



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Dec 2006 - Jan 2007



TCF

Christmas Thoughts

Beyond the Christmas trees, the angels and stars and beloved carols ...
Beyond the presents, the shopping, the baking and cooking ...
Beyond all these sights and sounds of Christmas ...
Beyond all of these ... there is hope.

Hope ...
For the bereaved parent, even at Christmas,
One of the most, if not THE most, painful times of the year,
There is an essence of hope.

Hope ...
It is the hope that someday the pain of the death of our children will be eased.
The hope is that once again we will laugh and love and cry
Completely without fear and hollowness.

It is the hope that someday we can remember our children
with a tenderness tinged with sorrow
And not overwhelmed with it.

So it is that for each of you I would hope ...
Peace, compassion, love, understanding,
Sympathy, sharing and listening.

In the sharing of our grief with one another
And in the emotional support we give to one another,
We receive and understand all these gifts.

Terre Haute, TCF, Indiana, USA
Reprinted from TCF Qld newsletter, 1989

Family Photos

In our last newsletter, our editor invited TCF members to share their stories on what they did when having a family photo taken after the death of one of their children.

One of our TCF Qld members has very generously submitted her story.

"I would like to tell you what happened in our family re new family photos after our daughter, Julie & son-in-law, John were murdered. Our eldest grandson, Adam who is brilliant on computers of his own volition scanned the photos onto the computer and picked two particularly nice photos of Julie out of the photos we had of her, one of these photos she was bending over looking over someone's shoulder but looking towards the camera; the other one is simply a very nice photo of her. The one where she is bending over slightly Adam superimposes on new family photos as though she is looking over our shoulders and the other photo is likely to bob up anywhere in photos but he mists it—when the photos are reprinted it looks like Julie was always in the pictures.

He always looked on Julie as his second Mum as he was an only child and was always at her place playing with the other children. He just didn't like her missing from photos. So she still regularly appears in different photos when the mood takes him to put her there. Quite often he also changes the background."

A Survival Guide

By Susan Arlen, M.D., Somerville, New Jersey Bereavement Magazine Nov/Dec 1993 (adapted)

As if each ordinary day isn't difficult and painful enough for the bereaved to survive, along comes the Christmas/New Year holiday season with its warmth and good cheer and its traditions and customs of family togetherness. The holidays can bring a stinging reminder of what once was but never will be again.

Often our childhood memories of the holidays somehow seem more festive, warmer, more complete, more ideal—indeed, more everything—than those of today?

Have the holidays actually changed, or has society in its push toward progress and future altered our perceptions? Two generations ago, most Australians spent their entire lives not far from their birthplace. Then, it was taken for granted that family and friends would always be there to share in all-important occasions, both happy and sad.

Our "progress" has caused us to become a fractured nation with families divided and split—members in different states of Australia or even in different countries. Now, when we want or need to "reach out and touch someone", we must either use the phone lines or board a plane.

A beautiful gift sent across the miles is a delight to receive—a message that someone cares. But given the choice, most people would forego the gift and opt instead for the presence of their child.

The bereaved parent/grandparent/sibling, however, does not have this choice. They cannot even anticipate a phone call. The holidays have become something for them to dread. "The gaiety seen in public places has become an affront and a source of increased distress for them. Their sense of despair and of being out of step with the rest of the world is intensified."

One of the issues expressed time and again is the dissonance that they perceive between their sorrow, loss and yearning and the incongruity that the rest of the world appears to continue along without missing a beat. The very sight of happy people rushing around looking for the perfect decoration or gift or party dress exacerbates the bleakness so often felt.

Holidays are family times, times of togetherness, closeness, tradition and ritual. How can bereaved families hope to survive the holiday season when their child, the one who gave meaning to the celebration, will not be there?

Can one celebrate Christmas with the anticipation of joy, good cheer and children's excited faces? Can one welcome the New Year with its promise of fresh starts and clean slates when all one really wishes

to do is recapture precious times past? Can times of wholeness, when our child was present, ever be recovered? All memories seem to be centred on sharing the joys and the prayers of those days when “looking forward” meant the happy anticipation of looking forward to being together.

How cruel and painful the Christmas/New Year season can become! Each sight, each smell conjures up thoughts of what once was. Those times of the year that recalled simple every-day-ness were painful enough. Then, suddenly as if out of nowhere, the holidays rapidly bear down, bringing into clear focus the differences between bereaved families and the rest of the world.

One day or even one moment at a time has been difficult enough. Energies for even simple tasks that occurred during times of small expectations have been depleted. Now, traditions that were once savoured and anticipated are feared, ritual is often dreaded, gaiety becomes an affront.

A Guide to survive the Christmas/New Year holidays:

Recognise the possible sources of discomfort, try to anticipate even the smallest part that might elicit pain, and then decide what can or cannot be faced, altered or eliminated.

