

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER No: 204

DECEMBER 2024 JANUARY 2025



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



Our Children ... Remembered with love

Forever Young

Forever Loved

Forever Longed For

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

Dear Friends,

For many of us, this time of year highlights the absence of 1 or more of our dearly loved children/siblings and it can be hard to cope and function as the world expects us to, even if many years have passed. And for those whose loss is more recent it is even more difficult.

Hopefully some of the articles in this newsletter will give you comfort and some ideas for ways of managing the next few weeks.

Remember that you don't need to allow others to put pressure on you to live up to their expectations of what you SHOULD be doing. Generally these people have not lived through the death of a child and the ensuing grief journey otherwise they would know that you only need to do the things you feel OK to do and for some that might be cancelling Christmas altogether for this year. For others it will be completely changing years old traditions or spending the day with only very close family.

Whatever feels right for you, will be right for you, although even then there may be times in the day where you need to escape and be alone with your grief and memories of your beloved child/children.

However you spend the day I wish you some moments of peace, some periods of happy memories and the love and support from friends and family.

Sending you all love and Christmas wishes,
Lesley Henderson.

As bereaved parents, we grapple with the concept of hope in the midst of our unimaginable loss. We understand that hope cannot bring our precious children back to us.

So, what then can we hope for?

Hope, for us, is not about wishing for the impossible. It's about finding solace in the smallest glimmers of light amidst the darkness. It's about daring to believe that there can still be moments of peace in our shattered hearts.

In the words of various scriptures, hope is described as a source of joy, peace, protection, and strength. But for us, it's also a lifeline, a way forward when the path seems impossibly bleak.

While our journey through grief may never be easy, let's hold onto the hope that we can find moments of respite, that we can honor our children's memories with love, and that someday, we can find a semblance of peace in our hearts.

From TCF Victoria



To all those who are supporting bereaved parents and siblings a special thankyou for all that you do to comfort and give hope, sharing stories and experiences.

Wishing you a peaceful Christmas .

Take care of yourselves and your families.

With thoughts of love and hugs of comfort,
Lesley Henderson

Why Grief Can Seem Worse During the Holidays

Grief in and of itself is bad enough, but it can be magnified when the holidays roll around. That's mainly because the holiday season is filled with reminders of the one you lost, as you're surrounded by others who have their loved ones with them and are celebrating a season of joy and togetherness. Joining a support group or getting counselling as part of bereavement services in Alameda County and elsewhere can help immensely, especially during this difficult time where everyone else seems so happy and put together.

The holiday season starts in early November and ends after New Year's Day, and that two-month period can be devastating for those who are in the process of grieving. This time of year brings a lot of hustle and bustle, shopping, and socializing with family and friends. Everyone else seems to be happy and festive as they run around preparing for parties, hitting up malls, and buying presents for loved ones. Even in the midst of so much chaos, you may feel utterly alone. This is exacerbated by the fact that often during this time, many normal activities are shut down or postponed, leaving you alone with memories of your lost loved one. The pain you're feeling is very much at odds with the celebratory spirit that's all around you, leaving you nothing but quiet moments where you're faced with the raw power of loss, points out Mental Help.

Tips to Cope with Grief at the Holidays

There are ways to get through the holiday and cope with your grief during this time. First off, it's important to acknowledge that the holidays will be tough for you and to give yourself some extra self-care as you navigate through this month.

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

Decide which traditions you would like to keep and which ones you would like to change, suggests *What's Your Grief*. Create a new tradition in memory of the person you lost. Think about where you want to celebrate the holiday. If it's too painful to do the same you've always done, consider changing the location. For others, it can be comforting to keep things as they were. It's totally up to you and there is no wrong answer. Plan ahead and speak with family and friends to ensure everyone agrees about the traditions that will or will not be honoured this year. Remember, everyone grieves differently. When several people lose one person they loved, everyone is grieving but they do it in a different way. If you lost a parent, for example, be considerate of how your siblings decide to celebrate.

