



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Aug - Sep 2005



Neverness

By Nicholas Wolterstorff, From "Lament For A Son"

It's the neverness that is so painful.
Never again to be here with us
Never to sit with us at the table,
Never to travel with us,
Never to laugh with us,
Never to cry with us,
Never to embrace us as he leaves for school,
Never to see his brothers and sister marry.
All the rest of our lives we must live without him.
Only our death can stop the pain of his death.
A month, a year, five years ...
With that I could live ... but not this forever.

I step out into the moist, moldy fragrance of a summer
morning and arm in arm with my enjoyment
comes the realization that never again will he smell this.

One small misstep and now this neverness.

Taken from TCFAtlantaOnline@attbi.com, May 2003

Mad, Bad And Sad

By Fiona McLintock, TCF Qld

A story written by Fiona about her grief journey after the death of her daughter Tonia whose anniversary is 26 August.

I was walking to our local shopping centre approximately two months after my daughter Tonia (aged 5) had died and I was suddenly struck by the fact that for, maybe one or two very short minutes, I had not thought about my dead child every minute of every day (and even throughout the long sleepless nights) for eight weeks. My mind up until then had been consumed, (or perhaps the correct word should be "subsumed"), by compulsive thoughts of her and my heart was struck in a deep crevasse of grief. This realization brought me to a halt (I literally scorched the soles of my shoes!) as I contemplated this utterly new phenomenon. It was a revelation that I hung on to as it gave me hope that someday I would be able to function as a normal human being who did not feel as though the entire world had caved in on her or a person who walked around in utter amazement that strangers could carry on their lives as though

nothing had happened. How could they act as though everything was ok? How was I ever going to act as though everything was ok? I hated them.

In fact, there were many things I hated then. I especially hated happy people; I hated people who tried to make me happy, I hated people who still had three children (heaven help them if they had a cute young 5 year-old daughter!) and I particularly loathed people who trotted out the hoary old chestnut clichés—I (uncharacteristically until then) wanted to ‘smack them in the gob’ so to speak. One poor young fellow, who was lucky there was no large boiling cauldron of water nearby for me to dump him in, told me “Oh well, life goes on.” Unfortunately he is now a very successful sportsman and his name and face is regularly splashed all over the TV every Sunday and I still want to dump him in boiling water!

I hated seeing my parents cry every day and I hated seeing my other two young children act as though nothing had changed (they are now 30 and 32 and have been able to articulate quite clearly what they were going through). I hated thinking that my husband at the time didn’t care as he did not show any emotion (of course I now know that men and women often react differently) and I hated what I thought was the false look of compassion on other people’s faces when they tried to look sad for me and say something meaningful as though they really did understand what it was like to lose a child but in fact they hadn’t a clue what it felt like.

Yep, I was mad at the world, at God, at myself, at the medico’s—you name it—I was mad at it. I was mad and bad but mostly just profoundly sad...

All this from a preciously placid, passive and non-violent person. A person who suddenly wanted to tear the lungs out of innocent, well-meaning but naïve people. I wanted to scream “my daughter is dead, my daughter is dead, my daughter is dead” and shake them until they grasped what a momentous tragedy had occurred and they had no right to be happy.

Twenty-six years later following many other personal crises, a diagnosis of cancer and many operative procedures later, the onset of panic attacks and mild agoraphobia, once more I was again mad, bad and sad. However I had learned some valuable lessons from the passing of my daughter. I made it a condition that there were to be NO clichés and if you didn’t know what to say then say nothing at all or else say “I don’t know what to say!”

I couldn’t understand how strangers looked so happy and ordinary, how normal their lives appeared when mine was spinning down that crevasse again. I once again wanted to ‘smack people in the gob’ or look around for boiling cauldrons of water!

My mind was consumed with thoughts of death again until one day I again screeched to a halt. The world was not a landscape of monochrome vista’s, it was just plain difficult at the moment and it was up to me to see that tiny sliver of hope I had once seen two months after my daughter died. When my husband (2nd) buys Tonia a birthday card and lights a candle next to it, when I receive a TCF newsletter, when I attend a special church service for those who have lost children, I stop and realize that “Yep Fiona, you’re often mad which makes you bad (or think “bad” things) but really you’re just sad.”

