



# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated  
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 175

DECEMBER 2019 JANUARY 2020



I'll be home for Christmas  
You can count on me  
I'll be home for Christmas. . .

I hear the words on the radio and in my mind.  
I see your face, your eyes, smiling at me.  
I am filled with incredible sadness  
knowing that You won't be home for Christmas,  
Not this year,  
Not next Year,

Not anymore years ever again,  
no matter how many times the song plays.

Everywhere people are getting ready to celebrate the season,  
while I am left to mourn your death and wonder if it will ever feel like Christmas again.  
If I will ever feel happy again without you home for Christmas.

This year I decorate the tree for others, not for me.  
I unwrap each ornament reaching into the box one more time.

I pull out a piece of paper  
I unfold it and see a heart that you drew, the words "I love you" written underneath.  
Though tears start to fall, a hint of a smile touches my face as I realise  
you really are home for Christmas.

*TCF/Atlanta*

*Christmas  
the Season of Hope*



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

**RETURN ADDRESS**  
52 SUNRISE DRIVE,  
SEAWARD BUSH,  
INVERCARGILL  
9812  
NEW ZEALAND

**TO**

# OUR CHILDREN

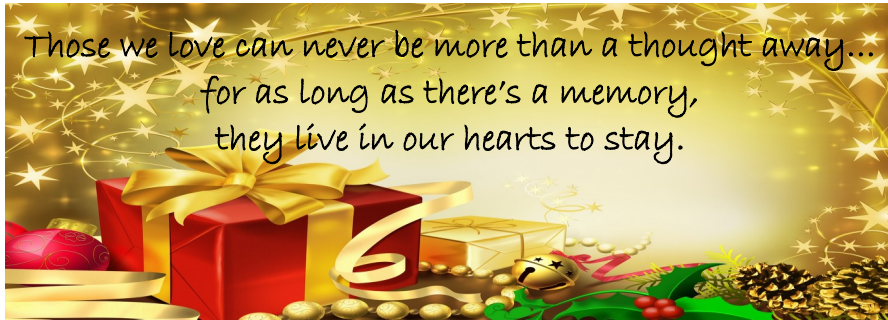
Children's names appear in this column if parents ask when they complete their annual donation form. You are also able to e-mail, write or phone me to have your child's name included.

This column includes names of those children whose anniversary or birthday occur in the months that the newsletter applies for.

You are also able to contact me if you wish to have a poem or piece, with or without a photo of your child included.

Once again, this is generally used for children whose birthday or anniversary occurs during the months of the current newsletter. I apologise for any omission or mistakes which I may make and ask that you contact me if this occurs.

Please contact me on 03 4326004, or TCF, Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru or by e-mail [tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz](mailto:tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz)



## 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		
Shaun Matakai	Born 2/12/83	Richard Craig Bell	Died 21/1/05
Maryann Gaye Pearce	Born 21/12/73	Simon Charlton	Died 14/1/08
Craig Noel Campbell Radka	Born 23/12/75	Sophie Kate Elliott	Died 9/1/08
Nikolaas Remmerswaal	Born 5/12/96	Ryan Joseph Frost	Died 16/1/99
Esme Caitlin Millais Stewart	Born 27/12/91	Laura Johanna Hood	Died 21/1/00
Wayne Edward Summers	Born 14/12/75	Tara Louise MacPherson	Died 14/1/05
Ben Watt	Born 28/12/87	Peter John Oxley	Died 6/1/96
Dion Wells	Born 5/12/61	Corey Ryalls	Died 13/1/99
Hayden Ross Whitaker	Born 12/12/86	Anthony Mark Staite	Died 19/1/98
		Dion Wells	Died 1/1/01
Claire(Mary) Benicarke(Schiehse)	Born 10/1/75		
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		



To all those wonderful people who give up their time to meet with or talk to other bereaved parents, to the coordinators, those who assist with the printing and delivering of the newsletter, and the numerous other generous people who give their time and energy to enable us to bring hope and support to bereaved parents and siblings, may you have peace, happiness and hope this Christmas.

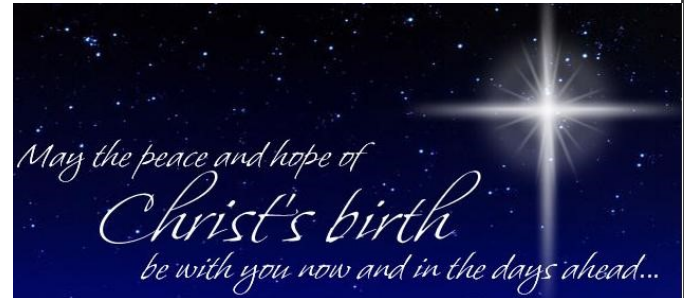
**May you have the spirit of Christmas,  
Which is Peace,  
The gladness of Christmas  
Which is hope,  
The heart of Christmas  
Which is love.**



Dear Friends,

December = Christmas.