Acknowledge that this year will be different. Eliminate whatever you need to. There is nothing you must do. Grief depletes energy. Because of this lessened energy, the simplest of tasks may loom large and insurmountable. How can you face dinners and parties when smiling and laughter feel like the twist of a knife in the raw wound of your loss? How can you attend religious services with all of their reminders and implied promises? Only you can decide this, there is no right or wrong.

Take care of your own health; guard your own strength and energy. It is OK to say, “no” to invitations. It is difficult to predict your feelings and energy levels, so it’s also OK to change your mind at the last minute about attending dinners, parties and religious services or to leave a function early. You must be your own guide.

Almost every shopping centre will display decorations and Christmas carols will be heard in every shop. People will seem to rush around with purpose. All of this can increase your own feeling of purposelessness, isolation and alienation from what the rest of the world is doing and feeling. Anticipation can soften the shock of the unexpected.

Give yourself permission to change whatever traditions or rituals that you need to change. Nothing is written in stone! Just because something has been done a certain way for twenty years doesn’t mean that it is the only way to do it. Change things if you want to. The option to return to the old traditions will be there next year and the year after.

Change the time, location and/or menu of traditional meals. Or eliminate them altogether this year. Attend religious services at a different time than usual or at another church—or don’t go at all this year. Decorate differently, have someone else decorate, decorate exactly the same as always or don’t decorate at all. Open gifts at a different time than you did before. YOU are the only guide as to what is correct.

Break large tasks into small pieces. Don’t be afraid to delegate tasks to others. Tell friends and relatives what would be helpful to you. They would probably like to help you but don’t know what to do. Tell them as specifically as you can.

Memorialise your child in some way that is both important to you and would have meaning for him or her. It needn’t be a large gesture, but it is helpful if it has a unique and personal value.

If you wish to go away for the holidays, do so. This year, you must do what is right for you. Remember though that you will take your thoughts and your grief with you.

Find something, some small thing, that is special to you. Do something you have never done before. Give your own life a degree of meaning and value no matter how bereft you are feeling.

All of these suggestions offer the same basic message: There is no right or wrong way for you to do things. There is only your way and that is the correct way for you.

People have often expressed a wish to hibernate during the holidays completely. We can mentally ignore the holidays by pretending that they don't exist, but it takes tremendous effort and energy to deny all of the input we see around us.

Remember that implicit in Christmas is the miracle of hope for the future. Create your own hope for your own future. Give yourself the gift of this miracle. May you find peace this Christmas/New Year season.

In Memory Steven Victor Gray

8/1/61 to 19/10/98

Steve Remembered and Loved Always

8 years with this empty heartache
I know this will always be
The saddest memories and anguish
As we placed your ashes in the sea
The photographs and momentos
around our home they grace
Don't give your voice, your laugh
your loving ways, expressions on your face
Wonderful Memories of the times we spent
as you grew into a man
The loss the grief the sadness
I deal with when I can.

Always in my Heart. Till we meet again...Mum.

Lovingly submitted by Steven's Mother, Helen Gray, TCF Qld.

Keegan Rhys Hardy

28/11/02 to 9/3/03

Every night in my dreams I see you, feel you and hear you.
That is how I know that you are doing OK
Every butterfly I see, every rain shower we get
Every time your brothers and sister smile
I know you are there and showing us just that.
Wherever you are, whatever you are doing
I know in my heart that you are with us each day
Wherever we are and whatever we are doing
You will always remain.
Love has touched us in such a special way
It will last a lifetime
And will never let go 'til we're gone too
Love is how we loved you
So deeply and so true.

Daddy & Mummy

Submitted by Fiona Hardy, TCF, Qld in loving memory of her son, Keegan

Cameron Bierge

15/10/69 to 3/3/05

DO NOT STAND at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints in snow,
I am the sunlight and ripened grain.
I am the gentle Autumn rain.
When you awake in the morning hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft star shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there,
I did not die.

Anonymous

Submitted with love by Kathleen Bierge in loving memory of her son, Cameron

What Do You Get From Attending A TCF Support Meeting

I remember walking into my very first TCF support meeting with great sadness in my heart, wondering if I was doing the right thing, dragging my feet as if I had a huge weight on my shoulders and very scared and anxious about what happened at these meetings.

When I entered the room I could hear people laughing and I was so angry and I thought "Why are they laughing, don't they know my son has just died". I was just about to turn around and walk out I was so upset when a very kind, gentle, caring lady approached me and said "Hello my name is Julia, you must be Joy, come on in and join us".

I have never looked back from that night and attended support meetings for many years, planning other arrangements around my TCF support meeting just so I could attend. Why?, you may ask, well after that first meeting I left feeling better off than some of the people that I had met that evening. As we sat in a circle to share our stories (and I was told I did not have to if I did not want to) I was overwhelmed when the lady next to me shared her story and she had lost two of her children, then the next lady to share her story had lost her only child, others had lost their child under circumstances that required ongoing distress such as court cases etc.