Nowadays the sadness is stored in a safe place in my heart to be comforted when the time is right, brought out when the time is right and I can look at other people with three children and feel happy for them or see another little 5 year-old with beautiful hair and sparkling blue eyes and think how beautiful she is....

To Korero o Aotearoa, he Whaea Me Hoki Rua Tamahine

By Fiona McLintock, TCF, Qld.

Once upon a time,
In a land not so far away;
A girl grew up and had a daughter
Perfect in every way.
In another land,
Still not so far away,
The good Lord cradled her in His arms
And took her to the spirit world to stay.
The girl grew up some more,
And gave birth to another daughter
Again, perfect in every way.
This time, in the land not so far away,
The good Lord decided
That this daughter could stay.
And true to His word and her mother's faith,
She grew up and remained
That perfect daughter in every way.
Then one-day she also grew up and left
For that land not so far away,
And had her own daughters
Both perfect in every way.
That girl, now a grandmother
Grown older and grey,
Still loves and misses her two daughters,
Both so perfect in every way,
But now this Mother is not very well,
She cries for her girls, "Please come back and stay,"
But she knows when you give birth,
That there are prices to pay
And the Lord puts no conditions
On when and where they stay.
Except, in your heart and the Mother knows,
They never really left anyway!

Fiona apologises to all Kiwis for any mis-spelling in the title.

Submitted in loving memory of Fiona's Daughter Tonia—anniversary 26 August

Annual TCF Seminar held on 18th June follow-up

We hope that all those who attended the Seminar went away with something that will enable them to solve an issue they may have had in their grief journey. The workshops were well attended and everyone participated most enthusiastically. As one person commented "the seminars give me the strength and courage to keep going".

Sid Everingham was our Guest Speaker this year and as one participant said "Sid was a wonderful speaker who spoke of very relevant topics and feelings". He always gives of his time freely and we feel very fortunate to have him as our Guest Speaker. One of the exercises he persuaded the participants to do was to write down (on posters) the "Learnings" and "Knowings" we have attained during our own particular grief journeys. Here are the lists of what people wrote on the day.

Knowings

Accepting a new me
Empathy
Love conquers all problems. My son is my son to love and be loved by
I can survive
Forgiveness creates an open door
Keep your loved ones memory alive. Always mention their name
I'm not alone
Trust your own feelings!
I know that some people are true friends even though they can't understand how I feel
Trust your intuition!
We are still here. Our lives are not over
I know losing a child is sooooo painful
I know that I should let go
I must share what I've learnt to help others
People who have experienced the death of a child are the best at knowing how much you are hurting
Loving someone can hurt
Know I have walked through the darkest tunnel
I know that I will see him one day. That this life is only short and the next life is joy forevermore
Life is for the living
God gives me strength and hope
Listening and patience
When people say they are "fine", they most probably are not
To understand the feelings of others, be non-judgmental
I have gotten closer to God and he is so real to me and I know and feel his love
There is NO instant remedy for healing grief or taking away the pain????

Learnings And/Or Lessons

To be non-judgmental
Quality time with a child is never wasted
Helps to understand other people's feelings
I've learned not to take life for granted. Always tell your loved ones you love them. Life is so very precious
I've learnt to tell people that I love them
SLOW DOWN your life and theirs
Some people understand. Some people don't understand but want to. Some people don't understand and don't ever want to
Life is so precious and also very fragile
Time with your loved ones is important
Life is too short. Make the most of every moment. Family can be the greatest gift. It's amazing where you find true friends
I've learned that my life will never be the same again—but it's still a life!
Compassion
I can do it. I do not have to lean/rely on others
Treasure the time you have with friends and family. Your family are your best mates
Talk to people you can trust. All members of family respond differently to same loss
I've learnt to live without being in control
A death should never be underestimated
I can rise above, launch away from my family influences
That we all make choices. We live and die by our choices. Life is pre-determined
Love yourself. Learn to love yourself again
Don't be intimidated!
Never underestimate what another person is feeling or thinking because we all wear masks that hide what is going on inside

Sharing my story builds bridges to another's heart
Have tried to be a good person with good values
Not to judge others. Be more honest with yourself
Be kind to yourself
Acceptance
Life with my loved ones is so precious
Express my thoughts
It's OK to share how I really feel—to be always honest!!
I should not "should" on myself
I know that I was a good mother after all. I often doubted that before I lost my son. I know that when he died he was totally loved. I know that his death has given me confidence in my mothering skills for my living children.
It is okay not to rationalize
Tears heal the wounds of the soul. This I know
It's OK for men to cry. You never get over it! You learn to live with it!

