

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated  
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 188

APRIL MAY 2022

We begin to remember  
not just that you died,  
but that you lived.  
And your life gave us memories  
too beautiful to forget.

Post by Nancy Tucker, Healing hugs.

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, 021 2155279 or TCF, Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru 9492 or by e-mail [tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz](mailto:tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz)

## The Anniversary

Let me be sad today,  
Give me this day to mourn,  
It's the date my little son died,  
And also the date he was born.

Let me think back to his birth;  
The fear of viewing him, dead,  
Memories of holding him close,  
And cradling his little head.

Allow me to visit his grave,  
To let a few balloons go,  
To place flowers lovingly,  
And trim the grass that does grow.

Allow me tears to cry,  
Love fills my heart to the brim  
Spilling it on those close by,  
While always longing for him.

Elizabeth Dent  
Lovingly lifted from Central Iowa Newsletter and  
reprinted in TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

## Our Children ... Remembered with love

### Forever Young

### Forever Loved

### Forever Longed For

Andrew Meldrum Cox  
Jack Stephen Dyer  
Nicholas Ian O'Hara  
Caren Amanda Phillips  
Alan Bruce Scorrige  
Anthony Mark Staite  
Jonathon Upton

Born 16/4/68  
Born 24/4/07  
Born 17/4/74  
Born 16/4/81  
Born 26/4/66  
Born 5/4/74  
Born 15/4/68

Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold  
Nicholas Evan Hood  
Vicky Knight  
Paul John Nicolaou  
Cindy Parish  
Liam Vettors  
David Jason Eugene Walker  
James Wing

Born 9/5/1978  
Born 12/5/1985  
Born 21/5/1980  
Born 21/5/1964  
Born 25/5/1965  
Born 1/5/2005  
Born 7/5/1993  
Born 31/5/1980

Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold  
Rebecca Clare Halkett  
Greg Holley  
Matthew David Hubber  
Sally Verone Kitto  
Robbie Knight  
Jake Lucas  
Nikolaas Remmerswaal  
Gary Brendon Thompson  
Hayden Watson

Died 6/4/02  
Died 20/4/03  
Died 6/4/85  
Died 30/4/00  
Died 23/4/01  
Died 18/4/96  
Died 26/4/77  
Died 1/4/12  
Died 9/4/96  
Died 11/4/97

Paul Graham Albrecht  
Michael Barry Duke  
Ben Henderson  
Erica Kewish  
Thomas Craig McDonald  
Maryann Gaye Pearce  
Wayne Edward Summers  
David Jason Eugene Walker  
Peter Gregory Warren  
Dan Wells  
Timothy James Williams

Died 19/5/2004  
Died 20/5/2005  
Died 15/5/2003  
Died 14/5/2014  
Died 25/5/2008  
Died 27/5/2000  
Died 9/5/1999  
Died 13/5/ 2000  
Died 17/5/1998  
Died 13/5/2003  
Died 29/5/2005

Kia ora whanau from Southland.

I hope this finds you all healthy and well. Unfortunately (while I write this) my household is in the middle of our isolation due to COVID. We have had a variety of symptoms and effects, which just shows how different we all are and how we handle and take things differently, even in the same family.

This highlights how we all deal with our own lives in different ways and what works for one of us may not work for another.

Mothers day is upon us, and at this time of year we think of our own mothers, here and passed, and then we think of ourselves (mums and dads). It is another time that we miss our children and think about them and ask ourselves, 'why are they not here?'. My heart goes out to mothers who never even got to have a hug or kiss on this day.

Family occasions can at times be draining and you may not want to attend, but we also must remember that we are not the only ones going through this, we are not alone.

Duck shooting would have been and gone, the nights are darker and longer, the days are getting colder and we need to take care of ourselves. Always reach out to others, you do not have to be a brick wall, there is always help.

Kia kaha xx Aroha nui Vanessa Young

Dear Friends,

As another Mothers' Day approaches, my thoughts and prayers go out to all bereaved Mothers but most especially to those Mothers, whose family this time last year was whole and complete, and now there is a special most loved person missing. The year of 'firsts' can be so hard as no one knows what to expect and are still devising ways to get through those special days. The feeling that you just won't cope and you won't survive is upper most in your mind. Family and friends often don't know what to say or how to help and even if they ask, we most likely don't know ourselves.

Those of us, further down this grief journey, know that we do cope and do survive and several have shared some hints and tips on making it through Mothers Day which I have printed in this newsletter. That's not to say that it makes the day easy, I still don't find it 'easy' 19 years later, however it doesn't put me into the deep dark hole it once did. I will certainly shed some tears as I look through Ben's photos and remember his life but will also share some laughs with my family as we remember some of his antics.

To everyone I wish you peace and love on this special day and hope that you can find some time to remember your child's life and share a special memory with someone.

Take care,  
Lesley

### **For All Bereaved Mothers**

I wish you a gentle Mother's Day  
For I know what you feel  
I know how you miss your child  
Your heart I wish I could heal

For those who lost an only child  
I know your pain today  
For I once walked in your shoes  
My tears fell like rain

I know your hearts so very much  
My heart feels the same  
We'll always miss our child  
On every Mother's Day God

Bless each and everyone of you  
Sharon Bryant, Andy's mom

Lovingly lifted from TCF Winnipeg Newsletter



## When Mother's Day Feels Empty

Written by Clara Hinton | Apr 23, 2007 Taken from [www.silentgrief.com](http://www.silentgrief.com)

There are no words to completely describe what a mother feels when her child has died. She feels lost, abandoned, afraid, lonely, forgotten, and most of all empty. The emptiness is like none other because it is an emptiness of the heart. When a child dies, part of a mother's heart also dies.

