THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated
Founded December 1989

A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER NO: 207 JUNE JULY 2025

Helen Lepierre Hello to Heaven—Facebook

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 021 2155279, or TCF, Lesley Henderson, 76 O'Neill Rd., 17 D R.D., Windsor, Oamaru or by e-mail tcf.nz@hotmail.co.nz

Some days you may feel that the earth has crashed into the moon and the sun has exploded into a million shards of light. You may not know which way is up as gravity suddenly appears to have changed direction, and you feel you are floating in outer space, searching for the star you once held so tight. This is grief. This is mind blowing, world changing loss.
~ Zoe Clark-Coates
Lifted with thanks from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

Our Children ... Remembered with love
Forever Young Forever Loved Forever Longed For

Matthew Alexander Birtles	Born 17/6/2004
Richard Cowie	Born 1/6/1974
Sophie Kate Elliott	Born 11/6/1985
Hayley Robyn Galpin	Born 29/6/1968
Daniel James Gillies	Born 22/6/1986
Robbie Knight	Born 9/6/1975
Claire Jillian Taiaroa	Born 25/6/1978
Ross Templeton	Born 22/6/1996
Brendan James Vass	Born 30/6/1986
Mitchell James Beaumont	Born 13/7/1976
Lee-Roy Cavenaugh	Born 12/7/2011
Heath Neil Colina	Born 18/7/1981
Te Ahu Aroha Foley	Born 2/7/1975
Ben Paul Gillanders	Born 13/7/1977
Matthew David Innes	Born 27/7/1987
Jake Lucas	Born 10/7/1978
Anna Ruth Iris Moore	Born 9/7/1974
Brent Allan Stenton	Born 19/7/1974
Julie Barbara Warren	Born 9/7/1961
Timothy James Williams	Born 6/7/1980

Claire Benicarke (Mary Schiehsel)	Died 10/6/2004
Lee-Roy Cavenaugh	Died 27/6/2017
Stefan Francis Cockill	Died 28/6/1994
Heath Neil Colina	Died 1/6/2002
Randell Coster	Died 2/6/2013
Matthew William Ross Dryden	Died 24/6/2005
Ian Peter Foley	Died 24/6/1987
Allan Stephen Hobbs	Died 27/6/1998
Callum Warwick Langley	Died 15/6/2006
Keryn Sarah Langley	Died 15/6/2006
Shaun Mataki	Died 27/6/2003
Jessie Adelaide Neaves	Died 5/6/2006
Claire Jillian Taiaroa	Died 19/6/1997
Melissa Jane TeHuia	Died 21/6/1998
Ben Watt	Died 3/06/2005
Terry Barnfather	Died 11/7/2000
Matthew Alexander Birtles	Died 1/7/2007
Marcus Fitchett	Died 18/7/1996
Te Ahu Aroha Foley	Died 2/7/1975
Vicky Knight	Died 1/7/1980
Aidan Samiel Konise	Died 23/7/2009
Sara Loo	Died 19/7/2010
Robert Shane McLaughlin	Died 4/7/2001
Kirsten Jane Maydon	Died 23/7/1989
Marie Anne O'Neill	Died 21/7/1985
Julie Barbara Warren	Died 14/7/1985

TCF Christchurch/Canterbury,

Recently we had a planning meeting and we will restart The Compassionate Friends/Bereaved Parents group meetings Tuesday 5th August 7pm Manuka Cottage, 70 Harman St., Addington.

The plan is that this will not be a monthly meeting but we will contact members in between meetings.

We will also be having our Candlelight Service on 18 November—details to follow.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Ngā mihi,
Chris Guerin 021 0293 1357

Dear Friends,
This week I have spent a lovely week in beautiful Queenstown. Between the areas with stunning Hoar Frosts and the beautiful clear blue days we were exceptionally lucky with the weather. While there I also took the opportunity to meet up with some of the Central Otago Compassionate Friends. Jan, the former Coordinator and I have spoken many times on the phone over the years however we had never met in person. It was also lovely to meet up with Margaret, Elenore, Phanny and Phanny's husband Alan over lunch. Although they were strangers to me there was no awkwardness in our conversations and it was special to share our stories. I think this is what TCF is all about and shows just how much we can support one another.
Tragically Phanny's 3 children and her husband were killed by Pol Pot regime and she herself lucky to be here. She shared details of a Podcast about her life.
A Survivor from Cambodia to NZ (Still A Live)
Phanny Thomas & Pauline Cartwright
On National Podcast

While in Queenstown we went up the Gondola and were watching Paragliders flying above Queenstown and although not something I had ever thought I would do, I signed up. I spent several hours terrified of what I was planning and it took a huge Leap of Faith to run off the edge of the mountain, but once flying high, it was exhilarating and amazing and I could just imagine Ben flying along beside me.