Ten in Heaven

Written by Louise Petch, mother of Kahn, TCF, Qld, 1/9/95 to 28/11/01

I look at boys your age
And think of how you'd be
A little version of your dad
With certain traits of me.

You'd be the strong big brother
That no-one messes with
And if your sisters got picked on
You'd give the boys a biff!

Yes you would have a girlfriend
Or maybe two or three!
For you'd be such a looker now
That everyone could see.

You'd play all kinds of sports
And have a lot of mates
Your body, mind be changing
You'd have your likes and hates

But sadly that won't happen
You're in another place
Your family grows without you
It's something that we face

So on this day in heaven
When you are turning ten
We'll all be crying tears inside
Like words flow from my pen...

Love you forever and eternity Kahn
"Your da man!"

There is a new song out by the group "gorillaz", Kahn's favourite group, he would love that song, it is even used as a commercial song on TV as well. Boy he had good taste in music!

*Lovingly submitted by Louise, Kahn's Mother,
Barry, Kahn's Dad and Skye and Jade his two sweet little sisters.*

A message from Kahn's little sister, Skye who is nearly 6 years old.

"I love Kahn very much
And sometimes I cry about him
I know it's sad cause he died
In a fire, I miss him a lot."
I look after his stuff and wear his clothes!"

"Jason—Healer"

8/12/82 to 21/9/02

Remember when we had a talk
About the other side
We wondered what happens to
Us all when we died?
You said let's just wait
Until we all get there
In all in all I have to say
That statement's pretty fair
You said that you weren't planning
To go for a long, long time
But matey it comes down to God
And when he tossed the dime?
It could be that what happens
Is all humans make the choice
But how are we to know the truth
When you don't have a voice
Sometime we'll get the answers
And they may come from you
To wait until we get there
Is all that we can do...

"We love you Jas"
From your real family
Baz, Lou, Skye & Jade

Written on behalf of Jason's older brother, Barry who lost his only brother, aged 19, so suddenly and tragically.

The Painful Grace Of Flight

By Mary Austin Wall, New Jersey

Now that it's spring, perhaps you've seen a butterfly or two ... and as summer comes, you'll surely see them alighting on flowers and dancing through the air.

Many cultures believe that butterflies travel between the spirit world and the earth, connecting people with the divine realm. A Native American legend says, "If you have a secret wish, whisper it to a

butterfly. Since butterflies cannot speak, the wish is safe, and the butterfly will carry the wish to the Great Spirit.”

The ancient Greeks believed that butterflies were souls, released from their bodies. In fact, ancient Greek uses the same word—psyche—for both soul and butterfly, so close is the connection between the two. Early Christians also used the butterfly as a symbol for the soul, and other cultures believed that the spirits of the dead took the form of butterflies. Some have said that the soul-butterfly’s ability to leave the body while we sleep explains where our dreams come from.

It may be, as summer comes, that watching a butterfly in flight will remind you of your loved one ... remembering their travel from this life to whatever comes next, when we’re set free from illness and pain.

It seems that you as a caregiver are also like the butterfly. As a caregiver, you are transformed. You grow .. Change over the time of your child’s illness ... learn to do things you never expected you could do. You grow from being a hesitant caregiver to someone able to journey with your child until they are set free from the struggles of this life.

When you grieve for a child, you are again like the butterfly. Grief can be like the dark of the chrysalis, or the cocoon. Some scientists call this phase of the butterfly’s life the resting phase, and it may be that your grief is a time of resting from the demands of life. You’re wrapped up in sorrow and pain... until you begin to stretch, and move ... and then the cocoon expands. You emerge from sorrow into the light of day, and realize that you’re not the person you used to be. For better or worse, you’re someone new, changed by your love and loss. Grief has altered your perspective, changed your view of yourself and the world. Like the butterfly, you’ve come out transformed ... or perhaps, for you, that transformation is still ahead. You may feel that you’re still in the cocoon—waiting, longing for the release into being a butterfly. Such struggles are not easy.