Mother's Day is a traditional holiday that has grown bigger and bigger throughout the years. We are bombarded with advertisements to take out mothers for a special dinner or buy Mother's Day flowers. For more than a month before Mother's Day, reminders are placed everywhere. It's impossible to pick up a newspaper, listen to the radio, or turn on the television without some kind of reminder of Mother's Day. There are Mother's Day banquets, Mother's Day baby dedications at church, and special family gatherings to honor mothers. All of this is wonderful except for the mother that is grieving the loss of her child.

For the grieving mother, every reminder of Mother's Day is like another wound to the heart. The hole in her heart caused by grief grows larger and larger with each reminder, and the emptiness feels darker and colder than she ever imagined possible. What is a grieving mother to do when there are so many reminders of the precious child she has lost? Mother's Day is the only holiday that specifically uses the word mother, so there is no real way of avoiding this day.

A grieving mother can, however, prepare for Mother's Day well in advance so that she knows how to avoid placing additional pain in her life.

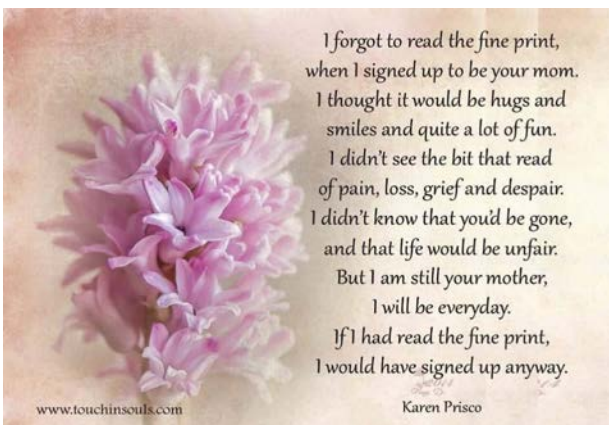
Remember that Mother's Day is not a holiday that has to be celebrated. If a grieving mother does not want to attend a banquet, or watch baby dedications at church, or see special family gatherings at restaurants, then she has the right to choose not to participate in these events without feeling guilty. Many mothers choose to stay home and do nothing special at all on Mother's Day, and that is fine.

Grief follows no rules and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Explain to others that this day is painful. Giving yourself permission to grieve in your own way is very healing and helpful, especially during such a difficult day as Mother's Day.

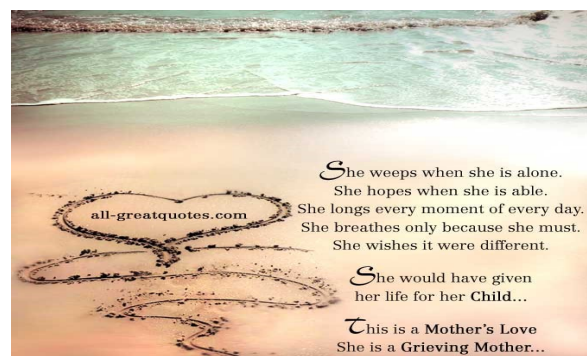
Do what feels right for you. Maybe that means taking a mini trip away where nobody knows you. Maybe it is staying at home. Perhaps a walk in the woods or a walk along the sandy beach would help you during this empty time. Journal your thoughts. Release a balloon. Or, maybe you want to avoid Mother's Day altogether.

You know what feels best for your heart, and giving yourself permission to do what is right for you can be the most healing thing of all.

Lastly, remind yourself often that you will not always feel this empty. With each passing day new hope will enter your empty heart until one day you will wake up to realize that the empty hole is beginning to fill with some joy. Mother's Day is only one day. With a little bit of preparation you can make it through, and you will have walked one more step in your journey of healing!



Gratefully reprinted from TCF Victoria Chapter Newsletter



If you've lost your mum, or a child, Mother's Day and the build-up to it can be incredibly difficult and sad. We've gathered some coping strategies from five of our Marie Curie experts that may help you navigate Mother's Day without your loved one.

#### **Allow yourself to grieve**

Sometimes the anticipation of certain times of year can be worse than the actual days themselves. Perhaps the most important thing is to simply recognise that the upcoming days or weeks might be hard.

#### **Do things differently this year**

If the idea of doing what you always did is too painful, then think outside the box and do something different.

#### **If you're stuck at home**

Sometimes just having a photo to look at, in the comfort of your home, and a still moment of reflection can help you through the day.

#### **Gardens can be a healing space**

Gardens can be a wonderful, quiet space to reflect on your loss. Some people like to plant flowers and it also means you can return a year later to see it has grown, which can provide some comfort.

#### **Tell others how you wish to spend your time**

Do you want to continue traditions, begin new ones or not celebrate it at all? Choose what you want to do and don't feel guilty if what you decide on may not feel like it's the 'right' thing to do.

#### **Be kind to yourself**

Grief can be exhausting. [Look after yourself](#) \_ practically, physically and emotionally. If sleeping has become difficult, have a guilt-free afternoon nap. Don't worry if this happens – you aren't at your sparkling best so be gentle with yourself.

#### **Ask for support if you think you need it**

Some people might feel awkward about offering their help, especially if they don't know how to broach the subject. So if you want support on Mother's Day, make the effort to [ask for it](#) \_

#### **Involve children in decisions on how they want to spend their time**

Ask them how they feel about Mother's Day, and let them know that they can [share any thoughts and feelings](#) \_ with you about the person who has died. They may be worried about upsetting you. It's important that they always feel included, and they may even come up with some great ideas on what to do.