During our Grief Journey there are times when we may need to take a Leap of Faith, like when we are starting to realise we can still laugh and could be happy if only we could let ourselves. But it can be scary; will that mean we start to forget our beloved child, will that appear to others as if we have moved on. And for those considering having another child when we know that bad things can happen to good people (to innocent children) the Leap of Faith needed to overcome the fear is huge. But in order to once again live fully, to laugh and love we need to take that Leap. And remember our children will be watching and wishing that we could be happy.
To everyone on the edge of the Leap of Faith, I wish you the courage and support to Leap and perhaps even fly high.

Take care,
Lesley Henderson.

PODCAST REVIEW Wayne Monkleigh—Ewens Dad. Reprinted from Focus, TCF NSW Magazine

The Grief podcast

(Kenzie's gift)
25 February 2025
Host Sasha Douglas

This podcast is sponsored by the New Zealand charity Kenzie's gift which is committed to supporting young New Zealanders and to improve their emotional well being and mental health.

It is named after Kenzie who passed away in 2005 aged 3 and set up by her mum Nic Russell. In this episode host Sasha talks to Kenzie's brother Conor now 24 but who was 5 when Kenzie died.

It's a very open and honest discussion about grief from someone who has been dealing with the loss of his sister and is also used to hearing his sisters name constantly but more as the charity than his sister which is something he talks about. He talks about his memories and the importance of the work the charity does as well as his response to it especially in relation to tattoos.

The host Sasha is very personable and warm and it really feels like a discussion amongst two young friends. It's only new and just has a few episodes but hopefully it continues as I think it's very easy to listen to.

News from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library by Mary Hartley

I'm writing this in May, and the weather has been warm and settled for the past couple of weeks; the hay fever season is in full swing leaving me with itchy eyes and a tendency towards sneezing fits, despite the medication I take to keep it in check.

When I think back 21 years to the spring after Claire died, my hay fever didn't appear until we were much further into the summer even though I'd completely forgotten about both it and the medication. With hind-sight it's obvious to me that my usually overactive immune system wasn't working at all, a common effect of grief, and what would have seemed like a welcome respite, if I'd given it a thought, was actually quite dangerous. I also remember that I wasn't eating properly, firstly existing on Shredded Wheat for some rea-son and losing loads of weight and then comfort eating and putting it all back on again. My sleep pattern was all over the place, sometimes sitting up half the night or sleeping until midday and there were more than a few nights when I barely slept at all.

My days were filled with inertia, exhaustion and feelings of anger, guilt and profound sadness while all the time I felt like I had a huge weight sitting somewhere in the centre of my body. I know I'm not the only one who's felt like this, and I am sure that many of you are feeling like it right now. For months I really didn't care about myself, or my own health needs.

By the middle of the summer I wanted to take back some control in my life, and to feel well enough to be able to get out of the house and walk in the fresh air without feeling worn out after a few minutes.

Margaret Reckitt is also interested in the concept of wellness and self-care. She and her husband Jack very generously open their house in Mouret, France every year to provide a safe and peaceful haven for bereaved parents and their families, in memory of her brother. That respite has helped people to find some peace in beautiful, relaxed surroundings and in the company of other families who know what it feels like to grieve for a much-loved child or sibling.

Margaret has very generously provided the library with a wonderful selection of books to help us to help ourselves; to be kind to ourselves. I'm not suggesting this is going to make everything ok again, nothing can do that. In a world that's spinning hopelessly out of our control, sometimes taking control of the things we are able can help quieten the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that are so frightening and can be the triggers of panic attacks.

Margaret's books cover the following:

- 'Why we Sleep: the new science of sleep and dreams' by Matthew Walker,
- healthy eating 'In Defence of Food' by Michael Pollan
- 'Ultra Processed People' by Chris van Tulleken
- 'Atomic Habits' by James Clear
- 'The Good Life' by Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz

Another book, already in the library, is 'A Happy, Healthy You' by Caroline Yeats which is written by a young woman with terminal cancer who was also a nutritionist. This book is partly her story and partly the healthy and delicious recipes she designed. Caroline's parents published this book after her death and it is a wonderful tribute to her, as well as a source of inspiration to others.

Of course, it's not just our physical health that suffers when we're grieving but we're also liable to be struggling with symptoms of PTSD, like panic attacks, anger, forgetfulness, flashbacks and so many more. We have books to help with those too, Such as 'The PTSD Sourcebook', 'The Body Keeps the Score', and 'The Only Way is Through' and books which specifically address such issues as panic, anger, depression or loneliness.

I hope this has given you food for thought but please remember we all grieve in our own way and in our own time and this may well be a subject you'll want to shelve for now and maybe think about later. If you feel you'd like to explore what some of these books have to offer, please contact me on lbrary@tcf.org.uk.

Thankfully I don't feel nearly as bad now as I did 21 years ago and, what I see as my gradual re-emergence from those first agonising depths of grief, is captured very well by Sara Rian in a poem from her wonderful book 'Find Me There' (pp103)

(your) death crushed me
crumpled me up
like a piece of paper.
now as i bravely open.
as i slowly unfold and expand.
you will find love in every crease.

With love from Mary
Gratefully reprinted from TCF UK Compassion

(It may be that you are able to find copies of the above books in a library here. Lesley)

No Chance Encounters

There are no chance encounters at Publix here, at least not with anyone that would have known my daughter. I am nearly 800 miles from Nashville, and nobody in this new town knows her.