Perhaps you’ve heard the story of the man who found a butterfly chrysalis, and watched one day as a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its way out of the opening and into the world. Then it seemed to stop, exhausted, and he thought it had gotten as far as it could. He decided to help the butterfly by taking a pair of scissors, and snipping off the rest of the cocoon. The butterfly emerged easily, but it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch, expecting that, any moment, the wings would expand and the butterfly would fly away. To fly, the wings needed to expand, and the heavy swollen body contract. But neither happened. The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings, never able to fly.

In his kindness, or haste, the man didn’t understand that the struggle was essential for the butterfly to fly. The tight cocoon was nature’s way of forcing the fluid from the heavy body into the tissue paper wings, so the butterfly would be able to fly once it came out of the cocoon. Not to struggle crippled the butterfly—as it often happens for us. In the struggle, often the very point when we think we can’t do any more, comes the gift that makes flight possible.

The struggle makes the wings—for the butterfly, and for us. Your child has struggled with illness and sorrow, and you have faced all of the complicated emotions that come with that journey. You have struggled with grief—and struggle with it still. We wish you the gift of flight, like the butterfly, whenever the time is right for you. We wish you the lifting of grief, with time, and the filling of your wings. We wish you the close connection between the butterfly and the soul—so close that when you see the butterflies this summer, and each year, your spirits may be lifted as you remember this time of transformation in your lives.

We wish you the grace of flight—and transformation.

*Loving adapted from TCFAtlantaonline@comcast.net, March 2004
(Rev. Mary Austin is the director of Pastoral Care & Bereavement Services for Meridian Hospice which covers Monmouth and Ocean counties in New Jersey. She is a Presbyterian Minister.)*

The Breakfast Cup

By Jan Owens, Visalia CA TCF

Yesterday we had breakfast, a small group of men whose common distinction was that we had each lost a child or young son or daughter to death. Talk ranged around the table, mixed with pride, love, regret, and questions: What now?

How do we move forward in life a little less than we were? Why was I unable to protect my child? How can I honour his or her memory? How can I be a better man because of this precious gift given me?

The answers, if there were any, they were varied and incomplete. As a result of these young lives we considered have come many acts of kindness and faith shared. Growing from their loss is a deepening sense of appreciation for our wives, and our children. There is also an unwanted, yet greater understanding of meaning of death. Who we are as husbands and fathers has changed—even though we can't fully comprehend how these roles have been altered. Five guys sitting around a table sharing a meal, sipping coffee, and talking about our children, our hopes, our dreams, our disappointments, our loss, and our next steps.

We have been handed a cup of grief which we cannot refuse. We each take it unwillingly, but take it we must. Its effect is catastrophic and causes us to weep with regret and guilt. The cup has stolen time and love. The cup has altered our course, our walk and in a bizarre way, the cup has led us to a path nearer to God. As men, we desire to fix and solve our family's problems. We cannot overcome this cup. We can only hold out our trembling hands, raise the cup to our lips, and whisper a silent, aching prayer, "Lord, you will not take this sorrow from us, so help us to honour our children. By Your Will, with Your mercy and grace we drink. We share our children with the One who gives us hope and life. Hug them for us today, please. Amen."

Loving adapted from TCFAtlantaOnline@comcast.net, 23 March, 2004

A Solitary Journey

By Helen Steiner Rice

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

Taken from TCFAtlantaOnline@comcast.net, 23 March, 2005

Fathers in Grief, a Paradox for Today's Male

By Mitchell D Carmody, Hastings, Minnesota

The loss of your child can be crippling and leaves deep scars. It changes who we are, how we look at life, and how we relate with the world. Five or six years out is still early in the spectrum of child loss but close to the point where positive rebuilding can begin. One thing that I have discovered that helps pull you out of the canyon of despair is compassion for others, because it is in giving that we receive and in healing that we are healed.

In the first few years, it is hard to even help yourself much less others and we mechanically maintain. We weep a lot and lick our wounds while clinging desperately to everything related to our child and in secret wish to join him. We rejoin the real world at our own time, and it happens when it is right for us. Everyone's journey is different, but what remains the same is the huge void that is left in our lives. How we fill it, is up to us. I believe we need to fill it with something positive for others, something that creates a legacy of good in our child's name. We now become the legacy, and we substantiate our child's life by the way we live ours.