It can also be helpful to have a word with the child's school to see if Mother's day will be celebrated in some way. You can make sure a child the opportunity to say if they would like to be involved.

#### **Have some quiet time to reflect on the good times you've shared**

What did you enjoy doing together before your loved one died? You may find some comfort doing the same things you used to do together at this time of the year, such as sharing a favourite drink or visiting a special place.

#### **Try not to feel guilty if you have moments of enjoyment**

Allow yourself to enjoy brief moments of respite if they happen and don't feel bad when they do.

#### **Talk about your favourite memories**

Even if you can't be with fellow grievers in person, just a phone or video call to reminisce about someone could be helpful, and could ~~alleviate feelings like loneliness.~~





We are each unique on our grief journey, and we will each mark this Mother's Day in a different way. Whatever your choice might be, make it your day...your day to celebrate *the eternal bond between mother and child.* There is nothing more beautiful.

~ Annette Mennen Baldwin, TCF/Katy, TX  
in memory of her son, Todd Mennen



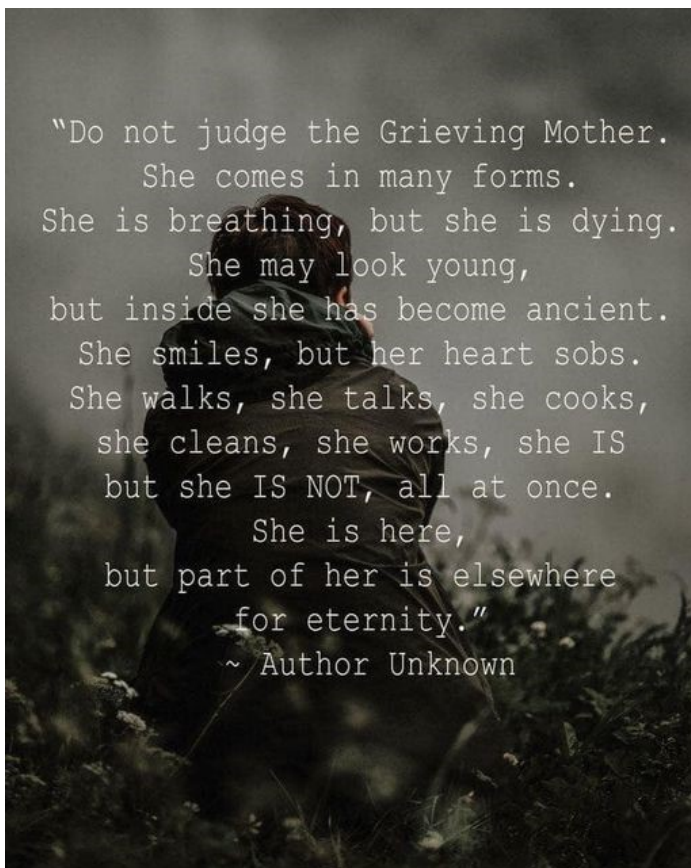
**The Compassionate Friends**  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



Not everyone will remember that Mother's Day is different for you and your family.

Let key people know what you might need or want for that day, whether it's a quiet day alone or involves an activity with others.

#GoodGriefNJ



"Do not judge the Grieving Mother. She comes in many forms. She is breathing, but she is dying. She may look young, but inside she has become ancient. She smiles, but her heart sobs. She walks, she talks, she cooks, she cleans, she works, she IS but she IS NOT, all at once. She is here, but part of her is elsewhere for eternity."  
~ Author Unknown

@encouragement.loss.of.a.child

*After the death of a child, it becomes crystal clear. We humans are capable of enduring much more than we can ever imagine.*

*Knowing that doesn't make grief one bit easier.*

*The painful truth is that we simply do what we must do. We do the unthinkable - day after day. Carol Clum  
Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Newsletter*

## YOU CAN SURVIVE...

Recently, a dear friend of mine lost her son to suicide. Unfortunately, this brought back memories of the loss of my two sons. The questions were there as my friend cried, "Why?" I couldn't tell her why: all I could say was that she may never know.

Why did my son take his life? Why was his older brother killed at work? These are questions to which I have never found the answers. I don't believe that God is a cruel God so I can't blame Him. Accidents happen, and sometimes surviving siblings take their lives. I was lucky to have my boys as long as I did. I value every memory, every picture.

I don't have the answers but I do know how to survive. I've found that talking with someone with whom you feel "safe" is a good thing. Writing about my loss has been a tremendous help and I am so grateful for the Compassionate Friends newsletter. In that venue, I felt "safe" in baring my soul. I walked and talked with a dear friend who later told me that he couldn't understand a word I said because I was crying so hard...but you know what? It didn't matter because he listened!

Surviving the loss of a child requires a lot of grief work. I wrote and talked and read until I was exhausted every night. Since there is emotional and physical pain and aching, sleep is so important at this time. Get in the shower and let the rush of water wash away your tears, your aches, the feeling that no one in the world knows how deeply you are hurting. The shower is a "safe" place, where no one hears your sobs, and no one asks questions or tries to express sympathy with words that mean nothing to you right now.

The one thing that is most important in recovery is that you need to feel "safe" whether talking, reading, crying, screaming or sleeping. Talk to that trusted friend. Let the shower wash away your pain. Take care of yourself. Let your caring friends hug you. Let the reading of other parents' losses make you aware that you are not alone. They've already gone through it and survived. So can you...

I enjoy Life; I appreciate Life so much more. Life is good!