I hate this time of year. *I love this time of year.*  
So much sadness. *So much joy and happiness.*  
So many sad memories. *So many happy memories.*  
So much pain. *So much love.*



During this Grief Journey, mourning and missing our Ben, there have been days which I will never forget. Of course the day of his accident and the day of his death; the day we brought him home; the day of his funeral and the day of his burial; the first anniversary of his accident, are all days etched in my memory.

The other day I remember as if it was yesterday is the first Christmas without him.

Prior to that Christmas we had always assembled, extended family, either at my parents place or at my Aunt's. The day hadn't really changed in all the years, although of course there were extra people mainly children or partners and sometimes someone who was overseas (but we always had long phone conversations) And later some important people missing, my dad, my uncle but never ever was there a child missing. Our child. A child who we couldn't speak to on the phone, a child who would never be present again.

I couldn't face the traditional day but our youngest son who was 4 deserved a Christmas Day so we had some family come and stay on Christmas Eve and then my mother and brother came and we had a picnic at the Botanical Garden. And yes we coped and survived the day.

16 years later, we have never resumed the old tradition, not necessarily because of Ben, more because people have moved on, with partners and in-laws and extended families who need their turn with my cousins and siblings. And I think I am glad that I was never put in the position of having to go back to the Christmas of 'before'.

We have since spent Christmas in many ways. Sometimes with some of my family, sometimes with some of my partners family and several Christmas's just my partner, our youngest son and myself, at home.

As the years have gone by the pain of Ben missing at family gatherings has softened and Christmas is no different. We now, once again decorate the house, have a beautiful Christmas tree, exchange gifts, laugh and have fun. But, we also cry, reminisce, feel sad and never ever forget that Ben is missing. We always light candles around his photo and have his photo album out to look at.

And still I have the above conflicting thoughts at some time either in the buildup to Christmas or on the actual day and I accept that this may be forever. And that's OK. Ben is and always will be an important member of our family, a son and brother, forever young, forever loved and forever longed for.

To you all I wish you a peaceful and loving day. A day where you are able to think of and talk about your loved one, a day where you are able to do what you want and need to do and where others accept that perhaps you can't fulfil their expectations.

Love and Christmas wishes, Lesley Henderson.



## Central Otago Compassionate Friends

Dear Friends,

The weather is all over the place here in Central Otago. Just like our mood swings! There is flooding in several places. Then soon it will be too hot again.

Thank you so much John and Pauline for hosting us last month in your beautiful home in Wanaka. You were very generous and you looked after us so well.

Our next meeting will be our Christmas Candlelight Evening on Thursday 12 December. Bring a candle and a photo for the Remembrance Table if you feel up to it. We will have our balloons to release as well and of course the cuppa at the end of the meeting. I am hoping to find inspiration for one more activity for the evening. It is always such a poignant time and thus not easy to organise a programme. But getting together to remember our dearly loved children is a happy thing in itself.

Sadly, two of our Friends, Roger Banks and John Wilson, have recently died. We feel so sorry that Paddy and Margaret both have yet another misery to be added to their lives. Arohanui to you both.

Let's hope that the weather improves so that we can all relax in the sun over the Christmas period.

Wishing everyone well,

Louise



## FOR THAT I AM THANKFUL

It doesn't seem to get any better . . .  
but it doesn't get any worse either.  
For that, I am thankful.

There are no more pictures to be taken . . .  
but there are memories to be cherished.  
For that I am thankful.

There is a missing chair at the table . . .  
but the circle of family gathers close.  
For that, I am thankful.

The turkey is smaller . . .  
but there is still stuffing.  
For that, I am thankful.

The days are shorter . . .  
but the nights are softer.  
For that, I am thankful.

The pain is still there . . .  
but it only lasts moments.  
For that, I am thankful.

The calendar still turns,  
The holidays still appear  
And they still cost too much . . .  
but I am still here.  
For that, I am thankful.

The room is still empty,  
The soul still aches . . .  
but the heart remembers.  
For that I am thankful

The guests still come,  
The dishes pile up . . .  
but the dishwasher works,  
For that, I am thankful.

*So much  
to be  
Thankful  
for!*

The name is still missing,  
The words still unspoken . . .  
but the silence is shared.  
For that, I am thankful.

The snow still falls,  
The sled still waits,  
and the spirit still wants to . . .  
For that, I am thankful.

The stillness remains . . .  
but the sadness is smaller.  
For that, I am thankful.

