

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

(Otago Chapter) Incorporated
Founded December 1989

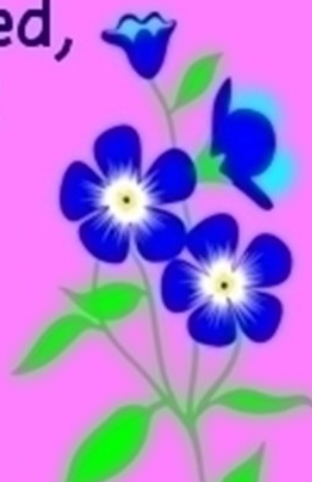
A WORLD WIDE FAMILY OF BEREAVED PARENTS CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

NEWSLETTER No: 194

APRIL MAY 2023

Forget-me-not, and think of me,
the times I made you smile,
Forget-me-not but don't be sad,
I'm with you all the while.

Forget-me-not
when you're in need,
and feel that
no-one's there,
Remember that
I'm still around,
I'm here, I love you,
I care. ~ © ~ *Mary Jac*



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

RETURN ADDRESS

72 TOTARA STREET,
NEWFIELD,
INVERCARGILL
9812

NEW ZEALAND

TO

OUR CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

Grief is like a shadow. It follows me.

Even on the sunny days there is a spot of darkness
around me.

But shadows are only cast where there are rays of light
first.

You were that light..

(The After Glow. Reprinted from Facebook)

Our Children ... Remembered with love

Forever Young

Forever Loved

Forever Longed For

Andrew Meldrum Cox	Born 16/4/68	Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Died 6/4/02
Jack Stephen Dyer	Born 24/4/07	Rebecca Clare Halkett	Died 20/4/03
Nicholas Ian O'Hara	Born 17/4/74	Greg Holley	Died 6/4/85
Caren Amanda Phillips	Born 16/4/81	Matthew David Hubber	Died 30/4/00
Alan Bruce Scorringe	Born 26/4/66	Sally Verone Kitto	Died 23/4/01
Anthony Mark Staite	Born 5/4/74	Robbie Knight	Died 18/4/96
Jonathon Upton	Born 15/4/68	Jake Lucas	Died 26/4/77
Rebecca Elizabeth Arnold	Born 9/5/1978	Nikolaas Remmerswaal	Died 1/4/12
Nicholas Evan Hood	Born 12/5/1985	Gary Brendon Thompson	Died 9/4/96
Vicky Knight	Born 21/5/1980	Hayden Watson	Died 11/4/97
Paul John Nicolaou	Born 21/5/1964	Paul Graham Albrecht	Died 19/5/2004
Cindy Parish	Born 25/5/1965	Michael Barry Duke	Died 20/5/2005
Liam Veters	Born 1/5/2005	Ben Henderson	Died 15/5/2003
David Jason Eugene Walker	Born 7/5/1993	Erica Kewish	Died 14/5/2014
James Wing	Born 31/5/1980	Thomas Craig McDonald	Died 25/5/2008
		Maryann Gaye Pearce	Died 27/5/2000
		Wayne Edward Summers	Died 9/5/1999
		David Jason Eugene Walker	Died 13/5/ 2000
		Peter Gregory Warren	Died 17/5/1998
		Dan Wells	Died 13/5/2003
		Timothy James Williams	Died 29/5/2005

Central Otago

Dear friends,

As Mother's Day comes with so many bitter sweet memories, we will all deal with it differently, finding a way to get through the day, even hopefully with enough energy to honour our own Mother, who will also be grieving the loss of a precious grandchild.....

As a group we have sadly had to restructure, due to the resignation of our Coordinator Pauline Trotter, and Chairperson Gill Elliott. Our Assistant Coordinator Jan Johnson will complete her Contract at the end of June, after which we will provide voluntary support, until our AGM when we will decide on a future plan.

In the meantime PLEASE do not hesitate to either phone or email me, and I will do my best to organise the support that you need.....

PLEASE take very best CARE of YOURSELVES, and reach out for a listening ear....

I am available on my cellphone 24/7.

Jan Pessione (Acting Chairperson)

Ph: 037 309 1246

Email: janpessione@xtra.co.nz

Easter Saturday was a beautiful day. It was our son Simon's birthday. He was born on 8/4/84 weighing in at 8lb 4.I used to joke with him and say "You'll probably die when you are 84! "

"Don't joke about that Mum" he would retort.

Seems I was wrong. Simon died in a car accident when he was 23 years old.

To us he will always be 23 but on Easter Saturday he would have been 39.

