. Or talk about them with people who also remember. Or sing or paint them, or find another way. For he was magic, and in your life. Not for long enough, that's for sure. But if you can, be grateful.

The moments will pass. They will become hours, then days, then weeks and years. Your dear, darling, beautiful child will still be missing. Not here. But also, somehow, here, too. And in front of you, let's hope, will stretch the next seven years, and perhaps the next. So try and do what Sam said: live each day to the full. Because you can.

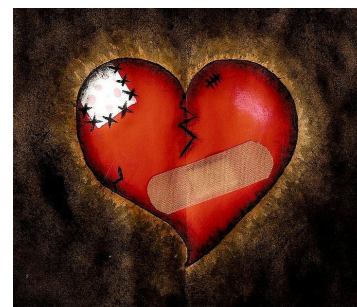
- This article is adapted from a speech given at the 50th anniversary conference of The Compassionate Friends, who support those who have suffered the loss of a child; tcf.org.uk.
- Thomas Harding's book, [Kadian Journal](#), is published by Penguin Random House. Twitter @thomasharding

This House and I

I think this house and I shall grow old
 Together and fall down around one another.
 How can I paint the walls
 when his breath has coated them?
 How can I wash the door frames when the
 Smudges of his fingerprints surely are still There?
 How can I patch the hole I kicked in the
 Wall in the weeks after he died?
 How can I clean the carpets that still hold
 Billions of his skin cells, his DNA?
 How can I throw out the old, broken chair
 That he sat and slept in?
 How can I clear the air that sometimes still
 Carries his scent?
 How can I ever fix the broken hearts of his
 Mother, his sisters and I?
 How long must I wait?

Jack McPeck, TCF/Spokane, WA
 In memory of my son Zachary Ian McPeck
 Portland Oregon Newsletter

Reprinted in TCF Winnipeg Newsletter



Is it Time to Forgive Yourself?

Each year, I'm invited to an Alumni Night by my support group. Every year, I go to let the newly bereaved know that (if they are willing to work on it) they can survive the deaths of their children and lead good lives again. Now, close to fourteen years down the road, my smile and the life of my son came back to me years ago.

Near the end of the meeting, as questions and answers went back and forth, a bereaved father said quietly under his breath, "I wonder what more we could have done? What decisions should we have made differently?" There was pain in his voice and he had tears in his eyes. I suspect there was guilt in his heart, too. His daughter had died from complications brought on by diabetes. Then, someone else spoke quickly and we never got back to him.

On my way home, I started thinking about self forgiveness and what a great benefit it can be on the journey to a better life. Those feelings of guilt associated with, "If only..." or, "Why didn't..." or, "Should we have..." are common. We think back and ruminate over and over about the decisions we made (or didn't make). We try to figure out how it all went wrong when our child died. It's easy to beat ourselves up with, "What if?"

When we make a decision, we think it's the correct decision at that time. If we think it's wrong, we don't decide to move forward. Before we make a decision, we use the information available to us based on our past experiences, advice from others and our best judgment. We mix some, or all, of those together and sometimes it's just a "best guess," but when we do it, we always, always, think it's the right thing to do. Even the person who gets upset with the boss and yells at him decided at some point that yelling at the boss was the right thing to do. As he was yelling, he may have thought, "This is wrong," but he went ahead anyway because he had previously decided it was right. In hindsight, it probably wasn't the right thing to do, but at the moment it was chosen, it felt right. That's why second guessing can be so destructive. "Why did I decide to yell at my boss? That was really dumb." It only was dumb because at the choice point it lacked information. Hindsight is always 20/20!

Some decisions work out, and some don't. If it turns out the decision you made was wrong or not even made (which is a decision too), you then use that experience to make a better decision next time. Perfect doesn't visit us all that often. We can make a perfectly round tire or find a perfect answer to a math problem, but "humans" and "perfect" and "emotions" just don't go together too frequently. Any decisions we made in regard to our children, were made in the best way we could with the information available to us at that time. We did what we thought was right. If we hadn't thought it was right, we wouldn't have made it! What's been done can't be undone, only learned from. Even if we later say, "I could have done better," there was no way for us to know it at that time. "I could have done better," is second guessing, and it's not healthy or productive.

Let's say your child died in a car accident after you gave him the car keys and you're now saying, "If I hadn't given him the keys, he wouldn't have died." You had no way of knowing he was going to have an accident and die. If you had thought he was going to die, you certainly wouldn't have given him the keys. For those parents whose child completed suicide, you may be saying, "How could we have missed the signs? Why were we so stupid?" You didn't see the signs because that information wasn't available to you yet. If you'd seen them, you would have certainly acted differently. For the man who thinks maybe they could have done more for their diabetic daughter, he may be saying, "Was there another test or another medicine or another therapy that could have helped her live?" Even if there had been, he had no way of knowing it. Perhaps a medication was still being formulated, but it was never seen by him. He couldn't have done anything different than what he did. He did his best.