Place a memory stocking or box at the holiday party or meal where everyone can write down what they loved about the person. Read them together.

Include your loved one's favourite dish at Christmas dinner.

Be honest with friends who try to get you to go out and "get over it." Let them know you're not ready. They will understand. Take baby steps and pace yourself. One day you may feel like being sociable and the other you may feel like curling up on the couch. It's OK.

Donate money to charity in your loved one's name or buy a gift and donate it to a charity they cherished.

See a counsellor to talk about your feelings. Join a support group to connect with others going through the same thing.

Donate your loved one's clothing to a homeless shelter. This may spur you to go through their closets if you have been having a hard time facing this task.

Craft a memorial wreath, ornament, tree, or decoration in their name.

Leave yourself an "out" at holiday events. Drive yourself to any parties you're invited to so you can leave when you sense too much holiday overload.

Talk to your kids about the loss. They may be feeling conflicting emotions about the loss of their loved one, as they struggle with the joy of the season offset by the sadness they see in you and others around them.

Nix the holiday cards this year. You're going through a lot. No one says you have to go through the motions of sending out cards if it's just too much. You can always pick it up again next year.

Minimize gift-giving, or skip it altogether. With so much on your mind, going to the mall or spending hours shopping online may seem like an unnecessary stress. Talk with family members about what you all want to do about gift exchanges this year. Perhaps you could do a Secret Santa where you only have to buy one gift for another person.

In the end, remember this: it's okay to be happy. This doesn't take away from how much you loved your spouse, parent, or other lost loved one.



Reprinted with thanks from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter



Missing You at Christmas

Every day without you since you had to go.
Is Like summer without sunshine and winter without
snow.

I wish that I could talk to you
There's so much I would say.

Life has changed so very much since you went away.
I miss the bond between us and I miss your kind support.
You're in my mind and in my heart and every Christmas
thought.

I'll always feel you close to me and though you're far from
sight,

I'll search for you among the stars that shine on Christmas
night.



Christmas Thoughts

by Maria Ahern, James' mum

While the rest of the world appears to be getting ready for 'the most wonderful time of the year' we are bracing ourselves for the grief triggers to hit us and developing our coping strategies. What is it for you? I've ordered more wool than is seemly and will be knee deep in crochet projects for the duration. The most common advice we hear is 'Be kind to yourself. Do what feels right for you'.

This, on the face of it, sounds like good advice, but how do you balance the conflicting needs and expectations of your family and friends with your own at such a complicated time of year? Or do you just escape? Is there any escape? Of course, there is no escape is there. All we can do is navigate it as best we can. Do you accept that kindly meant invitation? Do you make a polite excuse and decline? Do you satisfy the needs of those around you at the cost of your own? Do you stick to old traditions or do you do it completely differently? Cards or no cards? How do you sign them. Do you include your child's name or not? The perplexities are endless and sorry, but this next paragraph doesn't contain the answers to those questions.

We all do it differently and we may change our minds from year to year. One year, you may feel more robust and find that you can cook a big meal and have a family day of sorts. Another year you may not be able to face it and retreat to your own space for a while. It is, quite literally, a movable feast. The important thing to remember is that it doesn't matter. There are no rules. In the bigger picture, the only thing that matters, surely, is that we find a coping strategy that gets each of us through this time and out the other side.

Most of us have done it before and will do it again. But what advice would I give those for whom this is the first time? I remember my first Christmas. The pain was tangible and I found that I could barely breathe. I hadn't yet found The Compassionate Friends and looking back on it, (what I can remember for it is a bit of a blur really) I was quite literally lost. I remember thinking that I should try. That people would expect things from me. So I did. I went to a shopping centre and broke down sobbing in a department store. I might not remember much about that first Christmas, but I certainly remember the assistant trying to help me in that shop and how painful the whole experience was for me and must have been for her too.