The moment is gone . . .  
but the love is forever.  
For *that*, I am blessed.  
For *that*, I am grateful . . .

Love was once  
(and still is)  
A part of my being . . .  
for *that*, I am living.

I am LIVING . . .  
and for *that*, I am thankful.

May your holidays be filled with reasons  
to be thankful. Having loved and having been  
loved is perhaps the most wondrous reason of  
all.

By Darcie Sims, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Taken from Bereavement Magazine

What  
ARE . . . You  
Thankful?  
for?



# Coping at Christmas



When your child has died, Christmas can be unbearably difficult. The whole world seems to be celebrating, everybody appears to be obsessed with preparations, which seem to go on for weeks. These confront us at every turn –in shops and streets, on TV, radio, in magazines and on the web and social media. We often feel alienated, isolated by our grief.

As we contemplate Christmas –especially in the early years of our bereavement - we wonder how we will survive. It is normal for parents to feel they just want to 'cancel' Christmas. It is a time to be with family, and the enormous gap left by the death of our child is intensified. Christmas cannot be the same as it was because our family is not the same – not complete.

If this is the first year, it will be painfully different from previous years. We may find the anticipation and stress of what we 'should' be doing very hard to deal with. Do we decorate the tree, send cards, give presents, attend a place of worship, join in the festive meal, go to a family party? For younger children especially, do we continue with important traditions of trips to the shops, the decorations, a pantomime, and a visit to see Father Christmas?

Many bereaved parents find the run up to Christmas – with all the accompanying anticipation– can be more difficult to cope with than the actual day itself. We hope that some of the ideas below might help and support you as you prepare for the holiday season...

- Don't allow other people to dictate to you how you should get through this extremely difficult time of year. Don't feel you have to go to the office party or festivities with friends/extended family if you can't cope with them.
- Sometimes we don't know what we will feel like doing until the last minute. Don't feel you have to have a plan. Tell people you will decide on the day and you will come if you feel up to it, but may well not be able to.
- Let close friends/family know that you are struggling and need to be able to talk about your child at this important family time.
- Tell people that you need to have your child acknowledged by others at Christmas - to see their name in a Christmas card or to remember them with a toast during the Christmas meal means so much, but many people would be scared of doing this unless you tell them.
- Within the family try to talk to each other, about how you are feeling, or what you all might want to do. Thinking and talking together can help us to prepare ourselves for Christmas, and sometimes when these plans do go right, the day can bring surprising comfort to us.
- If you have young children in the family be aware that they might wish for Christmas to carry on as before – although this can be enormously painful for you, for surviving children the normality of Christmas celebrations can be a comfort
- For parents who have lost their only child or all of their children, Christmas can be an especially painful, particularly so if there are no grandchildren. Christmas is generally recognised as a family time and for parents without surviving children this can be extremely hard to bear. For such parents it can be difficult being with other families at Christmas and yet the alternative - being alone - can be equally hard to bear. Whatever these parents choose to do, it is vital that their child or children are remembered.
- Some people don't send cards at Christmas any more. Others like to include their child's name – for example - "Love from X x and x and always remembering xx". You can also ask others to include a similar sentiment on any cards they send you. A small gesture which can really lift our hearts.
- Don't put too much stress on yourself. If there are difficult relations who expect to visit or for you to visit them, just say you can't do it this year if it's going to make you feel worse. Or introduce a time limit - "We'll come over for a quick drink but will only stay an hour."
- Develop a Christmas ritual involving your child – attend a candle lighting service with other bereaved parents; spend time at a special memorial place on your own or with others; make or buy a special card or decoration for your child.
- Spend time with people who understand. Avoid those who don't.
- On the day itself, make time for yourself to escape if things are too much. A walk outside can really help ease tensions. Or take yourself off for a long warm bath.
- If you can't cope with the idea of Christmas at all, go away and do something completely different. (Be aware, though, that sometimes being away from supportive friends or family can be more difficult and the jollity of strangers may be painful)

- Volunteer for a charity helping the homeless or elderly over Christmas. This can be some small distraction and you are doing good too.
- Try to take some gentle exercise every day - really helps boost those much needed endorphins.

Be aware that the New Year celebrations can also be difficult. The coming of a new year can feel like we are moving 'further away' from our child and the celebrations of others, wishing us a 'Happy New Year', can intensify our yearning and grief. We can feel isolated from the celebrations and happiness of others.

Acknowledge these feelings to yourself and others close to you, and perhaps plan the evening of December 31st – whether that is to be alone, or with close, understanding friends who will allow you to be yourself and remember your child at this poignant time of year. After the death of our child, the Christmas holidays will have shadow, a yearning for what might have been, an added poignancy. However, we do survive these days, difficult as they are. What matters is that, as far as possible, you are able to do whatever feels right for you, and eventually be able to carry the loving memory of your child with you into future Christmastimes.