Yes, after nearly seven years of her being gone I have finally started to feel like I am home and I have made friends. Yes, her little brother has found his place in this amazing school. He is building his own community, making friends of his own. And yet, there is no one here that remembers KK, no one who knew her. They may know of her, having heard my story, having seen her photo on my desk at work. But anyone walking this path knows how hard it is to talk about our child that died, especially when that someone is a stranger making casual conversation in the checkout lane.

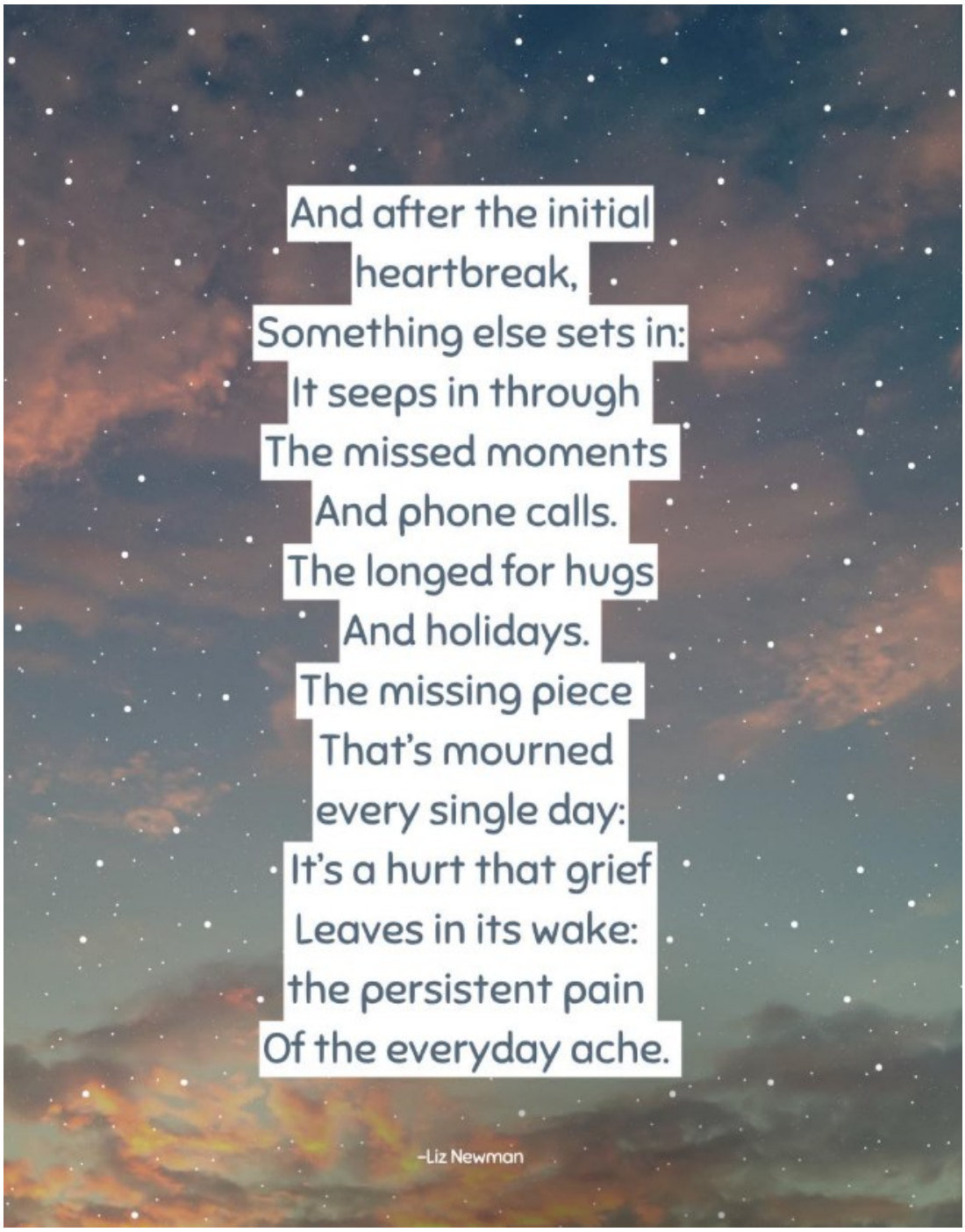
Perhaps some years from now words will flow more easily, when the scab of my loss will not be as fresh, will not loosen and bleed as quickly. Perhaps by then I will be able to get past the uncomfortable silence following the words “my daughter died”, that look in their eyes as they begin to consider their nearest escape down the freezer aisle. Perhaps I will be able to get past the initial awkwardness of our stilted conversation and tell them about her favourite cereal that she would eat without milk, or her enormous sweet tooth. By then I may not even tear up anymore.