We headed for the lovely Aramoho Cemetery in Whanganui to 'celebrate' his birthday.

For the first time our 2 grandchildren came to 'see' Uncle Simon. They play in his bedroom with his toys and things and they know he is in heaven but as for his earthly resting place it has never been mentioned. They are sensitive boys and we didn't want to give them any anxiety so waited 'til the time seemed right with their parents.

2023 was the year and the right time.

Bruno (11) had a wee cry. Aksel (7) said "This is cool"

We lit a candle, sang Happy Birthday, blew out the candle and had a picnic of juice and bikkies. Then we covered him with a glorious array of petals. Aksel chalked a message "I love you"

It was such a special and happy time.

The boys asked a few typical boy/what?/how?/scientific questions which we answered as best we could. It was just fine.

We then wandered over to 'visit' a cousin of their mums, also buried there.

We moved on to the Children's Area where our TCF group gather annually to decorate the gorgeous magnolia tree that overhangs it.

Buried there is a student from their school, a pupil of our teacher son Andrew.

The boys wandered round respectfully observing the graves covered in toys and memorabilia.

"Why does this grave have a spiderman on it?"

"Why does this stone only have one date on it?"

"How old was this girl when she died?"

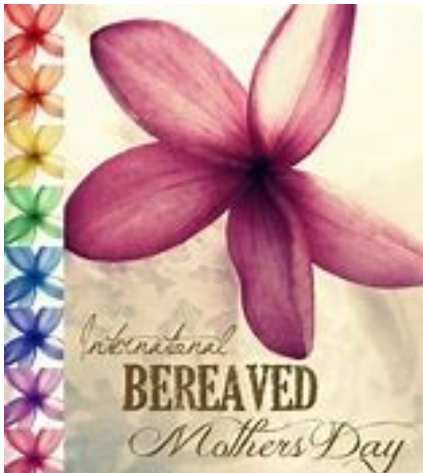
"This boy was the same age as me when he died?"

This created a maths lesson and they then worked out the ages of the children there. It seemed so natural and so normal. Death is a part of life.

I am so grateful for Easter Saturday. It strengthened us in our grief to share it with new generations who will never forget their Brother and Uncle.

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In memory of Simon Marsh.



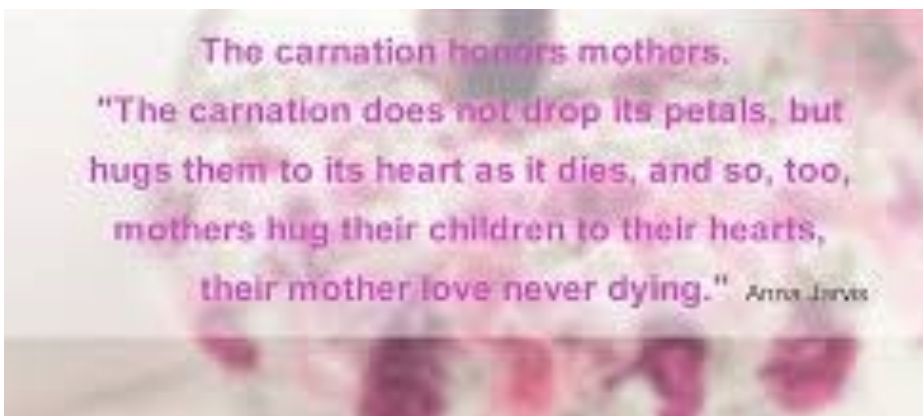
7TH MAY 2023

The Sunday prior to Mother's Day is marked as Bereaved Mother's Day. As grieving mums we have earned our own day dedicated to us to help heal our hearts.

Mother's Day was founded in the USA by Anna Jarvis back in 1908, dedicated to her own mother. As time went by, more and more people started to celebrate Mother's Day, until it became a full-blown international event. Sadly, Anna later spent many years trying to get it removed from the calendar as she felt it had become too commercialised.



Carnations. Anna Jarvis once said that white carnations were the symbol of Mother's Day because the flowers typify the virtues of motherhood: purity; gratitude; lasting qualities; faithfulness; its fragrance; pure love; its wide field of growth; charity; form and beauty..." Also this flower doesn't drop its petals but folds them to its heart



Some Ideas for Bereaved Mothers Day found on the internet.