Why did I put myself through it? To comply. That can be the only explanation for what I was doing. Placing myself in a busy shopping centre buying gifts for people when all I wanted to do was scream. Why? Who needed a gift that badly for pity's sake? But, I wanted to be what everyone expected me to be and I was hurting myself in the process. I still can't explain why I thought I could achieve such a mammoth task. I guess it was because I didn't give myself the freedom to 'do what's right for me'. I didn't give myself permission to 'do it differently' and I certainly wasn't 'being gentle on myself' because no-one had told me I could or should.

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

The other is the one I live by the most. Don't be quick to take offence. Remember, the non-bereaved speak a different language to us and a lot of what they say can get lost in translation. They also don't have the same knowledge as we do so they don't really know what to do for the best. So, for what it's worth, my advice is to take deep breaths and shrug your shoulders. I'll give you an example. We used to get hundreds of Christmas cards before. Then, the year that James died we got 6; one of those said, 'chin up' and another said, 'we hope that you are feeling better now'. As if we were recovering from a cold!

It really isn't worth getting upset about these things. People need educating, yes of course. That is why the work we do here at The Compassionate Friends is so important. We can inform people but of course what they do with that information is really a matter for them. As for us, the bereaved? Well we have enough to cope with without worrying about some Victorian traditions and how people apply them to us in our fractured world. Breathe, and shrug your shoulders.

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

Lastly, and most importantly, find some space for you. Allow yourself to lean into the grief, the missing and the longing for your child. Honour them and keep them close. We don't need to pretend. Who are we pretending for?

The memories of Christmas past may sustain you in Christmas present. Let them come crashing in and allow yourself a smile remembering those happy times. We need them. One moment, one breath, one memory at a time...

Maria (James's mum)

From Upright With Knickers On by Gina Claye and Members of The Compassionate Friends
Reprinted from TCF Compassion UK

The Holidays are Near ...

For many, there will be an unfamiliar sadness, perhaps a heavy weight, for some a reminder of obvious absence. This is a new place we are in without our loved one.

I hope that gentle encounters will greet you throughout the busyness, excitement, intimate, and special moments of the season.

I hope that we make time to hold tight to what settles the heart, to hold tight to a presence that yet remains even in absence.

May we feel strong enough to hold love in new, unrestricted space.

May we look for peace strength, and courage in unexpected encounters.

In the places of support-speak your loved one's name and remember what captures the fullness and simplicity of your shared love.

When quiet tears flow; reassure yourself that it is okay.

Find occasions to celebrate their life-no matter how young, no matter how fragile, how imperfect, complicated, innocent, delicate, or strong-willed-find occasions to honor their life.

Give yourself permission to take periodic pauses to reflect, to rest.

May we find moments to possibly laugh without guilt-laughter can partner with pain on the grief journey. Sometimes laughter can override pain, or momentarily dismantle the grip of pain.

Encourage others who are new grief travelers-who may find the grief period, and the season too difficult to walk through alone.

I wish for you, I wish for me-glimpses, traces of growth and recognizable, evolving hope.

May we find what is essential, as we move beyond where we are and what we understand.

Wishing you tenderness during the season.

Pamela Hagens,

Samuel's Steady Honoring celebrating and remembering all those who now occupy beautiful heart space.

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg 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.

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

What can I possibly say to help someone through the holidays?

I cannot recall how many times I have wished for magic words to ease someone else's pain. But, of course, there are no magic words. There aren't even any answers. But there are suggestions of ideas tried in the past. As bereaved parents and siblings, it is important to share our experiences with newly bereaved families who look to us for help.



Our first Christmas without our son Jesse, we changed almost all of our normal activities. We traditionally had dinner in my husband's parents' home. We invited friends who did not have family in the area. We shopped very little. The stores and crowds were too much to handle. We hung no decorations or stockings, had no tree - nothing. I stayed busy making candy and baking breads. We tried to help others less fortunate than ourselves. We donated toys and food to various charities. We participated in a Breakfast with Santa with Project Kind, the wonderful school Jesse had attended. Basically, we did what we had to do to survive.

Friends and family seemed to understand or at least accepted our changes. Maybe they just didn't want to discuss it. Whatever! We survived those first holidays, much to our amazement.