“Coping with Christmas” from the TCF website  
 Newsletter for Childless Parents | [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

### **Flow With the Season and Take Care of Yourself**

We're into November and it's almost time to take the "January pill." After Tricia died I decided I'd invent a pill you could take the week before Thanksgiving and when you come to, it would be January. I'm still working on the invention. In the meantime, I know many of you are already dreading the holidays.

The true spirit and meaning of Thanksgiving and Christmas are not necessarily exemplified by some of our "traditions." You are re-evaluating many aspects of your life so let this also apply to the approaching holidays. You will not always feel as you do now. You will again find joy in the holiday activities, but maybe not in all the things you once thought so important.

Flow with the season and with your sadness, knowing strength will come as you work with what you can do without over-taxing yourself. Resolve to be as generous with your energy as you can and as selfish as you have to be to protect the emerging person you will become as a result of your loss. This person can be truly beautiful and loving because of what you have learned through grief.

You will miss your child; no magic potion can wipe the pain away, but even this pain will one day change to something more gentle. Give yourself time and space. Enjoy what you can, you deserve some pleasure. And may some measure of peace overtake you before the year ends.

Elizabeth B. Estes TCF/Augusta, GA 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.



# A CHRISTMAS WISH

Shops, magazines, brochures and catalogues are full of Christmas plans and things to be done before Christmas arrives, (and before the relatives also arrive to swiftly gobble up all those painstaking preparations). We are all bogged down in the “must dos” and “must haves”. We are urged to buy, redecorate, cook, change, spend, spend, and spend before that date draws near. I did that too, until one awful year, a few days before Christmas. It was the day before our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and we were going to take time out from our very busy business and farm duties to celebrate.



In one moment our celebrations and our dreams were smashed. Our son was dead. How was it possible to contemplate one so full of life, laughter and love suddenly gone? How could we survive? Christmas passed us by, our grief heightened by the contrast of the rest of the world who seemed so much in the party mood. We felt so alone, so alienated. Bad enough to lose any loved one, but the loss of a child is never the right order, never acceptable, never a normal death at the end of a normal life. To lose that one at Christmas time just accentuated the loss. We wished him back, so much, if even just for one last hug.

We grieved and grieved, so deeply that we thought we might not survive. The first real Christmas without him, twelve months later, almost passed us by. Love came down at Christmas, says the song. For us, it felt as if love had left us, when he left. But we still had each other – just three of us now, and the wider family. We bought some things we needed, put them all in a box, we had a slightly special meal and that was it. Christmas done. It was hard on our daughter, grieving just as deeply, but differently, and we did not always recognise that it was so difficult for her, as well. We could not face shops, could not face anyone, really, so family received subscriptions to magazines. The next Christmas I hastily shopped before the Christmas music started (do you realise how EARLY that is?). It was the first and only year of my life I have ever been organised for Christmas well before it happened. Over the years, we met many others who had lost children of all ages. We learnt a lot. We learned that we could actually survive, and we reached out to those others in similar circumstances.

I always said I'd give up all I had learnt just to have our son back for one hug. Surprisingly, some time later, I had a very vivid dream. He visited me, and it felt very real.

His words were “You know I have to go back?” Oh yes, I knew. “I’ve just come back to see you for a while and for a hug.”

Then he told me why things were the way they were, and I know I visited that other place. There was so much more that I cannot remember, even though I still try, and now I know that I am not supposed to remember some things. Only later, much later, I remembered the words, his words; my words, as if he were saying, “I’m coming back for that hug, but don’t give up what you have learned. Use it!” So we have. We do. We continue to try in various ways to give back. I wrote a book about the grief struggle for others to realise that they are not alone. Kahil Gibran said, “It is only when you give of yourself that you truly give”. How true. What an important Christmas message if we were to heed it! How we often forget that in the mad spending rush.

So time goes on (sometimes relentlessly and in spite of us) and we learn, with a lot of hard work, to cope, to live with our loss, now an aching loneliness rather than a searing pain. Christmas has more meaning now. I can shop with the canned Christmas songs without standing, a blurry, teary mess in the middle of it all. I can smile and say “Thank you, and you too” when a checkout person says “...and you have a lovely Chrissie!” where once I wanted to yell at them “You don’t understand! I never will!!” We can almost now attend Christmas parties, (but still not on the day he died). We survive the actual day quietly, a diminished family now, smiling at his memory, laughing, because he would have made us laugh, and yes, a few tears are shed sometimes too. We remember other Christmases. His Christmas present now is a donation to the charities he would have supported, and, we try to think of others for whom, for a myriad of reasons and circumstances, Christmas is not exactly a joy.