Joan Conley, TCF/Kamloops Written with love, in memory of my two sons Jim and Jeff  
Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

WHEN YOU CAN'T CONTROL  
WHAT IS HAPPENING  
AROUND YOU, CHALLENGE  
YOURSELF TO CONTROL  
THE WAY  
IN WHICH  
YOU  
RESPOND.



THAT IS WHERE  
YOUR TRUE POWER LIES.

*After the death of a child,  
it becomes crystal clear.  
We humans are capable of  
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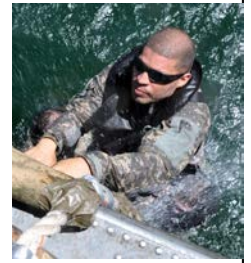
*Carol Clum  
Reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter*





## The Well

Living life without your child is like falling, quite by accident, into a deep, dark well in the wee hours of the morning. At first your entire body is underwater. You can't breathe. But that's okay, because if you don't breathe, you will die. You're not sure you want to live anyway. After all, dying means you will be with your child.



Then, without willing it, your body's natural buoyancy brings your head above the water. It's your body's survival-mode kicking in. You're able to breathe, but treading water is hard work. The water is bone-chilling cold, and you think it just might be easier to give up and drown. Even that is a scary proposition. Living isn't easy, and it's just too darn hard to die!

Outside the well, the sun begins to rise, and you catch a glimmer of light. Hope! Hours pass, and the sun is now high in the sky. With the added light, you notice a ladder for which to climb. But it is slick with slime. You attempt to scale the ladder multiple times in search of the bright sunshine. Sometimes, you only make it a few steps and fall. Then, there are times when you successfully climb nearly to the top, only to make one false move, and plummet into the frigid waters once again.

Climbing the ladder, like your grief journey, is a large, arduous process. Sometimes, it's one step forward and then two backwards. But eventually, you find your way out of that deep, dark place.

Still, the memory of falling into the well will forever haunt you. I wish I could tell you that you will never find yourself in that well again. But sadly, if you are a fellow traveler, I can tell you that it does happen. An unexpected event, a memory or comment takes you back to the early days of your grief, where you miss your child to the depths of your soul. But there is good news. Those days grow less and less. The sun begins to shine more often. When you fall into that deep well, you have become more adept at crawling out. You are stronger and braver. You find more joy than sorrow in your life, and for that, you are grateful!

Anne Lloyd Grief Digest, Volume 16, #2

Reprinted with thanks from Winnipeg Chapter News

## A FAMILY COPES WITH TRAGEDY

Most people think that after a reasonable period of mourning, families pick up the pieces of their lives and go on. I remember a friend asking me, three months after my son's death, if everything was back to normal. Those who haven't been through this experience cannot comprehend that life, as we know it will never exist again.

There won't be "normal" years for parents whose world has been devastated. Their dreams of raising children have vanished forever. Our surviving children have lost a part of themselves—the part they shared with their sibling. One daughter said to me, "I don't want him to stop living. I don't want to go on with my life without him being part of it and growing along with me. I don't want to leave him behind. I need his caring and sharing."

How would we live? How would we manage? Nothing could ever replace what we have lost. Since my son's death, I don't make long-range plans anymore or take anything for granted. I live each day as it unfolds, for I have learned that everything I know or have known can be shattered in an instant.

We did seek help in different ways, through counseling, writing and group therapy. As a result of our tragedy, our family is closer than we have ever been. Any anger or frustration we harbored about one another has disappeared because of its comparative triviality. We've shared feelings never before expressed and emphasized our love for each other, over and over again. This we will do forever more.

Nancy Doss, TCF/Houston, TX

Lifted with love from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News



## Here are my Top 4 Tips on how to handle Mother's Day after losing a child

<http://www.paulastephens.net/how-to-handle-mothers-day-after-losing-a-child/>

Grief is a dynamic process, what worked last year might not work this year and what works this year will change next. Leave yourself open to new ways of approaching where you are. Also, if you have a tough year, don't get attached to thinking, "that's how it going to be for the rest of my life!". Accept it as simply being a tough year and look to find ways to improve it.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. You are the only one who can determine what you need. You are as individual as the relationship you had with your loved one. Honour your uniqueness. Know that it's not just 'the day' that makes it hard. Often it's the days leading up to and following it that weigh on us. The anticipation and the let-down can be very exhausting.

Set aside 10 minutes to check in with your self – How's your energy, your mood, your body, your emotional state? Don't be afraid to feel like you're moving forward – We don't HAVE to stay stuck, we can choose happiness... If for no other reason than you, of all people, deserve it!

### Tips and Wisdom from Incredible Moms Who Know

The remainder of this post is a summary of how other bereaved Mothers have handled Mother's Day after losing a child. I have had to edit some a bit, but have made sure to leave the message untouched.

In all my grief on the first Mothers' Day without my daughter, I forgot to call my own mother. Just before bed that night four years ago, I remembered that I still had a mother. A mother who was worried about me. A mother who had lost a granddaughter and was grieving herself. So I guess my tip for newly bereaved mothers would be to call your mom. If your mother is no longer alive, do something in her honour and be happy she didn't have to go through what you are going through. And then be good to yourself. Because that's what your kid would be doing on this day. Be kind to yourself FOR your son or daughter who died. ~Robin B

I guess my advice is maybe more for families as a whole... Don't feel you can't 'celebrate' the day. You are a mummy and it is as much your day as any other mother. ~Hannah

Last year I bought myself the most vivid flowers I could find at the store (with purple in them of course), "from Kade." ~Jenny