Until then I will try my best and talk about her when it feels natural, when the right time presents itself. While it may not be a chance encounter, it could be a chance, an opportunity to mention her name. It might be at work, discussing costumes for Halloween, and I can gush about all the costumes she would design herself. Or it might be at the dentist, when the hygienist asks me about my horseshoe tattoo and I tell her about her love of horses. Who knows, it might even be at Publix, in the deli department as I wait in line. I might point to the Mac ’n Cheese, and tell the person behind me that it was my daughter’s most favourite food ever. I would tell them she died, that her name is Kaitlyn, and that I miss her beyond measure. Then I would tell them that every time I see Mac ’n Cheese I smile, because it reminds me of her.

Sylvia Bosma, Kaitlyn’s Mom Sylvia Bosma is the mother of three. Her only daughter, Kaitlyn - KK - Cook, died by suicide in 2017, when she was 14 years old. Sylvia got through the initial months of crushing grief by caring for her youngest son, who has Down syndrome. Finding her community; support groups such as The Compassionate Friends, counselling; time in nature, and words - books, podcasts, journaling, storytelling - are what has helped her get to where she can offer hope to those early in their grief. Sylvia lives in Tampa, Florida with her family, the search for her new identity - and purpose - a work in progress.
We Need Not Walk Alone
Lovely reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

Elizabeth Gilbert
“Deep grief sometimes is almost like a specific location, a coordinate on a map of time. When you are standing in that forest of sorrow, you cannot imagine that you could ever find your way to a better place. But if someone can assure you that they themselves have stood in that same place, and now have moved on, sometimes this will bring hope”
Helen Keller “We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world--the company of those who have known suffering.”

Reprinted from TCF Johannesburg 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.

Loss Resilience: Living The Contradiction – Still Standing Magazine

I was once asked to describe myself in one word. The best I could come up with was: Contradictory. Trying to neatly fit me into a specific label or box is somewhat of an exercise in futility and frustration!

I am a mother, yet I have no children here with me. I fiercely love my gone-too-soon daughters, yet I have chosen not to pursue having another child. When my fiancé died shortly before our daughter, I wasn't exactly single yet I wasn't considered a widow either. I am a happy person living a joyful life yet I ache and miss for the children I cannot hold.

I've been thinking a lot about my paradoxical nature lately. I get asked frequently how I can be such a happy person after all the losses I've experienced – the deaths of my fiancé, my children, many friends and family members. I've never really had a very good answer for that. It wasn't easy. It took me a very long time to find the beauty in life and living again. I work really hard every day to live a happy and joyful life. But exactly how I created that? I could never find the words.

Then last week a friend and colleague and I were talking about resiliency and loss, specifically the loss of children. She asked me how I defined resiliency in this area. I found myself blurting out, "It's the capacity to allow contradictions to exist at the same time." Our world tends to want everything to be black and white. But black and white makes the world a very hard and painful place to live after the death of a child. Black and white means we can be grieving or we can be happy. Sad or joyful. A mother or not a mother. A father or not a father. People are supportive or not supportive. People are helpful or not helpful. We are loved or not loved. Without the space to allow for contradictions, grief suddenly becomes unforgiving, endless, and isolating.

My contradictory nature, however, apparently came with a built-in resilience to loss in it. I can grieve and be happy. I can feel joy and sadness at the same time. I am a mother without a child to hold. I can miss my daughters immensely and still choose to not pursue having additional children. My contradictory nature has given me the resilience to feel sad for my losses even as I'm happy for others who are able to get pregnancy and birth living children. It has enabled me to accept that some friends and family can't support me in exactly the way I want and be grateful for that they give the best support they know how to give. It has enabled me to realize that loved ones can struggle with not being able to handle my grief yet still deeply love me. It has helped me see that people can say careless, hurtful things yet still be kind and good people. This ability to hold space for the contradictions of life gave me the resilience to be open to people's flaws and imperfects, to be open to life's pain and gifts in equal measure. When I could be open to the imperfection and beauty of others and of life, I was able to be open to my own imperfections and beauty.

When I was open to my own imperfections and beauty, I could open to both grieve and experience joy. In the contradictions of life, there is space for forgiveness, healing, love, gratitude, and peace. Life and death. Joy and sadness. Pain and peace. Love and loss.

Life is full of contradictions. Maybe that's what makes it beautiful.

Lifted with love from TCF Johannesburg Chapter news

Grief is a 24-hour-a-day job.

Bereaved parents are expected by the outside world to handle this full-time job along with their paying full time job and their outside activities as if nothing has happened.

How many of us have heard the questions, "When are you going to get on with your life? When are you going to forget about this?"

The answers to these questions are: "I will get on with my life when I adjust better, and I will absolutely NEVER forget that this happened!"

We are not able to turn off the grief from 8 A.M. until 5 P.M. We are not able to "leave it at home." We are not able to turn it off in the wee hours of the morning when we can't sleep. We are not able to turn it off just because we have a major project at work that needs to be done or a meeting that we need to attend. We are not able to turn it off upon demand.

We need to learn to explain that we need understanding and patience from those around us. We need support and strength now, not added pressures to forget. We need to learn to explain that we hurt and need some time to grieve. We need to learn to take the time to grieve.