What do we do with the guilt when we find that the decision we thought was right turned out to be wrong? (Or, if we didn't make any decision at all?) If we even occasionally say, "What if, what if, what if," our guilt, and the horrible emotions that brings might never leave. They can abuse us and tear us apart, and they have the potential to destroy our relationships with others.

First of all, feel the guilt and try to understand why you have the guilt. Don't run from it, deny it or try to hide it. Investigate it and learn from it. Do your best to express it in positive ways by talking or writing about it, beating up a pillow, crying or any other way that works for you. Let the guilt in, experience it. Let it out through positive expression, and then do your best to let it go. Let it in, let it out, let it go. There's no upside to guilt if it creates an ongoing disturbance in your life, in the relationship with your child, or with others in your life.

To move forward in your journey, try this to see if it can help. If you say, "I did the best I could at the time with the information I had and I forgive myself for any mistakes I may have made," and if you truly believe that, the guilt can disappear and be gone forever. One way that can facilitate letting go of your guilt is to speak, or write, an apology to your child and to ask for their forgiveness. They will surely give their forgiveness! They know you did the best you could at the time you made your decisions. You believed your choices were correct or you wouldn't have made them. Even if you now believe you could have done better, you did the best you could based on what you knew at the time. By speaking your request out loud, or writing it down, you give it a voice. It's no longer hidden in an unspoken thought or action. The guilt is being released from your inner prison, and once it's out, it can leave. If it's never out, it can never leave. When it's gone, you can work at forgiving yourself.

Forgiving yourself can be a significant step forward in finding your smile and finding the blessing in the life of your child. You did the best you could; try and forgive yourself.

Rob Anderson

Rob's journey began in March of 1998 following the murder of his son, Brendon. "I fell hard, I fell fast and I fell deep, just like many other bereaved parents," says Rob. "I began to put the pieces back together once I joined The Compassionate Friends. That support group saved my life. I could be any kind of bereaved father I wanted to be without fear of judgment or ridicule. And I was. I was a yeller, a crier, a table pounder or I was silent and reflective. I was all of them. I found a safe place to bleed out the poison of the death of my son."

Once Rob began to feel better, he gave back by writing about his journey. Numerous articles have been published. Writing turned to speaking. He presented multiple workshops at three national conventions of the Compassionate Friends. Rob's written a book titled, Dads in Grief - Grief in Dads, a survival guide for dads after the death of their child." Rob is looking for a publisher. "Life can be good again," says Rob. "It takes hard work and being good to ourselves. My smile and Brendon's life returned many years ago through my memories, his life force and my love. Death did not take all. He is, not was, a wonderful son. Bren continues to live in many special and powerful ways. Don't let death win. Let life win.

Dark Days

I was driving in to work today and thinking how far I have come since the early days of my grief. I started thinking about how something as simple as a good song gets me singing (not pretty, but to me I sound good) along with the radio. I now have goals and dreams that I look forward to pursuing.

I also started to think about some of the rough days I had early in my grief. The only goals I had on those days were to survive and to get out of bed to make it to work. There was no singing along to the radio on the way to the office, only tears. Every time I start to beat myself up for not being "further" along in life, I try to stop myself and remember some of those early days.

One particular day really stands out to me. It started out with the normal dread of waking up and getting out of bed. I had one of those moments of bliss between sleeping and reality. The moment that you thought you had the worst nightmare of your life and the reality that you were living that nightmare. The day progressed with the mental struggles I often fought. But this day I didn't have the strength to fight it, so I surrendered to it. I was on my hands and knees and had been gagging, throwing up from the stress every time I tried to eat. Throwing up from the stress! I didn't even realize that was possible. I was crying but there were no tears, only convulsive type spasms that resemble bawling, but again there were no tears. Only extreme sadness, fear, despair, depression, emptiness, guilt, devastation and anger. I am sure I am missing a bunch of other emotions that I was feeling that day. I remember that it was a wintery afternoon and there I was on my hands and knees not knowing if I was going to survive.

"Survive" is a word I asked myself a lot during the early days of the journey. "Am I going to survive this?" The reason I asked it was because I could feel myself dying and I really wasn't sure I was going to survive. I asked my counsellor, wife, family and friends. I needed confirmation that I was going to survive. And even when they said yes, I returned with "Are you sure? Because it doesn't feel like I am going to." I think some people around me started to ask the same question. One friend of mine responded to an email I sent him. "Hey buddy, I am getting worried about you. This is the first time I have had concerns, I don't want you hurting yourself, and you need to go to the doctor for help." I never got to the point of thinking about ending the pain, but I can see how people get to that point. My friend was right, I need to see a counsellor. When I was sitting with my counsellor telling my story, I was fine (ok not fine, but better because I had an opportunity to tell my story and cry), but when I was on my own it would start to build up until my next appointment. I needed her with me to help tame conversations I was having with myself regarding the survival of this nightmare. Unfortunately, my insurance only covered one visit per week.