And our gift? Well, our Christmas wishes have come true, in a way, various times. It’s not as good as the real thing, but it suffices as the best we can do. We feel him near us now. But there is still that empty place – at the table, and in our hearts. We have our hugs, in dreams, and in a form of reality you may never understand. So my wish is somewhat granted. And now we have a Son-in-law and grandsons to love - new gifts, and more Family.

And your wishes? What are they? My wish for you is that your own Christmas be filled with love and appreciation for your own family, and all those you love; that you are aware of the important things in life; and that every new day is a joy and a challenge to be used well. And may you have a truly happy Christmas.

© Carolyn Salter

Lifted with thanks from TCF NSW Focus Newsletter



## THE CATHARINE POINTER MEMORIAL LIBRARY

by **Mary Hartley**

By the time you are reading this we will be approaching Christmas and that puts me in mind of a poem written in 1833 by Alfred lord Tennyson.

'The Yule-log sparkled keen with frost  
No wing of wind the region swept  
But over all things brooding slept  
The quiet sense of something lost.'

Of course our sense of loss is often far from quiet and is with us every day. However some days are definitely harder than others and Christmas is right up there at the top end of the list, not helped by our tendency in this country to stretch it out to cover about a third of the year! We have some books in the library on the subject of coping with special occasions, including Christmas, but, rather than talking about one or two of them, I've looked at them all and tried to extract their best advice. This advice comes under four general headings starting with:-

### **1) Look after yourself**

This covers pretty sensible things like eating and drinking sensibly and getting enough sleep. Grief is so exhausting, and our sleep pattern is in tatters, so go with what your body tells you to do. There's nothing wrong with a nap in the afternoon or getting up at 3am for a hot chocolate and a re-run of Del boy falling through the bar flap. Also it's good to get out in the fresh air if possible for a walk, even just for five minutes or so. This is good advice for any time but it can easily be overlooked at Christmas.

### **2) Be gentle with yourself**

If you can't face the shops use catalogues or the internet or ask a friend.

Don't be afraid to say NO. If you can't face parties or extended family invitations don't go. If you do go, and want to come home early, do just that.

Accept any help that's offered. If a friend asks what they can do to help, tell them; they'll probably be pleased to be able to do something, maybe some of the shopping or just being with you for a walk or a coffee somewhere.

Have some ME time. Make yourself a quiet space to retreat to when you need to. A nice hot bath full of bubbles sounds good and jigsaws or the new 'adult colouring books' can be a therapeutic and relaxing way to spend an hour or two

Realise you're going to feel pain and express your feelings in words, writing (poems or a journal), in painting or music or whatever else you like to do.

### **3) Make changes in your traditions**

Maybe go right away from home and have a holiday

Maybe volunteer for a good cause

Change the way you do things at home. Don't decorate if you don't want to, eat out or at a different time and there's no law that says you must eat turkey on Christmas day. Don't go to relatives, or have the family come to you, if you don't want to.

All the books recommend planning ahead, so you've got an idea of the shape of the day, while remaining flexible in case you find you just can't cope with what you'd planned.

### **4) Above all honour your child at Christmas**

Say their name, talk about them and don't allow others to act as though they never existed.

Buy a special ornament, something you feel makes a connection with them.

Light a candle for them and have it flickering away during Christmas.

Take decorations and/or flowers to the cemetery or to a place that was special to you both. If you're going away you can do that before you go or after you get home.

Buy them a present, something they would like and which you can keep in their room or their special place in your home.

Donate to a charity in their name or maybe buy a present for someone who has very little at Christmas. Also homeless shelters are always grateful for gifts of food.

I hope this is a little bit helpful at this very difficult time of year. TCF also has a leaflet about dealing with special occasions which is available from head-office or your contact.

I wish everyone a peaceful Christmas.

*With best wishes from Mary*

*UK Compassion Newsletter*

## Christmas without Miles

Miles loved Christmas. From the time he was just a toddler, he really got into the "Christmas Spirit" and more so when we came to Australia to live because Christmas here is so different to the Christmases we had in the UK. When he died in April 2010, we knew we couldn't celebrate Christmas without him, so we didn't. We didn't acknowledge Christmas in any way, shape or form for nearly five years.

But, in 2015 when our grandchildren were 5,4, 2 and 1, I realised we needed to make Christmas magical for them. I'm not one for saying "oh it's what Miles would have wanted" with regard to things, because who knows what Miles would have wanted, but I felt so sure in my heart, that he wouldn't want his nieces and nephews to not have the lovely memories of Christmas that he had. So that year, I pulled my big girl pants on and decided we were going to go all out and have a Christmas like we used to do.