Pam Duke, TCF/Dallas, TX

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

Things I have Learned

Words by a newly bereaved Mum, 17 weeks after she lost her 15 year old son, Gage, to cancer in October 2022

Things I've learned in the last 17 weeks about grief and the loss of a child:
I'd watched people go through this before me and thought I knew what to expect but I had no idea.

That every breath, every heartbeat is pure agony. Every single day. It doesn't get better, it gets harder, the longer I am away from my child. And in the decades to come the pain will never fade. And honestly, I don't want it to. The pain keeps me alive.
That I would find my people. We are of all ages, all walks of life, all social standings and all religions or no religion. But we are one. We are alone together. These people are sadly other bereaved parents. But the normal awkwardness of a new friendship is not there. We instantly know each other's hearts and we are connected truly and deeply until the end.
That the people who loved and supported me before, the people I have known for years, don't know what to say to me anymore. That my grief is too much for them to handle. Most drop away, some wean off slowly, and others disappear very quickly. That this is not a reflection of me, it happens to most bereaved parents.
That my drive to stay alive is stronger for my other children. My will to be here for them and protect them is fierce. Yet I do not fear death. In fact, I will welcome the day.
That a simple photo, teddy bear or t-shirt have become the most important things I own. Items of value no longer matter. Physical items and money are not important. Only memories and love are.
That I would spend hours every day, talking to someone who I can't hear speak back.
That I now have no goals in life, except to live for my deceased child. To do the things he would love, and love the things he would have done. And to share those loves with his siblings so they still feel his warmth surrounding them.
That "I miss you" is the most powerful thing you can ever say or feel.
That I would be angry and sad and crying and laughing all at the same time.
That dreams of my child are my saving grace, but they don't come as often as I like. How I wish I could replay them like a video recording.
That I no longer believe in wishes and happy endings.
Life is cruel so hold on to the good you find and the people you love. Tell them every day how much you love them. 100 times a day if you can.
That my love and gratefulness for my own parents is now 10-fold what it was before. Not only do they grieve for their grandchild, but they grieve for me. The daughter they have now lost to this pain, their child who will never be the same again. Yet they still manage to support me every single day. Thank you, mum and dad.
That my living children would grow and love and show more compassion than most adults. That over a matter of weeks, they have wisened beyond their years. They are strong and brave and kind. And I am so proud of them.
That I still love as deeply as if I had never known loss. That the pain and fear are worth the love that can be had.
That not a single day goes by that I don't cry. That these wild animal-like howls can come out of a human mouth. My mouth. That sometimes you can also scream with no sound, no voice. Complete raw and silent pain pouring out as just air despite my best effort to make a sound, like watching a movie with the TV on mute.
That I will love my child as completely as if he was still by my side, hand in mine. That I am still his mother, despite his death.
That he will be my first thought as I wake, every single day, for the rest of my life.

Sara Brown, Mother of Gage from 2007 until ‘the end of time.’
NSW Focus

What I Wish I had Known

My eyes were squeezed shut; nobody told me what a recently stillborn baby looks like at full term. Eventually I slightly opened my eyes enough to see my husband on his knees sobbing by the bassinet, the midwife had carefully placed her in. I wish someone had told me that these few memories would be the only things I would have of my daughter and that I should cherish them.

My midwife told me I should hold her; I was too afraid of touching her because I didn't know what she would feel like or how it would make me feel; instead I had her kept in her bassinet in my room, my perfect little baby that looked like she was going to wake up at any minute. I wish I'd known how much I would ache to hold her for years to come.

The hospital worker took a few photographs for me, the flash made her skin look pale, not at all the memory I had of her. They cut a few locks of her hair and took her handprints for me to keep in a special memory book. I wish someone had told me that there were organisations that were trained to come and take photographs and memories of sleeping and unwell children.
I was ashamed of letting everyone down, for failing as a mother. I chose not to have any service to acknowledge her passing, leaving her in the hospital was so incredibly difficult and I didn't think I could handle another goodbye. I wish I had known that it wasn't just me that needed to say goodbye, it was her grandparents and sister too.

My doctor felt that after four weeks, I should be showing less symptoms of grief and put me on antidepressants. He suggested me talking to a counsellor which in my mind was absurd, there was nothing a counsellor could do to make me see things differently or fix me, my child had died and I was mourning her. I wish someone had told me that I was normal, that child loss is a long and difficult journey.

My grief remained and the world kept on moving. Friends and family seemed to have forgotten my grief or acted like I should have moved on. I began to feel trapped, like the suffocating weight of grief would never end and I would be in this pain for the rest of my life

The months went by and eventually I found support with people who had lost children. I connected with other parents who had lost babies and were trying again to conceive. After a lots of fear and worry, I gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Initially I fussed and panicked about every tiny noise she made but my new friends reassured me that it was normal and this time I did not feel guilty about my emotions. I wish I had known that last time I doubted myself.

My pain never went away but I learnt how to cope with it better. I began to volunteer with The Compassionate Friends WA and met this beautiful group of people, all with stories of their own who had overcome the initial pain of grief and turned it into strength to help others who had lost a child. I wish I had known about the amazing healing power of connecting with other bereaved parents.