I found myself thinking thank goodness I have not lost my only child or two of my children or having to deal with the ongoing circumstances surrounding the death of my child. As we sat in that circle and shared our stories and a mother reached out and held the hand of another who was sobbing uncontrollably, and later another put her arm around the shoulder of another, then another would take a box of tissues to someone else crying, I began to realize that I was in the right place, a place where I could talk about my child over and over, a place where they understood that stabbing ache in my heart, why I couldn't get out of bed in the morning and why I thought about nothing but my dead child.

I began to make beautiful friendships and build a strong support network through the amazing people that I met at each meeting. Slowly I became stronger in knowing that I did not have to suffer this long

road ahead alone and eventually I was able to help a newly bereaved parent who was attending a meeting for the first time and was probably feeling the same feelings that I did at that time.

I realize now that we do laugh again, the heaviness in our hearts lightens and the memories of our child/children grow stronger as time goes by and they are never forgotten.

Caring thoughts Joy Van Raalte Co-ordinator

4 today

Today's a day that we will, put on a smile for you,
For though you're gone, you still live on, in everything we do,

4 today you would have been, a delight to all you knew,
With your blonde hair, cheeky grin and eyes so beautiful blue.

You'd surely be up early, playing with Kaila and Jack,
They might try to boss you, but you'd take none of that.

You'd then all run to wake up, mum and dad from sleeping
Promising, that at your gifts, you hadn't been peeping!

What you'd get would be more than your wildest dreams.
A little bat? A motorbike? Or a racing car that gleams?

You'd light up our day, with your joy at your new toys,
You'd want to play straight away with the other girls and boys.

You'd have a little party with all of your friends there,
Your mum would bake an amazing cake for everyone to share,

We'd light up the candles bright and we'd all sing to you,
Happy Birthday little Rhino, you're in everything we do.

We know you can't be here, to celebrate your birthday
We will show you that we care, in every possible way

We'll still have the party wishing you were here
And even though you're not, we'll feel you're very near.

Have fun catching our balloons, Ryan.
We can only imagine at your likes and dislikes, talents and dreams.
We love you very much. Be happy little man. We love you so much. Dad, Mum, Kaila and Jack.

*Lovingly submitted by Shan Delany, TCF, Qld
Mother of Ryan Delany 2/12/02 to 19/12/03*

Feelings

I feel like I've just existed
And now it's been 4 years
I don't know how I've lived and breathed

Without you being here.

I know you lived your lifetime
As short as that seems to me,
But the pain in my heart is still so great,
Yet I know your spirit is free.

At times I think I hear you
The thoughts come to my mind.
I struggle for the sound of your voice,
But your voice I cannot find.

Yet you come to me in many ways
So I know you did not die,
You want to tell me that you're close,
And to please stop asking Why.

Our lives on earth seem all too brief,
or brief as it seems to me.
But where you are is forever,
God calls that Eternity!

*In Memory of Rebecca Ann Cotterill 14.02.77 to 25.12.02
who passed away on Christmas Day in Amsterdam*

Lovingly submitted by Patricia Cotterill, TCF Qld mother of Rebecca

Joey Organ

Born 2/12/02 Passed away 7/11/04

I would sit in my office and do work on the computer and a little head would pop up and Joey would say "HARO" and I would laugh and he would go around the side of the office put his hand on the power point and look at me and smile and turn all my computers off with one touch and he would laugh his head off and run for his life, I would lose hours of work.

One day he was riding his tricycle and I said to him it's your birthday soon so me and you will go and buy a bike together, his face lit up like a Christmas tree.

The ice cream man came down the road and I took Livi (Joey's older sister) and Joey out to buy an ice cream. I said to Joey "Livi can pick her birthday ice cream cake and next time you can pick yours out."

I was at work on the Monday when I got the phone call that Joey died, my Joey was gone. He was buried on the Thursday.

I still have the old bike; we never got around to shopping for the new one.


The ice cream man came around and he had a big smile on his face and I had to tell him that Joey wasn't there to pick out his ice cream cake.

I would give anything to have Joey just once pop up his head and Say "Haro" or turn my computer off.

I love you Baby.

Gang Gang. Your Grandfather,

Lovingly submitted by Peter McDowell in memory of his beloved grandson, Joey.



The above writings have been extracted from the official members newsletter originally compiled and printed by The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc. Our printed newsletter contains additional stories, verses, news, events, memorial notices & contacts. It is also sent to members much earlier than available on our website. Please contact our office if you wish to become a member to receive the full newsletter. We welcome contributions of articles, stories, verses etc to the newsletter. All contributions should be emailed to the Newsletter Editor.

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