We got the two trees (yes we have two trees as there is one for Jeanette to decorate and one for the children!) out of storage, along with all the decorations, lights and ornaments and dressed up the house. That year I started a new tradition of asking the children to come and help me decorate and they could decorate "their" tree how they wanted to do it, using some decorations that Uncle Miles, their Mummy and Uncle Henry had made in school. Whilst we were doing it, we had lots of Christmas music playing (Nana had a glass of wine - or two) and there was lots of chatting about Christmases past and Uncle Miles. We even have a couple of baubles with his photo on. We got together as a family on Christmas day and enjoyed turkey and ham and all the delicious things that go with it. I even re-started to send Christmas cards that year and when someone wished me a Happy Christmas, I was able to say for the first time, "and the same to you". Yes, there were tears and there will always continue to be tears, and I am not saying it wasn't hard, because it was. But seeing the children's faces when the tree was lit up and then when they opened their presents, overrode some of the pain we were all feeling that day. I felt Miles would have been very proud of me for having the courage to do it that year.

So since then, we have celebrated Christmas each year. The children come and decorate "their" tree whilst Nana has her glass of wine and we sing Christmas songs. Uncle Miles is very 'present' as he is all the time anyway and they love to talk about him, the naughty things he might have done and did Father Christmas still come? We have created some new traditions over the past few years and funnily enough, that's helped with missing Miles so very much at this family time of the year. My daughter now has a Book Advent calendar for the whole month of December and the four children take it in turns to pick out a Christmas book to be read to them before bedtime. Samantha has found lots of Christmas books that Miles, she and Henry enjoyed as children. Another small way of including him. It's never going to be "easy" having Christmas without him, but we can now enjoy the time knowing we are making magical memories for the children and including him in our celebrations in lots of little ways.

Jeanette Bath

Gratefully lifted From Focus, TCF NSW Newsletter



# POETRY / MEMORY CORNER

You are all invited to submit poem's, in memory of your child/children. These may be original poems or one that you have read which means something to you and your loved ones. Please remember to add the authors name if known.

## Wishing You The Colors of Christmas

This year I will leave behind the clanging  
reds and the vibrant greens,  
the glowing golds and the silver glittering  
plaids of Christmas.

I will tune out "Jingle Bells" and  
"Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer"  
and let "Silent Night" and  
"Hark The Herald Angels Sing"  
play softly in my heart.

This year I will allow time for silence  
and quiet meditation  
on the birth of The Christ Child,  
and turn off the squawking and shrieking  
of holiday commercials.

I want to be drawn in and comforted  
by the peace of soft blues  
and the calm of snowy whites,  
and to search the sky, the moon and the stars  
for promise and hope during the winter nights.

I will decorate with Christmas angels  
who stand still in my home,  
guarding my heart from pain,  
and the nativity scene which keeps  
me focused on the truth.

I will not yet open those sacred  
boxes of Christmas ornaments  
and priceless mementos which filled  
my home in Christmas past.

I want to think about the praise of the angels  
where our children celebrate Christmas,  
and leave behind the chaos the world  
has created and named Christmas.

I wish for each of us to have the courage  
to search the memories in our hearts  
and to not shut them out because  
of our unspeakable pain.

I wish for us to allow the presence and comfort  
of family and friends who love us,  
and remember that their celebration  
is tinged with lingering pain and private sorrow.

I wish for you the peace and softness of Christmas.

Carol Thompson, TCF/Tyler, TX

Always Remembering Sarah - December 2012 Lifted from TCF Winnipeg Newsletter





# A New Year...



## So What Does a New Year Mean?

In simplistic terms when life was uncomplicated by grief it meant starting over...a clean slate...making resolutions to clean up our act. Some of us like the feeling of getting a fresh start and forgetting the past. We like believing that, during this next year, things will be better. But when we are grieving, our tendency is to stand at the threshold of a new year looking back rather than forward. We fear that to walk through that door into a new year means leaving our lost loved one behind. To move on seems like an act of betrayal of or abandonment of the one we love. There may also be a fear of forgetting, or maybe a fear of letting go. We experience a contradiction: we want to feel better, but at what cost? Remember, January 1st is just another day. It has no meaning or power except the meaning we choose to give to it. Acknowledging our special needs as grieving persons, we can choose to make softer resolutions for the new year—resolutions that can still be challenging, yet are not unrealistic.