Tricia Jancovich (Mother of Katie Samara Jancovich 22-06-2010)

Reprinted with love from TCF WA newsletter

To All Bereaved Parents:

Be Patient I am a recovering bereaved parent. I was a parent by choice. One of my children died; I became a bereaved parent, but certainly not by choice.

As I tried to recapture the security of what was, after many agonizing months, I finally realized that I would never be the same again, that I would always hurt and miss my dead son, and that, ultimately, only I could be responsible for recovering from this hateful disease called grief. I had to make the choice of being a bereaved parent or a recovering bereaved parent.

I chose the latter. I sometimes fall off the wagon, and I know that I always will. The love of my child will never leave me, but thank God for my being a recovering bereaved parent. It does take time, however, so don't give up on yourself. It may take more or less time for some than for others.
Be patient. ~ Eunice Guy, TCF/Atlanta, GA Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News

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.

Strong

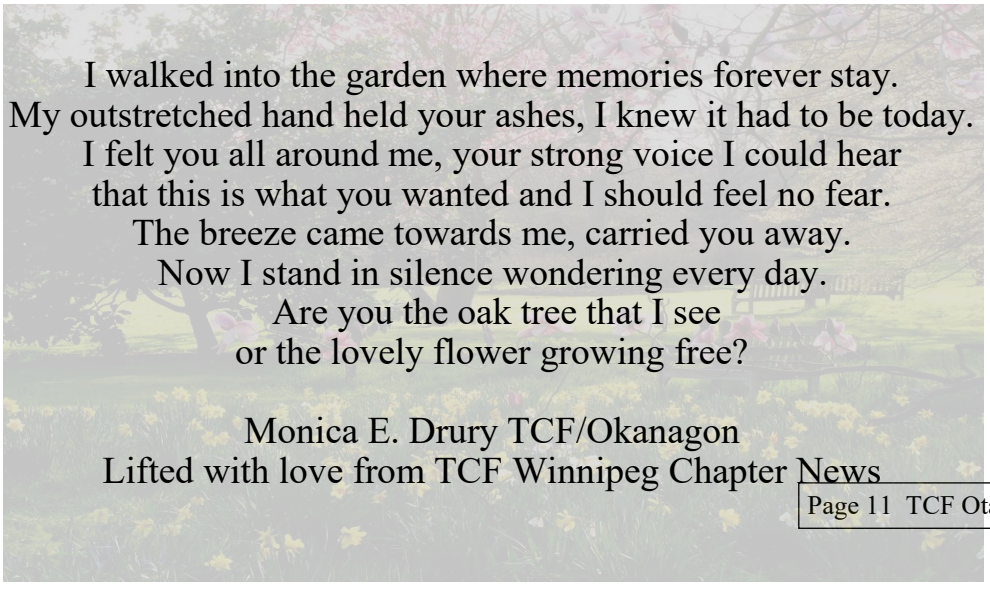
You're strong but you're not
You're sad but there's joy
You're hurt, angry, but hopeful
And 100 other emotions that only you know, and they can't be explained
No one can take them away for you, they belong to you now, like battle scars on a warrior

They can't feel your pain, they don't know it, they've never felt it, this is their first time too
so be patient with them, sometimes the people you know and love best
who love you are hurt and angry and sad as well
they may not say or do the right thing, and that's okay,
they love you they're right behind you ready to catch you

You're broken, he's broken, they're broken
And you're the glue, the one they look to you for reassurance, safety, and Love
You're Home to them, the one constant in life they can depend on unconditional love,
the wife, the Momma, the boo boo healer, and bedtime story reader

But who's your glue?
Who is going to wipe away your tears and reassure you?
Your strong faith tells you that you will hold her again
That picture in your mind of running to her and holding her with laughter instead of tears
Your glue is strong, your glue has no expiration date, your glue is mighty, and it holds forever

~ Phyllis Dickens
Phyllis Dickens is the proud nanny of three beautiful grandchildren, one Angel and two sweet little humans. She wrote this for her daughter in the hopes that would help her with her grief somehow. She thanks you for reading it, and hopes it touches your heart
We Need Not Walk Alone



Since You Left

by Deborah Waffle, Kelsey's Mom

I walked into a patient's hospital room, clipboard in hand. "I see you signed up for therapy dog visits," I said to the woman lying in bed. Another woman sat in a chair visiting. "This is Brody," I announced, indicating the golden retriever at my side. "Would you like him to say hi?" "Yes," said the patient. I waved my hand for Brody to approach the bed so the woman could pet him. Both women had open books in their laps, so I also handed them each a photo-filled bookmark. Usually, people first admire the top photo: eight-week-old Brody the day we got him. Then, of the middle picture, they ask, "Is that you?" Long ago, I did look a lot like my daughter, Kelsey, with wavy blonde hair and bright blue eyes. But that day, both women immediately turned the bookmark over and read the back. Then the woman visiting said, "My son died in a car accident twenty years ago. There's a grief metaphor about a ball and a jar. You should look it up."