The second Christmas season we had a new one-month old granddaughter. She helped a lot. We all know that our children can never be replaced. But if there is someone or something else to focus on, even for awhile, it helps. We had dinner at our home that year. We put up decorations, including Jesse's stocking. We decided that anyone who wished could write Jesse a note and place it in his stocking. Between preparing dinner and loving the new baby, again we survived.

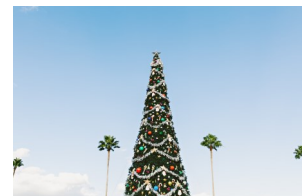
Now this year we intend to return to Jim's parents. I don't dread Christmas nearly as much as before. I'm not really looking forward to it, but I don't panic at the thought.

What I would like to suggest to others is to do what you need to do. Other peoples' expectations don't automatically have to be met. Discuss your feelings with family members. Remember, they hurt too. They will try to understand and respect your feelings.

It takes a lot of time and energy to grieve. Allow yourself all the time you need. I hope that something I mentioned is of help to newly bereaved families. The holidays can be painful, but we shall survive them. Maybe next year will be easier, and the next even easier still. Maybe before too long, we can enjoy all the memories of Christmases past without so much pain.

I wish you all a peaceful Christmas.

Brenda Hobbs, Denton, Texas
Lovingly reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter



Hints for Christmas by Darcie Sims

It can help to know how others cope with the Christmas season...

- **Take care of yourself physically.** Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli. If nothing else, jog your memory!
- **Be realistic.** It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!). Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.
- **Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears.** Understand that heartaches will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece.
- **Find the gifts of your loved one's life.** Think of all the "gifts" that your loved one gave to you... joy, safety, laughter, companionship, compassion. List these "gifts" on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to you. Some may put them in a gift box while others may decide to place them in the stocking. Some may decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. But, wherever you place them, know these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that, even though our loved one has died, we still have those gifts.

Reprinted with love from Compassion UK



One Last Gift

My daughter, Michelle, had blond hair. Her smile would make her beautiful green eyes sparkle. She was a kind and considerate young lady. She loved to talk and had many young and old friends. She worked at K-Mart and was attending OTC to become a physical therapist. She was 20-years-old when she was killed in a car wreck on her way home from work, Christmas Eve, 2004.

I was busy that season taking care of my mom and working. Michelle was not happy because I hadn't gotten our tree up. I told her to put up the tree. She and her friend Tamra decorated our tree that year.

Three years later, that tree was still in my living room. Her hands put the ornaments on that tree. Sometimes, when I miss her so bad, I will flip the lights on and it's like a part of her comes alive again. What a gift she gave me that last Christmas. With the memories of our last Christmas together, I get through the holidays and her death anniversary.

Find something that will bring you some comfort and hold onto it tightly. And remember "The Reason for the Season." Sheryl Baily, TCF/Springfield, MO

Reprinted with love from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News

~ Candles In December ~

My sadness seems reflected in the music that I hear . . .
 Every young one's glowing face reminds me you're not here.
 Shoppers crowd the festive stores, emotions all run high.
 This world I was a part of once, seems to pass me by.
 This season's meant for happy times, for love, warm hearts, and cheer,
 But grieving families around the world remember those not here.
 We struggle through the season, lighting candles to proclaim,
 Our children aren't forgotten, round the world our candles flame.
 I slowly pass through the gates thrown wide, one clear, cold Christmas day,
 No toys or playthings do I bring—those are gifts of yesterday.
 I carry with me just a polished heart of granite made
 and walk with grief to where my baby lies, in a silent silvered glade.
 "Merry Christmas, Love" I whisper, the quiet words seem so forlorn,
 "I've brought my heart for you to keep, my gift this Christmas morn.
 It is filled with all my love, though this one's carved of stone,
 I'll place it here—it will be near—you'll never be alone."
 We parents don't forget, my love, this month we will unite.
 To honor all we'll light a wall of candles through the night.
 The world will know our memories glow with love that's deep and true.
 We'll stand as one and before it's done the heavens will know too.
 Please keep my gift, beloved child, close to where you lie
 and know my love surrounds you 'til the day I too shall die.
 On the tenth of December, my candle's flame will light.
 I pray you'll see the love we'll free into the starry night.