Why not frame your New Year's resolutions in terms of hope for a gentler year; for gaining control of your emotions, for better understanding of the grief process and what we can learn about ourselves as we journey through it? Why not resolve to enter into a future that can be good, even though it lacks all that we might desire, and offers a hope that we will be at peace with sorrow and enjoy life even though we grieve. We know we are not the only ones who grieve, though sometimes we have felt all alone. And still we survive, even though at times we questioned if the struggle was worth it. We have tasted the bitterness of loss but have not allowed it to destroy us. And together we will rise out of the ashes of grief and say YES to life. None of us can do it alone. We need each other to lean on and celebrate our newness. Our hope for those in the throes of fresh grief is that someday your days will again bring you more joy... more music...more laughter...more gratitude...more friends... more surprises...more memories.

By Pat Schwiebert, R.N. [pat@tearsoup.com](mailto:pat@tearsoup.com)

## New Year

1997

"You will be glad  
to leave this year behind,"  
said people who do not know  
the terrible tie that binds  
the living with their dead.

But I  
am not glad to leave  
a year at whose beginning  
you were alive.

when,  
despite despair and anguish,  
there was still hope that you  
would remain here.

Cocooned

in the passing of the year,  
surrounded by music, people  
and celebration.

the pain  
of loving and losing  
the flesh and blood  
of you.

*Margaret Gillanders  
reprinted from 'Voices'*





## New Year's Resolutions for Bereaved Parents

I Resolve:

That I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving, and that I will not let others put a time table on my grief....

That I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving, and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.

That I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying, and that I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be "brave" or "getting better" or "healing by now".

That I will talk about my child as often as I want to, and that I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.

That I will not expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how I feel.

That I will not blame myself for my child's death, and I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job of parenting I could possibly have done. But when feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is normal part of the grief process and it will pass.

That I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.

That I will commune with my child at least once a day in whatever way feels comfortable and natural to me, and that I won't feel compelled to explain this communion to others or to justify or even discuss it with them.

That I will try to eat, sleep, and exercise every day in order to give my body strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.

To know that I am not losing my mind and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy, and a sense of vulnerability are all normal parts of the grief process.

To know that I will heal, even though it will take a long time maybe many years.

To let myself heal and not feel guilty about feeling better.

To remind myself that the grief process is circuitous-that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that "slipping backward" is also a normal part of the grief process and these moods, too, will pass.

To try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first, I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts so eventually they can become a habit.

That I will reach out at times and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.

That even though my child is dead, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.



# Sibling Page



Dear Siblings,

A very warm welcome to your Winter issue of SIBBS. This can be a very bittersweet time of year for us. For many of us, Christmas memories are indelibly defined by moments shared with our sister or brother over the years. My most vivid early festive memory is creeping stealthily downstairs in the dark early hours (watching out for that creaky stair) with Adam, to see if Santa had been yet to fill our pillow cases with presents (we didn't have stockings!) Around thirty years has passed since that particular Christmas, and I now have kids of my own. But I still always wake on the day with a punch-to-the-gut ache to sneak downstairs in that most magical, precious, innocent dawn with my brother. Sharing a post- Xmas lunch whisky together as adults would be magic too. What are your most poignant, special memories of Christmas and New Year with your sibling? How do you manage to get through this time of year, when it can feel like happiness is being forced on us from every angle? We've included one sibling's approach to Christmas after losing her brother to suicide - it's a helpful reminder that there is no right or wrong way to do this. As always, our hearts go out to anybody who has lost a beloved sister or brother recently, and to all those grieving their sibling years on. Wishing you a gentle Christmas, with glimmers of hope and love.

In friendship, Hayley x

SIBBS Newsletter, Winter 2019 | [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)



## It's THAT time of year again

Denial - such a "safe" place to be.

I saw my first set of Christmas lights the other day - it's THAT time of year again. It's the time when I visit the world of denial, the world where Christmas doesn't exist, festivities don't exist, my loss doesn't exist.

To think of Christmas without 'them' is like opening a wound, a wound that never really healed in the first place. The usual questions come along for the ride - "Why?", "Why me?", "How?", "Is this for real?".

I've been advised to leave denial world - it isn't safe I was told. I've been advised to use denial whenever I need it. I've been advised and told many things.

At THIS time of year I say - do, feel, be, whatever is right for your. Celebrate, rejoice, reflect, cry, deny, escape, mourn, laugh or reminisce - the choice is yours.

So allow me to reminisce for a moment - our last Christmas together. Food, toys, music and more food. The company of my family, the certainty that this will happen again next year and the next. The pure love and joy that expresses itself at THAT time of year.

The acknowledgement that the world is OK, things are great, this is REAL.

Peace to you all at THIS time of year.