Give comfort in an appropriate way

Acknowledge her pain

Cry with her

Give a simple hug – it can speak more than words

Listen to her as she talks of her child – Don't try to fix the pain – just listen and support

Write a personal letter to a Bereaved Mother that you know - showing sincere empathy and appreciation for her

Perhaps a white carnation if in season or some white flower

Always say/ write /speak her child's name – nothing warms her heart more – that name is a beautiful reminder

Cook a meal for her – the least thing on her list of to dos is cooking

Bake or buy a favourite treat

Invite her out for coffee , a walk or shopping

Ask her how you can help her- she may not like to ask

Pamper her in some way – soap, bath soak, hand cream etc

Make a memory craft using her child's name – initialled beads

Offer to do chores, gardening, shopping etc - to give her a bit of me-time

Make a charitable gift in her child's name – keep her child's memory alive

Memories and photos - share a memory or a photo you may have of her child

Plant a tree in memory or gift her a tree or plant. Paint a rock to go with it

Memory box – give a decorated box for her to keep memories in

Tell her about The Compassionate Friends Grief support – it will help her feel less alone

Don't wait for Mothers Day - do at anytime

Mention the day on Social Media

Some Quotes/ Captions

Today on International Bereaved Mother's Day, please keep the mothers who are mourning the death of a child in your thoughts.

Today is Bereaved Mother's Day. This is the day where we hold space for mothers who have endured the unfathomable loss of a child.

To every mother who is mourning the death of a child, we hold you in our hearts this International Bereaved Mother's Day.

The Sunday before Mother's Day is International Bereaved Mother's Day. Today to all those who carry a child in their heart; we see you and hear you and think of you today.

A mother's grief is as timeless as her love. Today is "Bereaved Mother's Day" – a date to honour mothers who have lost a child, for there is no stronger person than a grieving mother that wakes up and keeps going every morning.

If you're struggling to find the right words, here's a list of suggestions you can say to the grieving mother:

1) "You and your child are always in my thoughts."

2) "I can't imagine how you're feeling, but I want you to know that I'm here for you."

3) "I wish I had the right words, but sometimes there are no words to describe how sorry I am."

4) "Grief is a journey, and I'll be with you every step of the way."

Mother's Day, "Before and After"

While sorting through boxes and bags, it is not unusual for me to find something unexpected. It happened just the other day. Sifting through a box, I came across a wrinkled, somewhat yellowed piece of lined school paper. I carefully unfolded it only to find a drawing of a stick-mom and stick-daughter standing alongside a mammoth daisy. The mom and little girl were holding hands with huge lopsided grins on their faces. In her little girl just-learning-to-print handwriting were the words, "Happy Mother's Day, Mommy. I love you, Kristina." Even six years later, "gifts" such as these can bring fresh tears.

It is times like these that I am glad that I was an incredible packrat, especially when it came to saving things that my children have made. I can picture my then-blonde, petite little Nina (her nickname), with the wispy hair, bent over the kitchen table, crayon in hand, creating that handmade card filled with love. Memories of breakfasts in bed only to return to the kitchen after finishing the "gourmet" meal served with tender care, to find it in such disarray that it took hours to clean up! Even through the tears, these are the sweetest memories.

As I type this, I look at another gift from a Mother's Day past; a little statue of a harried mom, surrounded by mop, broom and bucket that says, "World's Greatest Mom," chosen for me at a neighborhood garage sale. I came across it accidentally shortly after Nina's death, unearthing it from its hiding place. I wondered to myself, why had I packed it away? Did Nina know that I did and did she think that, by doing so, I hadn't appreciate her gift? Did I ever thank her for it along with the other garage sale items that she proudly brought home to me, or did it show on my face that I really didn't need any more "junk" around the house? Sometimes resurrecting these treasures can bring unpleasant feelings of guilt as we wonder if our children knew how much their little gestures of love meant to us. When our child dies, it becomes easy to second-guess ourselves, trapped in our fixations and exaggerations of the negative things that may have occurred during our child's life.

The first Mother's Day after Nina died was a grief-numbing blur, as it occurred only three days following her death. Unlike previous joyful dinners out with my four children pampering their mom, we spend the day making funeral arrangements and choosing a casket for one of them. In the early evening, I overheard it said to someone else, "Happy Mother's Day." I turned to my own mother and apologized for having forgotten. I could not imagine ever celebrating another Mother's Day again. I am sure the dads have these same feelings on Father's Day. My heart goes out to them, because I think we forget that they, just like us, grieve and hurt, too. For those mothers and fathers who have lost their only child, I have been saddened by stories told to me by them of attending church on Mother's Day Sunday, and when the pastor asked the mothers in the church to please stand, they were undecided on whether they should stand or not. I hope that they will always remember, and the fathers as well, "Once a mother, always a mother; once a father, always a father." We are forever their parents.