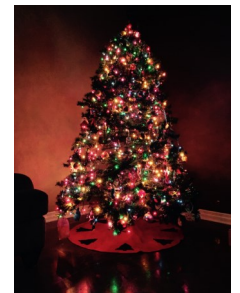


Sally Miglaccio, TCF/Babylon, NY
 Winnipeg



A Very Special Christmas Tree

Amidst all the confusion of getting our holiday decorations from past years
 All the pretence at gaiety-all the swallowed emotions
 there suddenly came a really urgent need...
 for a Special Tree!
 Not too big
 ...to stand at the end of that Special Grave...
 yes, she would like that!
 A Christmas Tree of her very own!
 And you simply can't imagine how hard it is to find one the right size
 ...and to get it standing upright in the frozen ground.
 For us it was Beautiful!
 And last year - in our quiet little country cemetery
 there were three such Special Christmas Trees.
 One was gaily wrapped in tinsel and garlands and sat in a pot.
 One was strung with cranberries, popcorn and suet balls.
 And one was small and plain-between two infant graves.
 But for those families-these were
 VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS TREES.



Bruce Conley
 Lovingly lifted from TCF Western Australia

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.

Christmas Eve

Silent night, holy night...

"It's about time," he says quietly.
Deliberately, wordlessly,
They gather the materials
Carefully put away last year,
The matches, candle, candle jar
To fend off the harsh winter wind.
Tis the season to be jolly...

Slowly they drive toward the town's edge,
Past homes with bright, blinking bulbs.
Cars of faraway relatives
Fill their drives.
Happy, laughing Families,
children home from school,
Pass by on the way to midnight Mass.
It's the most wonderful time of the year...

At last, town lights left far behind,
They sit mute, each wrapped in private
Cocoons of memories of Christmas past,
Excited whispers from their room,
Silly giggles, fervent good-night Kisses,
anticipation of morning.
On a cold winter's night that was so deep...

Through the gate, down the drive, engine killed.
Frozen grass crunching underfoot
Hand-in-hand they walk up the hill
To the familiar moonlight stone.
With practiced hands they brush it clean,
Then prepare their votive Noel.
The world in solemn stillness lay...



Lump in throat, arm-in-arm,
Candle lit, they stand and weep,
But not so bitter as in years past.
The pain's as deep but not so long,
As once again they dream of things
That should have been but never were.
The stars in the sky look down where he lay...

"Let's go," he says. She nods assent.
They leave, though turn back once to see
The lonely flame of their lost boy
Gleaming peacefully through the dark.
He whispers softly, his visit done,
"Merry Christmas and good-night, my son."

Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Richard A. Dew M.D.
Rachel's Cry, A Journey Through Grief

Lovingly lifted from TCF/Kamloops
Reprinted in Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter



Christmas Eve Is Hard For Me

“Christmas Eve is hard for me...” It was in the early hours of Christmas Eve 16 years ago that my newborn son was diagnosed with a horrible brain malformation. My husband and I were wrapping presents late on the 23rd (so now I associate wrapping presents with this diagnosis and throw everything I can into gift bags) when he began to have seizures so bad that we called an ambulance. Over the night the news went from bad to worse, and by dawn we knew that he would be severely disabled and die young. He died less than a year later.

It was a very long time ago, but grief has a way of working its way into your bones and nerves. I mourn the loss of my son every Christmas Eve — the loss of the healthy baby I thought I had until then, and the loss of the blessing Aidan turned out to be.

For those of us who have endured losses like these, there are always trap-door days (or trap-door smells or sounds or songs or pictures) when the ground gives out and we fall down deep. For the first few Christmas Eves after Aidan’s death I cried a lot in private, and in public held my breath and put my head into the wind of the day, making it through by sheer will. But bit by bit, year by year, I’ve learned that there are ways to keep from falling down deep, ways to be made strong against the wind of the day.