Maree Arkell

Lovingly reprinted from Sibling Page, Focus Newsletter TCF NSW



## “Why I haven’t cancelled Christmas after my brother’s suicide”

by Heather Moreno Sutherland

Christmas 2011 involved a visit to the funeral home to see my brother’s body in the casket and an evening where my parents and I, separately and silently but together, ignored the “Dr Who” Christmas Special blaring out of the TV in favour of drinking wine while looking through photos of Martin’s life, choosing our individual favourite moments as well as deciding what should be collated together for inclusion in the funeral image projection.

It wouldn’t be unreasonable, given these circumstances, for any person to think that Christmas could never be marked by us “properly” again. But it would also be an incorrect assumption to say automatically “you must find Christmas so very hard” or suggest “well I just couldn’t do Christmas if that had happened to me” – it’s just not that clear cut.

It would be easy to respond and say “I have to ‘do’ Christmas for my 3-year-old daughter’s sake,” but this would be a fib. I “do” Christmas for me, having made the decision to love and engage in Christmas immediately after seeing my brother’s body that year. Christmas became something for me to aim for at this time of year, to actually help me cope. Having the anniversary of my brother’s death a mere 10 days before Christmas Day doesn’t make this easy. From the first of December, I feel restless, have a little difficulty staying still for long, needing to be “doing” something. My concentration wanes, and I generally feel fed up with all around me. The question “oh, what’s the point?” forms frequently in mind. The initial Christmas buzz, although I do like the music and the food, does get to me a bit (and this is perhaps why I get my shopping done and decorations up at the end of November...), and I cannot avoid that gut-felt pang when I pass something I would totally want to buy Martin as a Christmas present. The build-up to the anniversary of Martin’s death, however, has always been worse than the day itself, a day I have made about self-care. I spend the day alone as much as possible. I get my hair and nails done, have a massage if I can, and I always go to the cinema – Martin always loved movies, so rather than viewing the day as “the day he died,” I have renamed it “Film Day.” I do something he and I enjoyed together, and I am able to feel calm in the dark, remembering something positive about his life and our lives as brother and sister.

Come December 16, I give myself permission to fully join the land of the living again, and making Christmas as lovely as I can becomes a priority. I book theatre tickets, seek out Christmas-based activities to visit and participate in. I do worry sometimes that I foist my Christmas ideals on those around me who are not quite so comfortable with it without Martin, but I explain why I do it to them, and I think they understand. They do come with me, as it were; we still cry when we feel the need to, but we all seem able to continue together. I describe what Christmas meant to me before Martin died, especially in the period after I had left home for university; it was for me always about coming home to my family, feeling relaxed and warm together, and enjoying each other’s company. I still try to include Martin in this way, sharing my positive memory of him at Christmas. I buy presents for my mum and dad that he might have gone for, (I did that while he was alive anyway, lazy b\* @&\*r!). We have and I hope will continue to toast his presence at dinner, and we talk about him when a memory comes up. He is included, if not physically present, and Christmas to me still generates those feelings of comfort and together-ness warmth. Getting through suicide loss anniversaries during the Christmas period takes a lot of energy.

I know, for some, what I have described here is alien. They can’t or don’t want to acknowledge Christmas without their gone loved one. I sometimes worry this is a bad thing about me, that I should be more sombre about this time of year, that it is disrespectful to my brother to seek out tinsel and glitter when he is no longer here, that I should “cancel Christmas.” But if there’s anything I’ve learned over the last five years since Martin left, there’s no one way to handle this experience of bereavement. Whatever needs to be the way for an individual after such a loss is right. For me, Christmas helps. It is a way to celebrate my current family, to remind myself of the need to be happy about life, while also accessing Martin’s presence, when the latter can be very hard to feel at other times of the year.

In the words of Alexander Smith, “Christmas is the day that holds all time together.”

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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	Ngaire Penny (Marlene, 18yr old daughter MVA Nov '91)	03- 455 5391
DUNEDIN	Alexis Chettleburgh ( 22 yr old son, suicide.)	03-4777649
	Corinda Taylor (Son, 20 years, suicide)	021 2930094
CENTRAL OTAGO	Wilma Paulin (Son & Daughter, 6yrs & 3mths)	03-4493213
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Pessione (16 yr old daughter, accidental)	03-4487800 janpessione@xtra.co.nz
QUEENSTOWN	Arlette Irwin	03 4510108
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Johnson, Adult son, Neville, cancer	03 4488360
CENTRAL OTAGO	Louise McKenzie (David, 14yr, accident) Central Otago Co-ordinator	03 4486094 louise.mckenzie@xtra.co.nz
INVERCARGILL	Linda Thompson. (Ryan, 16yrs, Cardiac Failure. Dec 2001) Southland Co-ordinator*	03-2164155 027 390 9666
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	04 9387212 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI 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.co.nz](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.co.nz)

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