If we are fortunate to have surviving children, they are often forgotten as well. In the early days, we become obsessed with the one who is missing. My own children showed quiet patience with this. I often wonder if they thought "What about us? We're still here!"

Now with almost seven Mother's Day's behind me, I try to accentuate what I do have. This does not happen overnight. I found that in celebrating my surviving children, I could still honor Nina's memory and find ways to include her as well. I have developed a ritual where I get up early on that morning and bring flowers out to the cemetery. I bring a flower and a note to some of the mothers that I know who have buried children there to tell them I am thinking of them and their child. There is something very healing when reaching out to others. I then sit by my daughter's gravesite on the spring-green grass listening to the sweet call of a robin. I bring her a flower and write in her journal telling her how thankful I am to be her mother, how much I love and miss her. That is our private time together; the rest of the day is spent honoring my other children.

Mother's Day and Father's Day are holidays especially created for us. Try to get through them the best that you can, in whatever way feels right for you. Truly, only you know what that is. Whether it is alone those first few years or with people that you love and who understand, do something that you find comforting. It is your day, for you were the giver of a precious life—you held a miracle in your arms. Even as powerfully destructive as death is, even that cannot take those memories away from you—they are your child's gift to you.

With gentle thoughts and peace on your special day, Cathy C. Seehuetter, TCF St. Paul, MN In memory of my daughter, Nina

Cathy Seehuetter began her journey with grief when her 15-year-old daughter, Nina, was killed in a drunk-driver accident in 1995. Since Nina's death, she has been active with TCF and is presently serving her second term on the National Board of Directors. She has been published in Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul, as well as grief magazines, and is also a contributor to the forum, "The Bulletin Board" in the St. Paul Pioneer Press. She has given workshops at TCF national conferences on "Journaling and Writing as a Healing Tool." She lives in Minnesota with her husband and has three surviving children and four grandchildren.

Lifted with thanks and love from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter

Dear Friends

Mothers' Day is one of the sweetest anniversaries of the year. Motivated by the wish to honour motherhood, its lapse into crass commercialism has not dimmed its original inspiration. For TCF mothers the day throbs with hurt. We long for our dead sons and daughters and this in no way distracts from our delight in the loving care of our surviving children, For those who lost only or all their children the agony is indescribable.

Delving into my treasure chest of memories I recall three incidents which meant the world to me and which I'd like to share in the hope that they will resonate with you too.

That first dreadful Mother's Day after Lionel died I dragged myself from bed, exhausted by a sleepless night and endless tears. Why I should have rooted in the back of a cupboard I don't know. There I found a forgotten briefcase. When I opened it I saw the last hand-written, humorously drawn Mothers' Day card Lionel had made for me. Of course I howled but these tears were different. Mingled with the anguish of loss was a realization of the permanence of love and the miracles that life can still yield.

Another year a friend brought me a gift on Mothers' Day. She'd heard a voice saying "She's still my mother", and just knew this was a message from Lionel. Ignoring her own distress, for she too is a bereaved mom, she rushed to get me something to remind us that "once a mother, always a mother".

Some years later I was able to absorb the fact of Mothers' Day without disintegrating. My husband was busy and I took myself off for movies and a meal. Naturally all the restaurants were full of families celebrating together and here was I, sitting on my own, I was asked if I was waiting for someone. I silently shook my head and then placed my order. Minutes later a large glass of wine was before me. "I didn't order this", I said. "I know", answered the waiter, "but you deserve it." I've never forgotten that kindness from a sensitive stranger, one more proof that compassion thrives.

May you be blessed this Mothers' Day with love and kindness, memories and miracles.

With love Taken from the book "A String of Pearls" Rosemary Dirmeik

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.

Facing Mother's Day after the death of a child

I don't feel much like celebrating Mother's Day this year. My 15-year-old daughter died 51 days ago, after being plagued by a rare, relentless form of cancer for five years. I'm not sure what the celebration is supposed to look like when I failed at my main task as a mother: Seeing my child safely to adulthood.

I realize that attributing the death of my child to my own failure is irrational. I understand that guilt and blame won't bring her back, that we tried valiantly to cure her with treatments that ranged from a liver transplant to chemotherapy to radiation. I know cancer kills children every day. But she wasn't a statistic. She was my child, and I couldn't save her. I couldn't save her.