I have been walking this road for 23 years. Our son, Marc, was 18 when complications from a 4month battle with lymphoma ended his life. I would suggest to someone just starting, to make their child's favourite desert and then eating it in his or her honour. Memories are so very important now, as this is all we have to keep our children alive in our hearts. And memories of those living years must not be overshadowed by the actual time of illness and death. There are more good memories than that. It also feels good to be doing something in remembrance of them. I have been serving cherry cheese cake for 22 Mother's Days now and will continue the tradition. ~Linda

On the days that have huge overwhelming significance to me (not just Mother's Day), what I've done is plunge into volunteer work. I am working with my hands which for some reason feels very good, and I am helping others for a whole day. I volunteer weekly throughout the year, but make a special point to work all day on these two significant days. I sent love and support to all who will read this message. ~Karla

We lost Patrick the week before Mother's Day. I dreaded the day, but dread doesn't keep those days at bay. Time passes the same with or without your child. Early in the day, Patrick's 12 pall bearers, all very close, rang my doorbell. They presented me with a James Avery bracelet, from Patrick and them. I've never taken it off. It's my permanent Mother's Day gift. I suggest that you purchase something that you wear every day that reminds you that you're still a mother to someone in Heaven. Dread is a poison that can ruin every month, every holiday of the year. I find that the dread is more painful than the day itself. I do acknowledge that there is a great deal of power in a holiday, for grieving people. But, I simply refuse to let it steal my entire life. Yes, I battle with special days, but I always win. My proof? It's my 4th Mother's Day. I may not like it, but it hasn't taken me down. The Monday after, I will still be standing...I'm a survivor, scarred and battle-worn, but still standing. ~Patti B.

This my "trick" to help me make it through all the special days/holidays in which I spend with family. The rub comes when they expect me to be happy and celebrate while I feel like I'm Page 9 TCF Otago April May 2022 dishonouring the memory of my child by being so. My "trick" is to PRE-GRIEVE. I select a day in which I celebrate the life of my child who died. Then later on the holiday I can more freely attend the other celebrations. ~Anne M.

When my son died, my thoughtful sister in law made ribbons for us to wear to the memorial service from his blankets. With this energy, I can take him with me everywhere. On Mother's Day, I pin this ribbon over my heart, and in spirit, he joins us in the celebration. ~Jennifer R.

We also practice honouring our son every year on his birthday with a hike in nature and a "release" of some kind-balloons or a boat float, for example. This event allows me to reserve other dates for their own purpose as well. Lots of love, understanding and forgiveness-self to self. ~Jennifer R.

We are coming up on my third Mother's Day without Kade. A couple of my girlfriends were running the Rockies Homerun for the Homeless 5K with their families, the race fell ON Mother's Day (this year unfortunately it does not). It was perfect. My hubby and I trained a little for it, did it with friends, and had a patio lunch with them afterward. I have learned that it is important to have \*a plan. \* ~Jenny R.

I like to get inexpensive flower pots, plant some pansies in them and put on porches of friends that aren't expecting anything:) makes me feel good and not think about my sorrow!!!! ~Saraha

Since I have other children I feel like I need to let them have the day. I spend time alone in the morning before the day starts and remind myself I am creating memories with my surviving children. ~Pam

I am trying to keep my sons name alive by supporting a foundation that helps families with a child with cancer. ~Hulya

I switched around what I'm doing at work that day so I'll be working with 2 special people & we can make it a nice day:). ~ Carol

Give yourself permission and grace to NOT celebrate if it doesn't feel right. Mother's Day for a bereaved mother is not the time to bow to the expectations of others. ~Amy

Prior to the passing of my son I used to celebrate (brunch get together) with all the mom's in my family. After his passing (and now) I find alone time (take a walk/get a massage, etc) to reflect how my life is, as a mom, right here right now. Mother's Day has changed through the years for me. I am thankful to be at a place of gratitude now ☐ ~Olivia Reprinted with love from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter

## THE COWARDLY BRAIN

Your child dies, and because of that trauma, you need for all your systems to go on automatic pilot, without any prompting from you, and function more perfectly than ever before.

You find, instead, that your brain, the coward, chooses this time to say, "Excuse me, I have been traumatized here and am no longer capable of concentrating, comprehending, remembering, maintaining any kind of organized pattern, or making good decisions. I really am not functioning well, so if you will excuse me, I think I will go on leave for awhile, and when I am better, I will be back. And oh, by the way, I am leaving your emotions in charge while I am gone."

Your emotions, not having had much experience in being totally in control, prove not to be good leadership material. You find yourself reacting in strange ways to old situations. The people around you, who have not had your experience and who already may be doubting your sanity, now become thoroughly convinced that you are in desperate need of long-term mental treatment. You may find yourself agreeing with their assessment of the situation, for those first months of emotion-controlled patterns are easily confused with mental illness. How many times have you said, "I think I am losing my mind"?

I hope it is a comfort for you to know that your brain has not gone forever. You will find that before it returns to stay, it will check in from time to time for brief visits. When you find yourself acting rationally for a change, maybe even remembering your own name, for example, just say to yourself, "it must have been my brain on a test run." On the other hand you may have a day when you ride around all day with your emergency brake on, or pass the exit that you've used for the past fifteen years. If that happens, just know that your grey matter is not in touch at all that day. Your emotions do not know anything about brakes or exits, you see.