Nice presents and pretty lights don’t do it - they are too ephemeral - nor does music, no matter how lovely (a friend of mine who suffered from chronic depression once said wisely, “Some things take more than Mozart”). It takes things more fundamental and enduring. This Christmas Eve at dawn I went for a run. I pushed up the hills and sprinted down them, the cold air rushing into my lungs. I felt physically strong and capable, and as the sun lit the trees and filled the sky everything felt clean and possible. It helped.

My eldest daughter brought her kitten home for the holidays, and all day we laughed at Beau as he played with ornaments on the tree or hid inside boxes ready to pounce or chased the laser pointer absolutely anywhere we pointed it (what it is with cats and laser pointers?).

My 6- year-old, Liam, has a belly laugh that makes us laugh even more. It helped.

At church, two teenagers gave up their seats and stood so that an elderly couple could sit and it made me feel hopeful.

A girl from the children’s choir who couldn’t have been more than 13 stood up in front of the crowd and led everyone in singing the responsorial psalm; I watched her steady herself, take a deep breath, and sing out brave and strong. It helped.

A friend of my daughter’s who spent so much of her childhood with us that we all came to think of her as family, came to visit us for the first time in many months. I had missed her so, and seeing her again, and seeing the wonderful woman she is becoming and seeing how happy she was to see us -- it helped.

And there was Liam’s sheer excitement as we laid out cookies and he wrote a note for Santa. He got out of bed three different times to remind us to go to bed so Santa would come -- and one other time to tell us he was sure he’d heard bells outside. It helped too.

I lost Aidan, and others dear to me. And as not just the mother of a child who died but a doctor, I know more keenly than most that we are all vulnerable, and loss is inevitable. We all have our trap doors of grief, we all have days or months or years when life’s winds seem too much to fight. This is simply true; nothing can be done to change. But, I have come to see clearly, that doesn’t mean that life can’t still be good. Joy, beauty, excitement, laughter, bravery, kindness -- they all endure and shelter us against the wind.