I know other mothers who've lost children, and they've tried to prepare me for how unbearable this Hallmark holiday can be, how your very identity as a mother is shaken and upended when your child dies. We're a dismal, heartbroken club of kindred spirits. We share the pain of empty, quiet rooms that hold the remnants of our children's lives—keepsakes that remain long after our dear ones have gone. How can I celebrate this day? How can I celebrate myself? Every day I open the door to my daughter's room, sit on her tidy bed and wonder how any of this is real. How is it possible that all I have left is her collection of albums, stones and crystals, and her closet full of untouched clothes? How long will they serve as proof that she was here on this Earth, that she was real?

As the days go by, my daughter's proximity to me fades, the reality of her absence becomes more concrete. This would be okay if it were because she had graduated high school, gone off to college and started her life, but that's not what happened. She stopped existing at 15. She stopped.

I don't know how to celebrate Mother's Day without the consolation prize given all mothers—that our babies are gone, but we have laughing toddlers in exchange, that our toddlers are gone, but we have curious, bright-eyed preschoolers in their place, that the messy, carefree days of preschool meld into the primary years when interests and personalities emerge and blossom, giving us teenagers who are whole, unique people. The fact that our kids grow up into actual people distracts us from the pain of their fading childhood. Except, of course, if they don't grow up.

I am two mothers now—the mother you see walking beside my remaining daughter in the all-too-real world of chores and home work and trivial things and the mother you don't see—the mother bereft, imagining that my daughter is two steps behind me, just out of sight.

There are too many mothers like me, rushing here and there, pretending we're fully in one world when, really, we're in two. I look whole and normal, but deep inside there's an emptiness where my heart used to be. I can't walk with my surviving daughter without imagining the shadow of her sister right beside us, rolling her eyes, glancing at her phone.

Jacqueline Dooley

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Winnipeg Chapter News

There is a fear that I have
When their name is not said
I worry that they are
FORGOTTEN

There is a great joy that I have
When their name is said
To know that they are
REMEMBERED.

• **Mother's Day with Empty Arms** Written by Clara Hinton,
www.silentgrief.com

Experiencing a miscarriage is devastating. Hopes and dreams of a baby are snatched away so suddenly. Many mothers have an extremely difficult time accepting the fact that one day there was a baby growing inside of them, and the next day the baby is gone.

Facing special holidays without a baby is terribly painful, often causing a heightened grief, one of the most painful of all holidays to face with empty arms is Mother's Day ...

There is no simple solution for decreasing the emotional pain of child loss, especially during a holiday such as Mother's Day that is specifically designed to honour Mothers. A mother can, however, make some preparations for that day in an attempt to work through her grief rather than facing this holiday with an anticipated dread.

Probably the best gift a Mother can give herself is the acknowledgement that she is a Mother, even though she is not carrying her baby around in her arms. Most friends and many family members will avoid the topic because it makes them feel too uncomfortable. However, a Mother can plan ahead for this holiday by letting others know of her wishes to be included among those being honoured as Mothers.

If a Mother who has suffered a miscarriage feels uncomfortable about being given a flower in church, or by attending a Mother's Day meal, then she can substitute other activities that make her feel more comfortable during this difficult time.

Mother's Day is a great time for a couple to spend time together talking about their loss and what the baby meant to them. Perhaps a planned walk in the park seeing and hearing the sights and sounds of nature. A husband and wife can verbalise their lost dreams together. There is great healing within a marriage when a couple can talk together about their baby. This is another way of allowing a mother who has miscarried to really "feel" like she is a mother. Validation is an important part of grief healing and is so important on Mother's Day.

If you have not named your baby who was lost to miscarriage, Mother's Day is a great day to think about doing this. There is healing in giving your child a name. Often Fathers will not be ready to do this, or they might not see a reason to name a miscarried child. A mother can name her baby and keep the name in her heart. She needs to hear words other than "it", "tissue", or "foetus". There is something very special when a mother can call her child by name.

Finally, a Mother who has miscarried should give herself permission to do what feels best for her heart to do on Mother's Day. She can write a love letter to her baby. Perhaps she will want to plant a flower in memory of her baby. She might want to plan a time for a balloon release on Mother's Day, giving her baby permission to "be away" while she remains the child's mother.

Mother's Day is not a day to mask feelings. By planning ahead to do just one thing that will validate being a Mother, Mother's Day will have special meaning, and moving ahead in the slow, difficult journey of grief can continue in a positive way

Gratefully reprinted from TCF Victoria Chapter Newsletter



Don't

Please don't tell me I'm richer for having had him. I am too busy being the poorer for having lost him.