Rest assured, however, that one day when you and it have had the necessary time to recover some of your lost functions, you and your brain will again become one and go about the business of continuing with your life. Mary Cleckley, Jack's Mom TCF/Atlanta, GA Winnipeg



# 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.

## Mother's Day

by Julie Stahl

I think I would prefer to die  
my second death

Now while the scent of him lingers yet  
in the soiled clothes strewn around on the  
floor of his bedroom

While his footprint remains oil on glass  
from our last long road trip  
on the windshield of my car  
valuable no longer for its re-sale value  
nor cargo carrying capacity  
but only for this fading track

While his voice is still trapped  
in someone's answering machine (Why can't it be mine?)  
so that when they come to town  
they can play it for me  
They haven't yet erased it  
but they will

Before I close my eyes and can no longer see his eyes  
Or the dimple in his cheek  
Or the mole on his back  
Or the dozen other things that made him mine  
especially, mostly, but never all

Before I have lost all trace  
and the fine line  
between memory and fantasy  
blurs and he becomes  
a Saint or a Hero or a Legend  
Instead of just a boy  
Whom I loved above all others,

All else past, present, future  
In the silent aftermath of my first.



## Rest in Peace

Rest in peace, my little son.  
Your life was over before it had begun.  
You were with me for not much time,  
Five short months that you were mine.  
Then one day you had to go,  
The reason why we'll never know.  
The night you were born,  
I knew in my heart,  
You will always be with me though we're  
apart.  
You were so tiny but perfect to me,  
Little fingers and toes, perfect as can be.  
I held you in my arms, I didn't want to let  
go,  
Here's a few things I want you to know  
.....  
When you left you took a part of me,  
Something that no one can see.  
You have my heart with you always  
Even on the cloudiest days.  
Your brother and sister love you too,  
Even though they never saw you  
When you felt mommy and daddy give  
you that kiss  
You're forever in our hearts  
MICHAEL GREGORY BLISS  
Love you always Mommy, Daddy, Kiera &  
John Jr.

Reprinted with love from TCF Winnipeg  
Chapter Newsletter



A Creative Healing Journey during the month of May 'May We All Heal' (MWAH), is a creative healing journey through the month of May, focusing on grieving and healing for grieving parents.

In May 2015, a group of women from the Grieving Parents Support Network community created the 'May We All Heal' project, a creative healing journey for women and men. Since then, it has been running every year in May.

For the first project, they focused on creating a photographic journey following daily prompts, which were shared on Instagram and on Facebook using the hashtag #mayweallheal or #MWAH followed by the year. Participants especially benefited from the community that resulted from the event, both on Facebook as well on Instagram. It allowed parents, mostly women but also men, to go deep into their journey of grieving and healing after the loss of their child. Here is a previous photographic journaling challenge for the month of May. You could follow the prompts or make up your own.

Gratefully lifted from Focus—NSW newsletter

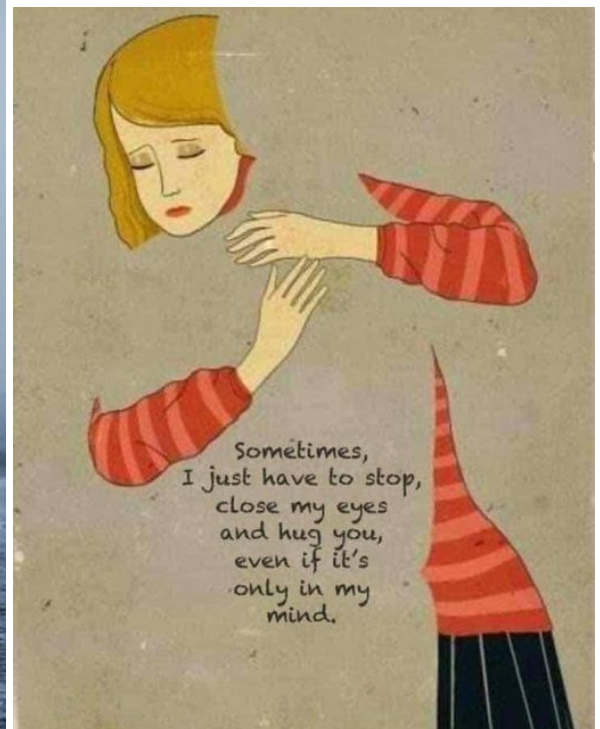


Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

—Jamie Anderson



MyPositiveOutlooks.com



Sometimes,  
I just have to stop,  
close my eyes  
and hug you,  
even if it's  
only in my  
mind.

TCF UK



## Communicating with My Child

Eighteen months ago, I dedicated a bench to Philip. It's in a space Philip would like, out in the natural world, with abundant wildlife and wonderful views across hills and sea.

I go there often to spend time alone with my beloved son. I sit on the bench, look at the vistas, and remember our family as it used to be.

I talk to Philip. I make him promises; I ask for his guidance. I muse on what his life would be like now. I tell him how deeply I love him, how missing him gets harder with each passing year. I tell him about his brothers, about his sister-in-law and his little nephew, both of whom he never met. I tell him how important he is to us. I tell him that we will never forget him, that though our lives are five years past his death, we still think of him all the time and want him with us. I tell him that I am having a terribly hard time accepting that he has died, and that I am doing the best I can.

I have no idea if I am communicating with a Philip who has survived death or with myself, who hopes he has. Sometimes I think I feel an impatient nudge, a sort of, "Get on with it, Mom, it's not what you think" message. Sometimes I feel his arms around me in compassionate understanding. Sometimes I don't feel any response at all.

I am grateful for these private times with my child. Whether he lives on in some other sphere, and how I hope he does, or whether he resides only in our deepest hearts, there is an honouring of him in these conversations, a recognition of his existence and its importance, that matters very much to me.

I believe that we all need to find our individual ways of keeping the channels to our children open. My conversations with Philip may seem odd to some people, but they are right for me.