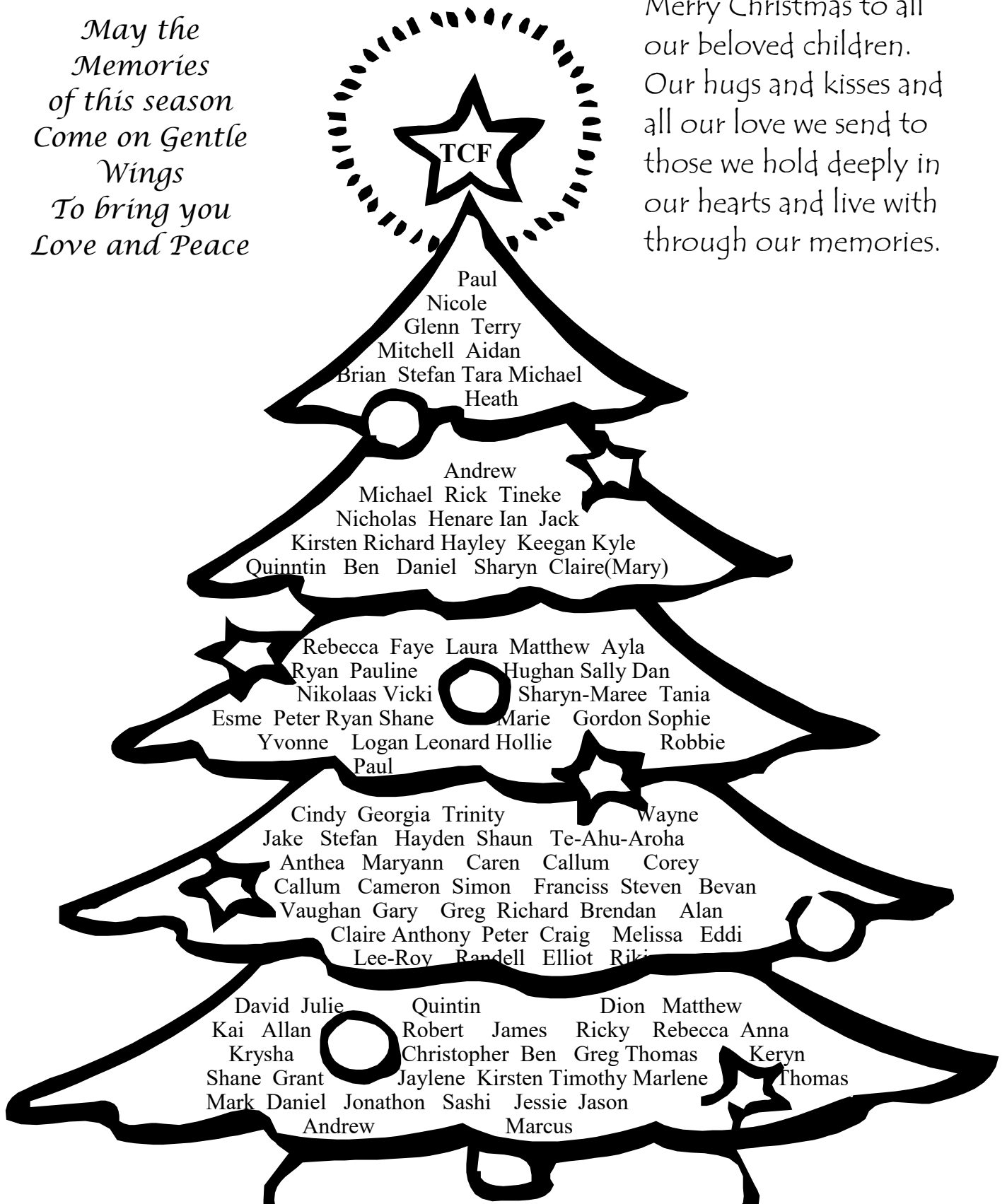
Most of all, the ties that bind us together make the difference: when we reach out our hand to take another, we do not fall so far.

Claire McCarthy, M.D. TCF/Kamloops, B.C. Pediatrician, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

*May the
Memories
of this season
Come on Gentle
Wings
To bring you
Love and Peace*

Merry Christmas to all
our beloved children.
Our hugs and kisses and
all our love we send to
those we hold deeply in
our hearts and live with
through our memories.



Otago Dec 2024 Jan 2025



Sibling Page



Why the Death of a Sibling is like Losing a Part of Yourself

If you're anything like me, you grew up in a fairytale surrounded by siblings who stood 10 feet tall. You grew up with parents who were as brave as superheroes. You grew up naïve to the world around you. Don't get me wrong; I was well aware of what the news never failed to talk about. I knew mothers and fathers could lose their battles with cancer. I knew children could be kidnapped. I knew houses burned down, and car accidents happened almost every day. But, I had created a world where my family was untouchable, where nothing could ever happen to them because they were mine.

Five years ago, a police officer knocked on our front door. It was 10 pm, and I had just gotten ready for bed. "There's been an accident. You need to come to the hospital right away." By this point, I had seen enough TV shows to know this was not what you wanted to hear from a police officer, especially not at 10 pm, and especially not when your older brother still hadn't made it home. I lost a brother that day. I lost a cheerleader, a mentor and a best friend. The safe space I had created so easily disappeared, and I was left to tackle the world without the one person who had always paved a path before me.

There's no word to describe the loss of a sibling. If you lose a spouse, you're a widow or widower. If you lose your parents, you're an orphan. But if you lose a sibling, you just become the girl who lost her brother.

My therapist described it as losing a limb. If someone tells you it gets better with time, the person's lying to you. Yes, cuts get better and wounds do heal, but when you lose an arm, it's foolish to await the day it "gets better." You simply learn to live with one arm. I learned to do the things I know he would have liked. I learned to listen to the songs we sang together in the car without breaking down in tears. I learned — and am still learning — to function normally without him just a phone call away.