Please don't tell me there is a light at the end of the tunnel. What tunnel is that? My only tunnel vision is consumed with blackness right now.

Please don't tell me I'll understand it all one day. PROMISES. PROMISES. There's nothing like here and now explanations.

Please don't remind me he is in a better place. My maternal instincts have been grossly abused so that he can be there.

Please don't tell me Spring will come and birds will sing again. Right now, I only hear they're out of tune, and they jar my no longer musical ears.

Please don't bother to remind me I'll be reunited with him one day. My life is here and now and his face is conspicuously absent.

Please don't tell me things could be worse. I am saturated with the present bleak winter of my grief, and if there's worse than this, then STOP THE WORLD, I WANT TO GET OFF!

Do

Remind me that if I can do but one small act of kindness, give one dot of comfort, be of value to just one other on this strife torn earth, then I can give no greater gift to my lost child.

Keren

Growing Around Grief

Inspired by therapist Dr Lois Tonkin, this concept of growing around your grief can be easily visualized in this drawing. It is often thought that the grief after losing a child or loved one will shrink (or get better) over time. In actuality, the grief we feel after the loss of our child or someone important will always remain the same, and our lives will learn to grow around that grief.

Taken from

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief>



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

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.



WHEN I GO

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to live with my love
in a different way.

And if you need to see me
close your eyes
or look in your shadow
when the sun shines

I'm there.

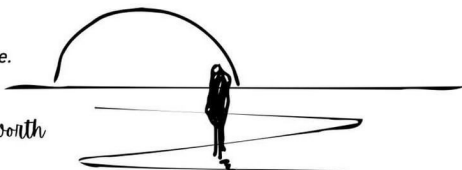
Sit with me in the quiet and you will know
that I did not leave.

There is no leaving when a soul is blended with another.

When I go
don't learn to live without me
just learn to look for me in the moments.

I will be there.

Donna Ashworth



Helping parents to face the future when an only child has died.

Anyone whose child has died is acutely aware of the enormous gap that their child leaves, no matter what their age or the circumstances of their death. However, when you have lost your only child, or all of your children, the emptiness within your heart has another dimension altogether.

Many speak of feeling as if there is no reason to go on, since there is no one for whom they must be strong or feel responsible. The loss is not only of the present relationship, but also of future hopes and dreams. When an only child dies, all hopes of weddings, a daughter- or son-in-law, and the possibility of ever becoming a grandparent are gone. The future can appear bleak and empty.

It can be very difficult for childless parents to hear stories of surviving children – even from other bereaved parents. You have, perhaps, an even greater need to talk about your child who has died, but it hurts to have no living children to relate these adventures to. Christmas and birthdays are particularly painful, and there is no-one to remember and acknowledge your role on Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day.

If you have to deal with the loss of two or even more children, you face very complex emotions. It may be that another child has died in completely separate circumstances and so the stages and agonies of grief are begun all over again. Or perhaps more than one child died in a single incident and there is the confusion of grieving equally for two or more unique children. Each had their own individual characters and personalities, and we have had a very different relationship with each.

If you have lost your only child, or you know someone in this situation, here are some important points which you may find helpful to focus on:

Once a parent, always a parent. You may ask, 'Am I still a parent?' Hold on to the fact that once you have been a parent you are always one. You know that your love for your child or children (whether babies or adults) will never go away and is part of who you are.

Grieve for the loss of the future you expected

This will take time. Not only do you need to mourn your present loss, but also the loss of all future hopes and dreams. Very gradually you will be able to incorporate your all-important past into a new present and future.

Adjust to your loss

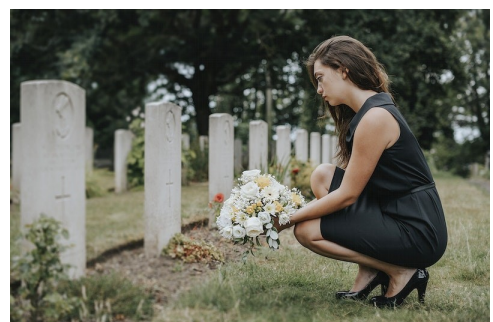
Well-meaning people may encourage you to take advantage of your new 'freedom' to develop your career, other interests or community work. But this is not a 'freedom' you would ever have chosen, and it is painful to even think of it in that way. Try to lay aside such hurtful suggestions as you adjust to the enormity of your loss.