As I mentioned earlier, I sometimes have a tendency to judge myself for not being the guy I was 10 years ago before the loss of my first child. However, when I look back at some of those dark days, I realize I have come a long way from those days and that it's ok to have easy/relaxing/enjoyable days and that the most important thing is the fact I feel happiness and peace in my life. Those two things are not easy to come by and I need reminders of those days to realize that it's ok to just sit back and enjoy the simple things in life.

I decided to share my thoughts and this story today because I want you to realize that no matter where you are in this journey, there is hope. There are brighter days ahead if you put in the hard work of allowing the grief process to run its course instead of fighting it. Learn to surrender and be vulnerable.

Kelly Farley BP/USA, Coeur d'Alene Chapter Kelly Farley is a bereaved father who has experienced the loss of his two children over an eighteen-month span. He lost his daughter, Katie, in 2004 and his son, Noah, in 2006. During that time, he realized that there is a lack of support available to fathers suffering such a loss. As a result, he is working on his first book as a resource for grieving dads.

Gratefully lifted from Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter





Sibling Page



My Forever Valentine

14th February 2013, 9 Years Ago, we buried my brother.. Lachie.. it feels uncomfortable to write that, and I am certain that makes no one reading this comfortable, but unfortunately for us that is the reality, I could use other more 'toned down' explanations but today I tell you how it 'really' is.

9 long years without him, an emptiness we feel every day, an emptiness that can completely envelope you in a cloud of sadness, no one can 'fix' it, we will never 'move on' from it, it just is not possible to do so because we loved him, he loved and was loved, and we are stuck in this vault of missing him forever and the unfairness of him not being here cannot be fathomed.

In speaking with my son Hamish recently, we talked about the importance of hugging those people we loved, in particular his Great Grandmother (95yrs), his explanation "Is that because she hasn't got many more hugs left before she goes to heaven?" Super insightful for a 4-year-old... And made me think, if only we could evaluate our length of life based on hugs, I would be literally hanging off all those people I love so they could live here on earth with us forever, the longest last hug.

If only I knew the last time I saw Lachie that our last hug was indeed our last, I would have held on and not let go.

My Brother, My Forever Valentine X by Rebecca Tobin

Reprinted with thanks from NSW Focus Newsletter.



"We didn't realize we were
making memories,
we just knew
we were having
fun"



Butterflies by Anna Mackland

My wonderful big brother David died on the 14th Oct 2020 after a short illness leading to a sudden cardiac arrest. He was 47 and was born with a heart condition. Although he had his challenges growing up; recovering from open heart surgery, multiple hospital appointments, missing time at school, unable to engage in most sports, I never remember hearing him moan or complain.

He was my best friend growing up. Few people would know of David's early life challenges, and he went on to set up an amazing life with his wife and 2 children in Scotland, pushing personal boundaries and contributed massively in his local community. Although he worked full time he also volunteered with Carnoustie Council with various projects: beach litter picking, street Christmas light co-ordinating, scout leading, and setting up a Facebook covid support group as a lifeline for those struggling during the pandemic. He did this all humbly and quietly, making a difference without making a song and dance about it.

One project he worked on during covid was encouraging the community to come together to paint stones of hope during the pandemic. These stones became a caterpillar weaving it's way round Carnoustie park. We found out after David died that it had been his idea for the caterpillar to transform into a butterfly, creating a permanent art installation of hope for the community.

The Carnoustie butterfly was unveiled a week after the first anniversary of David's death. Little did David know this butterfly would also become a message of hope for all those grieving for him.

The butterfly is known world-wide as having a symbolic link with life and death. The caterpillar effectively dies and transforms into something beautiful through its process of metamorphosis. All of us who grieve the loss of our siblings will never be the same again. We are permanently changed by our loss but from this loss can come unbelievable resilience and transformation. The short life of a butterfly reminds us life can be short and creates a new appreciation for life.

We are all on a grief journey, at different stages. Having David as my brother, and losing him, has made me who I am today and he will always be a part of who I am in the future. Losing my brother is the hardest thing I have ever been through, but I am proud that he was my brother and that he was part of my life.

A butterfly lights beside us
A butterfly lights beside us, like a sunbeam...
And for a brief moment it's glory and beauty belongs to our world...
But then it flies on again,
and although we wish it could have stayed,
we are so thankful to have seen it at all.

Author unknown



August Sept 2022



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
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Johnson, Adult son, Neville, cancer	03 4488360
CENTRAL OTAGO	Pauline Trotter Central Otago Coordinator (Andre, 25yrs, Car crash)	0273960611 centralotagocf@gmail.com
INVERCARGILL	Josie Dyer Vanessa Young (Jaylene 6yrs chemical poisoning) Southland Coordinators	0276321742 0273562271
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	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

COPYRIGHT

We are grateful for permission given to use material from other T.C.F. chapters, for our own, The Compassionate Friends (Otago Chapter) Incorporated, Dunedin New Zealand. All material is copy right to "The Compassionate Friends" and all is marked with it's Author and origin (if known). Copyright, All rights Reserved. Permission to use anything from this issue or other issues, must be sought in writing by contacting,

TCF c/- Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru. New Zealand. e-mail tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz Or by ringing Lesley Henderson, 03 4326004