I encourage you to honor your own private ways of communicating with your beautiful child, whatever they are. If you are searching for the channel that will work for you, consider what some other bereaved parents have found helpful: poetry, painting, journal writing, hiking in the natural world, daydreaming, music mediation, lighting candles, wearing a deceased child's clothing, sitting in his/her room, playing a sport she/he loved, among many, many others.

May the time spent in private dialogue with your child bring you peace-filled moments, a renewed sense of connection, and strength to continue the difficult journey we are all on.

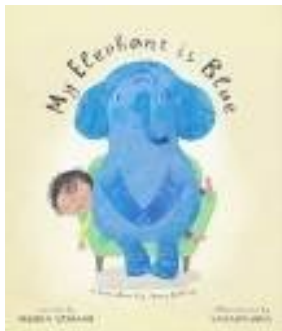
Kitty Reeve, TCF/Marin County and San Francisco, CA Chapters  
Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

### BOOK review

#### **My elephant is blue** by Melinda Szymanik

Published Puffin 2021

Isbn 9780143775645



A warm and empathetic picture book for children about having Big Heavy Feelings. It tells of a child who has 'the blues'. She wakes one morning to find an elephant sitting on her chest. How she and her family help to make her feel light and free again is told in a quirky and hopeful way with charming bright illustrations. This book will create conversation and strategies to help young ones explore and understand living under the weight of a big sadness.

Thanks to Keren for this review,



# Sibling Page



## SIBLING CREDO

We are the Surviving Siblings of The Compassionate Friends. We are brought together by the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Open your hearts to us, but have patience with us. Sometimes we will need the support of our friends. At other times we will need our families to be there. Sometimes we must walk alone, taking our memories with us, continuing to become the individuals we want to be. We cannot be our dead brother or sister; however, a special part of them lives on with us. When our brothers and sisters died, our lives changed. We are living a life very different from what we envisioned, and we feel the responsibility to be strong even when we feel weak. Yet we go on because we understand better than many others the value of family and the precious gift of life. Our goal is not to be the forgotten mourners that we sometimes are, but to walk together to face our tomorrows as Surviving Siblings...of The Compassionate Friends.

## What a Son Will Tell His Mother about Grieving the Death of His Sister

My son's only sibling, Maggie, his younger sister, my daughter, died almost four years ago, suddenly. She was twenty-two; he was twenty-seven. Perhaps because he is a man who does not easily talk about his feelings, we usually share our grief in oblique ways, but those moments are nonetheless intimate and meaningful. However, this past summer, when I was visiting my son and his girlfriend, Jacqui, for a week, we had a chance to talk about his grieving more directly. He was relaxed, on vacation from his teaching job, and we pattered around his new house, making a garden, and enjoying being together. We spoke often of Maggie and slowly, as we worked side by side, we made our way around to talk of how it is now, this grieving his sister.

Here's what he told me: "I've had a broad reach about all the things that were going to be affected by Maggie's death right from the beginning. I thought about the immediate losses and into the future; maybe that's just me and my personality, but I cast a wide net into the realm of all that Maggie's death was going to touch. And I knew it was never going to go away. I'm not sure that my grieving has really changed a lot; once the initial shock wore off the depth of the grieving has been pretty constant, which has surprised me. The process of becoming an only child is a lot of things. Obviously, it's not always like that for everyone who loses a sibling, you might go from being four to being three, but for me, I'm the only child now. I always consulted with Maggie about stuff, family stuff and life stuff, and I miss that. No one else knew me like she did. The other part is thinking about my parents' getting older and being now the only potential caretaker and the prospect of doing that from a distance and alone is daunting. Having all the attention on me is weird and sometimes hard; it's not like everything got doubled when Maggie died, but just knowing that all family-oriented business and conversations are falling just to me is sometimes a lot. There's no divide and conquer going on when it comes to the kids and Mom and Dad.

Having someone who you were expecting to have through all the big life events not be there is really what gets me the most. Maggie won't get to come watch my soccer team play and she won't ever visit us here at the new house. She'll never know Jacqui. Jacqui is very receptive to Maggie still being a presence in our lives. It's really nice that she has dreams sometimes about Maggie and almost feels like she knows her. I do wish that they had known one another so that Maggie could be more of a person to Jacqui than just an idea. Obviously Mom and Dad have been important in helping with processing the grieving, but a lot of my support has been in Mike, who has always been a surrogate brother but now he's really filling the role of the person who has known me the longest in a sibling kind of way. And I can really talk to him.

I find I have very little patience for drama and fighting, especially among family members. I just think: Get over yourselves. Family has always been important to me but now those relationships are more important than ever and the little problems and differences are not worth getting worked up about. We just have to love each other."

It's hard living over five hundred miles from my son, but I make an effort to be with him often and for no specific reason other than that with this child, I can love him in person.

Meg Tipper, September 2012

Meg Tipper's book about the first year of grieving Maggie's death is entitled *Standing at the Edge: A Year of Days After Sudden Death*.

Article from the Newsletter of BP/USA, A JOURNEY TOGETHER and reprinted in TCF Minneapolis Newsletter

## **Losing a sibling as a teen changed my feelings about parenthood**

My thoughts about parenting have generally existed in a continuum that ranges from, “I definitely don’t want kids” to “Kids seem like this fantasy thing” all the way to “If I have kids, I’ll do this...” But nowhere in those ricocheting and often short-lived conceptions of potential parenting has there ever been a moment where I’ve thought, “Yes, I’ll have kids.” Mostly, I’ve been wading about in the grey for a long time. I now realize a great deal of my ambivalence stems from my most well-known observations of parenting; a lifetime spent watching my own amazing, instinctive, and infinitely nurturing mother raise her two children...and then watching her lose and grieve one. I have seen motherhood at its finest, and seen it suffer through the worst, and I know the consequences of that experience are part of my own smudgy, undefined thinking about the subject and the choice.