In our "modern day" society, it is especially difficult for fathers to grieve openly, caught in a catch 22 of how to express the deep pain we are experiencing. Men don't cry, men do not emote, men do not hug (except maybe at the funeral), men don't go to support groups, men don't call in sick because they are screaming inside, because we are the men of the family. Fathers are the fix-it guys, the protectors, the strength and the rock the family needs for support. More times than not people will ask a father, "How is your wife doing? This must be extremely hard for her."

The modern male is now given (by women therapists) license to show emotions, to cry, scream, hug and express their deepest emotions and fears, to let it out. The irony of this is that if the man emotes and the family has never seen this behaviour, this behaviour is taken as a sign of weakness. The spouse and other family members feel they have lost their safety net, their rock of support and they feel even more helpless and rudderless on this journey of pain. If this happens, he may again "clam up" to help with his family first and deal with his own pain later. He finds that "letting it out" is an axiom of sophistry and in doing so, he feels he is letting his family down. Indeed a paradox for the "wanna-be-sensitive" dad! Most men cry alone in their cars on the way to work, and they explain that the red eyes are due to allergies or a late night. When my father died when I was fourteen, my mother told me that I was the man of the family now, and I did not cry, let alone grieve. It was not until years later and my losses became overwhelming that I finally let it out and expressed my emotions for the loss of my father. It has been sixteen years now since Kelly died, and I still cry with my wife when we feel our loss together or even when I hear a special song like *Wind Beneath My Wings*. I do not care who is present. You love hard, you grieve hard, and it is supposed to hurt. When you recognize your own pain and express it, you automatically become more empathetic to others in similar pain and can help relieve theirs. Now, I even cry when I see Hallmark Card commercials—I can't help it.

People tell us to find closure, to move on and not to dwell on it. We can, but not how they think we should. We find closure in what will never be, let go of the what-ifs, the "shoulda-woulda-couldas" and move on with the knowledge that our children are forever by our side, only in a new relationship. We live in one sphere of existence, our loved one who has died in another, but with faith, undying love and the desire, we can connect at the seam where our two worlds meet. Love never dies.

In America (and Australia), we are allowed a few weeks to "get over it" and then we have to "get back on track". The dead are wrapped up neatly, so to speak, and put away, and their names remain unspoken. I find this totally unacceptable. It has been almost sixteen years and I still talk about Kelly every day and always will. We will always be bereaved parents, but we will not always be experiencing the pangs of grief. Like suffering from arthritis, we learn to live with grief for the rest of our lives, and also realize we shall still have flare ups of pain and discomfort as we move on through the years.

Lovingly adapted from Bereavement Magazine May/June 2004 www.bereavementresources.com

The Loss

What parent doesn't wake in fright
In the middle of the night
When a child is not in bed
Past the curfew that they said?

Then the knock upon the door,
Touches nerves already raw.
Knowing what you're going to hear
Every parent's dreaded fear.
At the parties tempting fate,
Driving with a drunken mate
Taking chances whilst they're young.
In the guise of having fun.
They forgot to say goodbye,
Didn't know that they would die
Thought that death was for the old
Wouldn't listen, won't be told.
So the parents torn with grief
Hear the news with disbelief
One less child around the place
Meal times see that empty space.
For a time, they cannot cope
Lose their faith, abandon hope
Then one day a voice so dear
Mum and Dad, I'm very near.

*Extracted from Bridget's Book of Angelic Verse (Saying Goodbye is not Forever).
Lovingly sent in by John & Joy Van Raalte, TCF, Qld, for the 12th anniversary of their most precious son,
Mark Andrew Van Raalte.*

"Grieving people regardless of their backgrounds
want to be remembered and to know that their loved
one's life was of value."

*By Wanda Jenkins, University Park, Illinois,
Racial Profiling: A Bereavement Perspective, www.bereavementmag.com*


Hope

By Mary Dunn Jones, Tifton, Georgia, Bereavement Magazine July/Aug 95, www.bereavementmag.com

Hope is not pretending
That troubles will not come,
They come in time to all,
Though more appear to some.

Hope is the trust
That troubles won't last forever,
That with time and love,
Days will soon be better.

Hope is belief
That hurts will be healed,
As memories
In wounded hearts are sealed.
Hope is the faith
That there IS a source of strength,



That the love of God
Will provide the missing link.

Hope says that He will
Guide all the night through,
To the morning light
And refreshing dew.

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