Find a 'new normal'

Gradually, imperceptibly, as you travel the long journey of grief, you will find you have gained a new strength and will begin to find new interests in a future that is quite different from the one you had anticipated, but which can again be filled with peace, joy and meaning. Eventually some bereaved parents become involved in charities, perhaps supporting a cause their child was closely connected with. It may be possible to work to prevent further deaths from similar causes to that from which their child has died. Some find a positive way to allow the name of their child to live on by leaving awards or memorial prizes.

As one mum put it: 'My charity became my child; his legacy for eternity ... It is my Sunday lunch for Alex, his roast potatoes and my attempt to feed him and make him loved forever.'

Lifted with thanks from TCF Johannesburg Newsletter



From Dolores Sylvestre, Winnipeg:

15 years They say time heals all wounds. To a grieving parent, sibling or grandparent I believe this is unbearably not true.

15 years. For 15 years we were blessed and fortunate to have our son, brother and grandson Derek in our lives. On February 13, 2023 it will be 15 years that Derek took his last breathe and our lives were shattered. On February 13 he will be gone as long as he was alive.

15 years was not enough time. Not enough time to get his driver's licence. Not enough time to graduate from high school. Not enough time to go to college or university. Not enough time to fall in love. Not enough time to become an uncle. Not enough time to have a life.

I have travelled a long way on the road of grief. This year my grief has affected me differently than previous years. Derek's champagne birthday was also this year. He would have turned 30 years old on September 30, 2022.

We only had our family dog Duke for 2 years when Derek died. Derek was Duke's favorite, he slept with him at night. Duke turned 17 on September 19, 2022. Sadly, we had to say goodbye to Duke on December 12, 2022 as I write this. Duke lived longer than Derek. This day hit me harder than I anticipated. Another piece of Derek was now gone, another loss.

When will this pain end? I know the answer is until I take my last breath and see my Derek again. Grief is unfinished Love. I have been dreading Derek's angel day more than usual this year. Many days my grief has dropped me to my knees again as it did in the early years. I feel like I am going back into the abyss. I am struggling to comprehend that Derek's absence from our lives will soon be longer than his living memories. I find this unacceptable. How can this be?

Time can be so cruel. We think we have all the time in the world until we don't. To a bereaved parent, time goes on so fast and stands still at the same time. I don't know where life will take me but being able to share my tears, anger, despair, joy with my Compassionate Friends family helps me breathe.

One hour, day, week, year at a time. In loving memory of Derek Sylvestre (forever 15)

Derek's mom Dolores Sylvestre

Reprinted with love from TCF Winnipeg Newsletter

This is my wish for you:

Comfort on difficult days,
Smiles when sadness intrudes,
Rainbows to follow the clouds,
Laughter to kiss your lips,
Sunsets to warm your heart,
Hugs when spirits sag,
Beauty for your eyes to see,
Friendships to brighten your being,
Faith so that you can believe,
Confidence for when you doubt,
Courage to know yourself.
Patience to accept the truth and
Love to complete your life.

—unknown

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Sibling Page



Hello, I'm Rachael

I'm the youngest of three children. I lost both my siblings. My sister died when we were teenagers. My brother died just after I turned 30.

From being the youngest, I have become the oldest. It is not a position I ever wanted. Grief is vastly different for children. Because it has happened to me twice, I understand that now. I didn't when it happened the first time.

When you're a child you don't have tools to process what's happening to you. The key thing to say about grief and children, from my experience, is that it's very frightening. Everything you think is certain, disappears. Your parents change overnight. Your family changes shape. Your position and your role in the family change. You don't quite know who you are or who you're supposed to be. You're still going to school, and you still look like a child.

And that's the second big aspect, which I think is loneliness. You're not like your peers anymore. They don't understand. And you can't be carefree - which they can see, but they probably don't understand or don't know how to help. I actually have my diary from that time. I was 14. Before Nikki died, the voice of the person writing is a fairly cheery kid. And that's true even though I knew she was very ill, that she had tried suicide, and I was very afraid she would die. There's a break of three months after Nikki died and the diary starts again. And it's the voice of an adult. Quite simply. It's a sudden leaving behind of childhood.

It's hard to understand all this when it's happening - I certainly didn't at the time. I think this is why people bereaved in childhood circle back to grief - something I have done. Sometimes because understanding drops into place as you go along. Sometimes because something that wasn't resolved or understood at the time is triggered, and you have to use your new adult brain to understand it now. And sometimes because you meet a milestone in your life, like having children, that brings a new aspect of the loss that you hadn't known would exist.