The back of the bookmark explains that Kelsey had small fiber neuropathy that affected her autonomic system, and died September 28, 2022, age 29. She had wanted Brody to become a therapy dog and bring joy to others; now, we're doing that in her memory.

When Kelsey was born–April 10, 1993–she had a dimple on her chin and a mohawk of dark hair. Though otherwise healthy, she had occasional high fevers and urinary tract infections. As she grew, I'd sometimes hear her in the bathroom saying, "Ow, ow, ow." When I asked if she was okay, she'd nod and hurry off to continue playing. What I didn't know then was that when Kelsey peed, it burned, even when she didn't have a UTI. Since it had always felt this way for her, she thought this was normal. Over time, though, the burning pain started to linger, and soon this began impacting her entire life. After endless doctor visits, Kelsey was diagnosed first with vulvodynia, and later with small fiber neuropathy. Her digestion, urinary tract, bowels, and pancreas all were affected. Still, no doctor ever indicated that, outside of discomfort, her symptoms were incredibly concerning. Then one evening in her late twenties, Kelsey was experiencing her normal symptoms: nausea, stomach pain, and inability to go to the bathroom. The next day unfathomably–she was gone, having died alone in the night.

That day, Kelsey's young dog, Brody, came to live with my husband and me. As my only living connection to my daughter, he quickly became my life preserver. I had always tried to convince Kelsey that, despite her pain and illness, one day she'd find her something good. I'd summarize the most recent memoir I'd read about a person who experienced tragedy but found a way to continue living in a positive way. Even before meeting Brody, Kelsey planned to train him to become a therapy dog. Visiting people who were sick and in pain—as she was—would become her something good. Now, with her gone, I wondered if I was strong enough to emulate the people I'd read about.

One week after Kelsey died, Brody and I walked into a dog agility class. I didn't want to be there. But Kelsey had been so excited for Brody to do this that, even though she was gone, I didn't want to disappoint her. During introductions, I said, "My name is Debbie, and this is Brody." How could I tell them that Brody was my daughter's dog, and she had just died? It took all my strength to get through the class. But we did, and after that, Brody and I attended more classes and eventually saw a private trainer to prep for the therapy dog test. This goal gave me something positive to focus on, while also making me feel closer to Kelsey. Still, when Brody passed the test eight months later, instead of celebrating, I felt the pain of missing Kelsey even more: because I was his handler, not her.

We began visiting patients at a hospital and residential health facilities. I'd walk down the hall towards the nurse's station, and people would look up from desks and say, "Brody's here!" They'd gather around to pet him. Brody would lower his head, as if he were getting a massage. One woman we visited had limited mobility. I said, "Would you like Brody to sit on a chair so you could reach him?" Her eyes brightened, and she smiled. "He can do that?" I set a folding chair beside her bed. When I tapped the seat, Brody jumped up and sat. The woman laughed. Now she could see his soulful eyes and deep red fur, touch his velvety ears.

Sometimes when people read the back of the bookmark, they tell me their grief stories. Listening to them talk about a loved one they miss is another way I can help, and something I didn't anticipate. Aside from our therapy dog work, Brody has been my constant companion—going for daily walks and hikes, sitting on my lap when I feel most vulnerable. It was bittersweet when I realized that Brody was doing for me exactly what I'd hoped he would do for Kelsey.

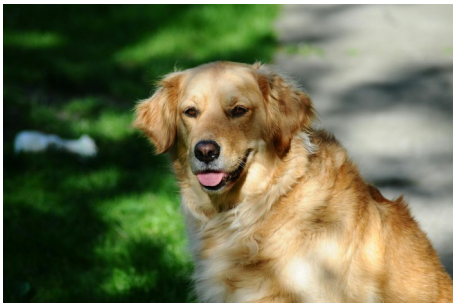
In the metaphor about the "grief jar," grief is like a ball in a jar. The ball, your grief, never goes away and never gets smaller. But you, the jar, grow as time passes and you learn to live with the loss. Soon there's more room

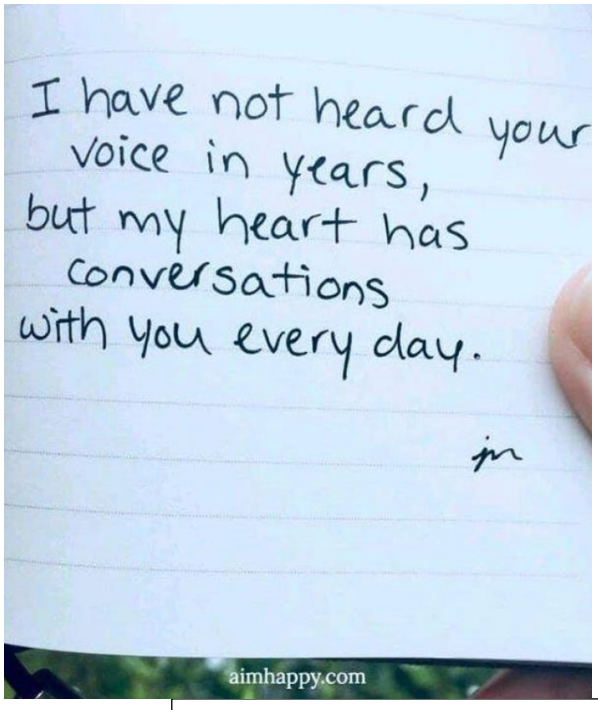
around the grief for other things. This visual representation of grief gives me hope.