When your sibling dies, you go through a radical bisecting of reality: you’re a half of a pair, and the other half is no more. The core of your world, your familial unit, is fragmented. The remnants are morphed and scattered. The reality of your parents as humans becomes glaring; you witness their pain through the most horrific, tragic experience we can endure. Watching your own mother experience the sudden death of her child is an intensely vivid and ongoing lesson about the worst possible experience of parenthood, and it’s an experience that continues indefinitely. I had three days left until seventeen and my brother was two months from twenty when, in the middle of an April night, my brother died in a field two miles from our house. I will always remember the sequence of events that led to me knowing that my brother was dead: the phone ringing, my parents saying that there was an accident and they didn’t know what happened, them leaving to check on things (I do not know why, but the neighbours whose land his truck had flipped onto were the ones to call, and this is what they told them). My parents came home, the front door shut, and I heard my mother collapse with the most soul-wrenching sound that a human can emit. Still unmoving in my bed, I listened to the horror of two people in their dining room experiencing the agony of losing their child, and I began the struggle of losing my brother.

Over the years, I’ve realized that watching your parents survive this is a secondary trauma to your own experience of the loss. You grieve; you grieve for them as well. I cannot begin to convey the lessons you learn from watching your mother’s sorrow swell, crest, dissipate, and rise again over the years.

Witnessing that undoubtedly redefined what parenthood and mothering meant to me. In considering any potential to have my own children, my understanding of the risks and wagers inherent in parenting has changed a great deal. I learned that children weren’t guaranteed. If children died — and in my horrible skewed reality, they did — their presence and much of your life was replaced with an inescapable, oppressing horror. In short, the worst of parent experiences is much larger and clearer in my life than the good. Losing my brother either manifested or triggered in me a struggle with anxiety that I hadn’t known before. Not in the sense of worrying or being tense or being preoccupied; intense, trauma-based anxiety strikes like a tsunami, collapses the structures around you, leaves you wild and panicked and grasping for reality, safety, and security. I’ve gained a lot of control over it and have developed ways of calming those thoughts, but they are there. I imagine that, if I had a child, they would resurface tenfold, engulfing me. I would live with not only the fear of grief because of my experience observing my parents, but the struggle with panic-and-anxiety-riddled conviction that my child might die, right now, unless I somehow prevent it. I wonder at what point, if at all, I would be able to experience my own child detached from my memories of my brother. When I initially considered ever having children, one of my first and only certainties was that its name, regardless of gender, would be after him. Since then, I’ve put that certainty away. If I did have children, when would I stop combating the guilt that stems from having kids, an experience he wanted and never got to have? When would my child stop reminding me of my own childhood with him? Would those thoughts be overshadowed by the present, or always on the periphery? What would be my brother’s (and his deaths) role in how I viewed, rose, and related to my own child?

There is the additional difficulty of being the only surviving child and having a mother who very much wants grandchildren. I’m not in a position to give them to her right now; simultaneously, I’m not in a place to explain why. I would hate for her to know that the loss of her child, or my observation of her, had negatively impacted my feelings about having kids. My mother is by far one of the strongest, most loving mothers I have ever known. She sewed her children’s baby blankets at fifteen because, five years before she was ever pregnant, she already wanted her own children so badly. She is an intrinsically loving, nurturing soul; no one deserved to see their children grow up and start families more than her. I know that not all surviving siblings have these feelings; I know that many go on to have fantastic experiences with parenthood. But for me, I feel like it’s an experience that I learned too much about in the wrong way and before I saw the good parts. (I have now seen “the good parts” as my friends have had children.) My own trauma and subsequent struggles with anxiety, as well as my experience with watching my parents’ trauma, remain the frame through which I experience these choices, at least for now.



## MISSION STATEMENT

The Compassionate Friends is a mutual assistance self-help organisation offering friend-ship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

The primary purpose is to assist them in the positive resolution of grief experienced upon death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings. The objective is to help those in their community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers and professionals to be supportive.



## **D**o you need to talk? Our telephone friends are willing to listen.. **Telephone Friends**

DUNEDIN	Anne Lelena (Son Colin 22yrs Suicide)	03- 455 9274
DUNEDIN	Ngairie Penny (Marlene, 18yr old daughter MVA Nov '91)	03- 455 5391
DUNEDIN	Alexis Chettleburgh ( 22 yr old son, suicide.)	03-4777649
	Corinda Taylor (Son, 20 years, suicide)	021 2930094
CENTRAL OTAGO	Wilma Paulin (Son & Daughter, 6yrs & 3mths)	03-4493213
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Pessione (16 yr old daughter, accidental)	03-4487800 janpessione@xtra.co.nz
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Johnson, Adult son, Neville, cancer	03 4488360
CENTRAL OTAGO	Sue Tait Natasha (29) Medical Event Central Otago Co-ordinator	sue.tait@xtra.co.nz 027 4420156
INVERCARGILL	Linda Thompson. (Ryan, 16yrs, Cardiac Failure. Dec 2001) Southland Co-ordinator*	03-2164155 027 390 9666
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident	04 9387212 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI	Marie and Ron Summers (Son, Wayne 23yrs, Suicide)	07 8954879
WHANGANUI	Nina Sandilands (Debbie, 16yrs, Brain Virus)	06 3478086
WHANGANUI	Keren Marsh (Simon, 23yrs, car accident)	06 3443345 marshkandb@gmail.com
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

[www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz)

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