When my brother Robin died, he was 32 and I was 30. We'd lost Nikki, and so we knew how important we were to each other. And when I realized, Rob was going to die, I thought, it was unbelievable, but I also thought I knew about grief, and what was coming towards me. With some dread. To some extent I did. I'm not fazed by how difficult Christmas and birthdays and Mothering Sundays are. I have the T-shirt. I already knew how hard it is to watch your parents grieve, how overwhelming that can be, and how hard it is to disentangle yourself and find space to feel and recognize your own loss. I was able to protect myself better when Rob died, just because I understood what was happening better - what my parents needed and what I needed.

Second time round I also understood that sibling grief is a different thing. It's a different bond. We grow up around each other, we shape each other. I think when you lose your sibling it feels like you lose your identity in some ways. You lose your past. Who you were in the family vanishes. It can feel like losing yourself. You lose aspects of the future - like being together through the loss of your parents one day. Being the last one left of my birth family is my particular nightmare.

One of the good things is that over the years my parents and I have talked a lot about grief and a lot about death. The first time, when Nikki died, it was very hard. We were laying new territory on a completely new and terrifying map. The second time we had the landmarks. In some ways, we supported each other better. We talked better. I feel I can say what I need to about death and grief to both my parents now, and that feels like a real source of strength for me. (If I was going to give any advice on the basis of my experience, which is dangerous ground, I would say try to have the difficult conversations.)

I wasn't prepared for how overwhelmed I would feel by losing them both. It was as if Nikki had died all over again when Robin died. I found it very difficult to speak at all, let alone speak about losing them.

Two things really helped me. I saw a therapist. That enabled me to go back and find words for some of the things I hadn't been able to understand as a child when Nikki died. Finding words helped. The second thing is that as an adult, I realized I didn't have to sit alone with this. I went in search of other bereaved siblings.

There was nothing via TCF at the time, but I went to a TCF National Gathering and there happened to be six other bereaved siblings who had come with their parents. We got together in a room for one hour, and that hour was a turning point for me. I was able to say what had happened. I could barely say the words, but I did, and felt understood. From there I became involved in TCF providing peer support for siblings. We started with an overnight retreat, which became an annual thing. Now we have monthly online Zoom groups, which I help to facilitate.

I don't actually need those online Zoom groups anymore. Grief has been part of my life since I was 14 and sometimes, I'd quite like it not to be. But I never want to feel that lonely again. And I don't want anyone else to feel that lonely either. Grief is personal, and sometimes it is very, very solitary. But being understood is powerful medicine. For me, it helped transform a paralyzing experience into something I could live with. It made it possible to find a purpose again.

A couple of years after Rob died, I started my own family, which really was a triumph of hope over experience. I also started writing and I now write for the theatre, and love that. So, there was life after death. It's different, and I'm different. Some of me is someone Nikki and Robin would recognize. In other ways I think I'd surprise them. I find my life now engaging and hopeful, and I still grieve - because I still love. And I'm grateful to everyone I've shared the road with along the way.

Rachael Claye, SIBBS Newsletter, Summer 2021, TCF/U.K.

Books in the TCFV library that may be helpful include "Sibling grief" by P. Gill White and "Knowing why changes nothing" by Eva Lager

Reprinted with love from TCF Victoria 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 Lelena (Son Colin 22yrs Suicide)	03- 455 9274
DUNEDIN	Ngairie Penny (Marlene, 18yr old daughter MVA Nov '91)	03- 455 5391
DUNEDIN	Alexis Chettleburgh (22 yr old son, suicide.)	03-4777649
	Corinda Taylor (Son, 20 years, suicide)	021 2930094
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Pessione (Acting Coordinator) (16 yr old daughter, accidental) janpessione@xtra.co.nz (Marina, 54yrs, Airways Obstruction)	03-4487800
CENTRAL OTAGO	Jan Johnson, Adult son, Neville, cancer	03 4488360
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	04 9387212 lorraine.driskel@gmail.com
KAPITI COAST	Anna Upton (Son, suicide)	04 2936349
PALMERSTON NORTH	Robyn Galpin (Hayley, motorcycle accident)	06 3535929
TAUMARUNUI CENTRAL NORTH ISLAND	Marie and Ron Summers (Son, Wayne 23yrs, Suicide)	07 8954879
WHANGANUI	Nina Sandilands (Debbie, 16yrs, Brain Virus)	06 3478086
WHANGANUI	Keren Marsh (Simon, 23yrs, car accident)	06 3443345 marshkandb@gmail.com
WHAKATANE	Trish and Alan Silvester	07 3222084 atsilvester@actrix.co.nz

www.thecompassionatefriends.org.nz



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