When Kelsey first died, my grief barely fit inside my tiny jar. As time went on, whenever something special happened or I went to a memorable place with family and friends, I saved or bought something and put it in a big box. Occasionally I sit down with each item, remember where it came from, and think, Kelsey, look at everything that's happened since you left! My grief jar is growing. Two years later, there's Brody's certificate for passing the therapy dog test, and the hospital newsletter welcoming him. At the Jersey shore, my first time there without Kelsey, I saved my beach badge and some shells. There are keepsakes from California, Hawaii, and Utah. When I read a memoir by a parent who's lost a child, I add that child's name to the box, knowing how important it is for parents living with this unimaginable grief to have their son or daughter remembered.

Pursuing Kelsey's dream of making Brody a therapy dog was the beginning of my learning to live and breathe again after losing her. My grief still feels like a weight that I carry around, always. But now, when I sit among these items and the memories–and when I walk into a hospital room with Brody and see a patient's eyes light up–I know that, somehow, my life has continued without Kelsey. And that, in her memory, I'm trying to be a better person because she lived.

Deborah Waffle is the author of My Grief Jar: Still Growing After the Loss of My Daughter. In her memoir, she shares Kelsey's journey of living with a chronic illness and how Brody helps counter her despondency after this tremendous loss. Deborah taught for 33 years and is now retired. She lives with her husband Marty in Broadalbin, New York. She and Brody regularly visit different medical facilities as a therapy dog team.





Sibling Page

365 Days Without You by Imogen, on the loss of her sister

365 days since I sat in that police station hearing them say
there'd been a terrible accident, and you'd passed away.
365 days since you left
365 days since a hole was blown through my chest
365 days of experiencing agony I never knew existed
It took hold of my heart, and it ripped it and twisted
365 days but a lifetime of tears and yet missing you forever will mean
I shed many more lifetimes worth throughout the rest of my years.
365 days of wrapping my head around associating your name with death and died
And feeling immense anger that so many of your dreams won't be realised
365 days and 365 long broken nights of wondering, were you in pain? did you have to fight?
and wherever you are now, are you alright?
365 days of questioning why and what for,
but the answers won't come you're just not here anymore.
365 days since us who love you so deeply
Also lost a part of our soul and a life we used to live cheerfully
365 days of using all my strength to hold it together when everyone is around
Then closing the door and falling to pieces on the ground
365 days of thinking 'this can't be true' but slowly starting to realise it is.
We've lost you.
365 days so for others, the shock has passed and subsided
But for us, it's all-encompassing even though we try to hide it
But then I remember there could be one thing that's worse
if we'd never had the time with you that we did on this earth
365 days of looking back on our lifetime together
And holding on to every memory so tightly
because they are the most precious treasure

Lifted with love from TCF UK Compassion

Letting Go By Shannon Billeter

You're still here in my heart and mind,
Still making me laugh cause your stories live on.

I hold you in a thought and I can feel you.
I feel you and this gives me strength and courage.

The tears I have cried for you could flood the earth
And I know you have wiped each one away.

For you Brother, I promise you this,
I will go on with my life and make you proud.

I will always hold you in my heart.
I promise you I will be missing you everyday till the end of time,

But this is not my end
And I can't hold my head underwater....I need to breathe.

I need to love and miss you,
but I also need to live because through me you will live,

You will still laugh and love,
You will still sing and dance,
You will still hug and kiss.
You will forever be in our lives,

You will forever be a brother,
a son, an uncle and friend.

I am going to miss your shining face
I think of you and wonder why?

I might cry or smile,
But at the end of the day
I am one day closer to you….

Lovingly reprinted from TCF Queensland Newsletter

MISSION STATEMENT

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

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

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

Do you need to talk? Our telephone friends are willing to listen..

Telephone Friends

DUNEDIN	Anne Lelenoa (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	Jan Pessione (16 yr old daughter, accidental) janpessione@xtra.co.nz (Marina, 54yrs, Airways Obstruction)	03-4487800
CENTRAL OTAGO	Pauline Trotter (Andre, 25yrs, Car crash)	0273960611
INVERCARGILL	Josie Dyer Vanessa Young (Jaylene 6yrs chemical poisoning) Southland Coordinators	0276321742 0273562271
TIMARU	Phyl Sowerby (Son Cancer 1998)	03 612 -6402
CHRISTCHURCH	Chris Guerin	02102931357
WELLINGTON	Lorraine Driskel Son (twin) 19yrs—car accident lorraine.driskel@gmail.com	021 688504
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) marshkandb@gmail.com	06 3443345
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz

NEW ZEALAND
Lottery Grants Board
TE POARI ROTA