However, "normal" has lately been like a blanket too short for a bed. Sometimes it covers you just fine, and other times it leaves you shaking in the cold. I've come to find the worst part is I never know which one it's going to be when I wake up. It's been almost five years since that day. Some days the ache is a little less than before, but other days it makes me want to lock myself in my room. And some days, I still feel like I am stuck in a void. There is no statute of limitations on grief. There is no time limit to waking up crying, or having to leave the grocery store because you see your sibling's old friends. There is no special cure for those dull aches in your heart that don't seem to ever go away.

But, coming from a sister who thought she would never find the light again, know there will come a day when the thought of that loved one brings a smile to your face instead of leaving you gasping for a breath you cannot find. There will come a day when you find yourself talking about your sibling and you do not feel uncomfortable. There will come a day when the universe sends you a sign to let you know your sibling is doing OK. And there will come a day when the 19 years you were able to have with your sibling becomes enough for the 19 more you'll never have.

There is no other love like the love for a brother, and no other love like the love from a brother. And if you're lucky to have a brother who was also your best friend, that love is going to cover you during the best of times and hold your hand through the worst.

This article was written by Kady Braswell yourtango.com
Reprinted with thanks from TCF NSW focus





Let yourself feel good again,
Laugh with friends, have fun.
Living your life to the full is
Not a betrayal of a memory but
Fulfillment of a promise to
Someone who would want only
The best for you.



By Karen Katafiwsz
Lovingly lifted from TCFQ HUGG



Dancing in the sky

“Oh-oh, I I hope you're dancing in the sky
And I hope you're singing in the angel's choir
And I hope the angels know what they have
I'll bet it's so nice up in Heaven since you arrived
So tell me, what do you do up in Heaven?
Are your days filled with love and light?
Is there music? Is there art and adventure?
Tell me are you happy? Are you more alive?
'Cause here on Earth it feels like everything
Good is missing since you left
And here on Earth everything's different
There's an emptiness”



by Dani and Lizzy, Song lyrics extract
Lifted from TCF NSW focus



A Sibling's Grief

...the loss of a sibling - no matter how old, no matter how close or not, and no matter how often death has occurred to others we know - is like losing part of our own lives and part of ourselves.

Who will be left now to remember us as the children we once were? Who will be able to remember our parents the way we do and as only their children can? Who will be there who lived in the same house, tasted the same foods, heard the same stories, and were taught the same lessons as we were?

We still have our own memories, of course, but without someone who shared them with us, they become mere ghosts... When we lose a sibling, we lose not just that particular person or relationship, but perhaps our last remaining link with our past.

Our siblings are special people in our lives, that is, sometimes they are supports and sometimes they are stresses or even strangers to us. But it does not really matter because regardless of whether we live like each other or even like each other, we have intimately and irrevocably shared and shaped each other's past and been shaped by them.

So when our siblings age and fail, our own lives are changed, too. And when our siblings die, we know there is no one else - no matter how close to us they may be - who can bring back the particular part of our life we have lost.

Gratefully lifted from TCF/Northshore, Boston Newsletter
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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	Jan Pessione (16 yr old daughter, accidental) janpessione@xtra.co.nz (Marina, 54yrs, Airways Obstruction)	03-4487800
CENTRAL OTAGO	Pauline Trotter (Andre, 25yrs, Car crash)	0273960611
INVERCARGILL	Josie Dyer Vanessa Young (Jaylene 6yrs chemical poisoning) Southland Coordinators	0276321742 0273562271
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	021 688504 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI CENTRAL NORTH ISLAND	Marie and Ron Summers (Son, Wayne 23yrs, Suicide)	07 8954879
WHANGANUI	Nina Sandilands (Debbie, 16yrs, Brain Virus)	06 3478086
WHANGANUI	Keren Marsh (Simon, 23yrs, car accident)	06 3443345 marshkandb@gmail.com
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz

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