



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Aug - Sep 2008



A Father's Story

Gunnar Rasmussen, bereaved and loving father of Simone

With a young child's death, the dream is snatched from us. We feel that there is no tomorrow-no laughter growing up; no first love; no graduation; no marriage; no grand-children; no realisation for those hopes and dreams. A huge void being left in the wake of such a massive loss, is what I believe is grief.

Despite this shattering of the dream, there was a child ... the loving, the gift and the story ... a painful one whatever it is.

My youngest child, Simone, died just before her thirteenth birthday. She fell from the eleventh storey of an apartment building whilst interstate on holidays with another family. It was Australia Day 1992 and my wife, Laraine, and I had arrived home from a weekend in Ocean Grove to be met by several people in our living room.

A friend began to explain. His words ended with the chilling conclusion "and she's dead". An iron fist just shook me ... my insides were squeezed. Three words which changed my life forever.

From those crystallized moments of learning that Simone was dead my first response was to sit quietly on a rock in the garden.

I can hear once more the scream of pain from Laraine as she was told of Simone's death. Laraine and I realised that when Simone was falling to her death we were totally becalmed as we sailed on the river off Barwon Heads.

Until these inconceivable words had been uttered, Simone was still alive to both of us.

In the midst of my devastation I told myself "I can't sit on a rock, I have to hold and protect my wife and my two other children". This, I believe, is a very male thing to do.

From those very early days and over time, I've seen how, between a husband and wife there can be distinct differences in their grief responses.

With Laraine, there was much more "being out there". As she grieved, there were tears, talking, the fist hammering the kitchen bench in frustration and anger. As a woman, Laraine knew she was allowed to let go by observable grief. I, on the other hand, did much of my grieving in the car by myself.

I had a forty-five minute journey each way to school. In those ninety minutes a day alone in the car I would often weep.

I also walked a lot and talked to myself. I've found that talking out loud and self-talk is very important. If you only think, your thoughts are jumbled and incoherent. However, when you actually hear a voice, it slows your thoughts down, as you can't talk as quickly as you think. With self-talk you don't need to be shy, you can be angry, you can cry. From this talk, I always felt calmer and settled. I still use this technique if I've had a bad day. My therapy is to go for a walk and to engage in self-talk on the journey.

In the raw shock and sorrow during the days and nights that followed Simone's death, we talked a lot as a couple ... and still do.

However, I never talked to Laraine about my own grief process. Somehow we knew that we would be travelling very different journeys in our grief and promised each other to have no expectations of the other and no judgments about how we were living with our grief.

It was one and a half days following Simone's sudden death before I was able to cry. I just felt completely knotted up inside. I thought that if I started to cry I may never stop. If I really cried and let go what would happen? I was scared of the loss of control in my life. I definitely feel that my cultural background also had a large influence on my reactions.

I am Danish and came to Australia in 1974. In Denmark there is no screaming and shouting, it is a "lovely little country where everyone is in control of their emotions". I must have succeeded as I heard comments from people around me such as. "You're being really strong" or "you have to be strong", terrible remarks to a bereaved parent, but oh so common.

Frequently I was asked how my wife was, rather than how I was.

Sometimes I felt that the world didn't allow me to grieve. However, in hindsight, I feel I have travelled a good 'grief journey', even though a lot has been by myself-well, I'm a man, aren't I? Isn't that what I am supposed to do?

After Simone's death, life is very different. It is not the life before 1992. There is no going back to the old self. "It's a nightmare to think about what happened. As a father I wasn't there to protect my daughter. I really don't know what happened to her". Thirteen years after Simone's death there is never a day when I don't think of her. It may not always be conscious, but it's there.

My deeply cherished hope for the future is that "One day I would like to be able to think of Simone with no pain-just feeling warm and fuzzy and a deep sense of her love-because she deserves that. Glancing back over the moments, days, months and years since Simone's death. "I reckon I've done well, I've not forgotten her or what happened, but I'm honouring thirteen years of love, of funny stories and of the joy that a daughter or son can bring to a father.

When I think of that, I know that I'm getting there. This Father's Day, as with the last twelve, I will shed a silent tear when I wake, but I know that Laraine will give me a beautiful gift and a card from Simone and I will spend the day with my son, my daughter and my three wonderful grand-daughters.

I will survive.

Taken from TCF Vic Aus, Aug-Sep 2005 Newsletter

NOSYM

*Anthony Furzer Devoted father and friend to Ben 19 years
Born June 5, 1983-died 2002*

The word I would say every day
I think about nosym every day
Nosym is in my heart every second
I created nosym
I cuddled and cared for nosym
I love nosym
I would tuck nosym into bed
Stroke his beautiful face and gently kiss his forehead.
I played games and taught nosym all I possibly could
I held nosym high above my shoulders.
I gave nosym my life
My soul
My heart
I watched nosym grow I am always so proud of nosym
nosym and I did everything together
nosym was not only nosym but my best mate
nosym was kind and caring
nosym was everything a young boy and man could be.
I miss nosym, beautiful smile and cheeky grin
nosym champion footballer and sportsman
nosym champion young man
nosym talented carpenter
nosym nosym nosym nosym nosym
I will say it forever

nosym backwards means my son.

Taken from TCF Vic, Aust, Oct-Nov 2005

Music, When Soft Voices Die

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory -
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

This poem holds special memories of Nick.

He chose this poem to read at the interment of his Nana's ashes, the same day that he died, 30th June, 2004. Music was his passion. Indeed, Nick's soft voice forever vibrates in the memory of all who love him. Sent in by Nick's Mum Judy Shepherd

There's a New Man in Town

By Dave Simone-Bereaved Father, Tampa, Florida-TCF Atlanta On-line

My son is dead. The moment I was told my son died in an auto accident, there was a new man in town. The old man would find a way to fix "it" or at least make "it" better. The new man couldn't fix a thing. Oh, he could make arrangements, settle accounts, acknowledge condolences as though he were really there but the new man was far off, living in a protective shell hardened by disbelief and shock. Yes, he did things, but he didn't feel in the old ways, he was far off being reborn.

My wife's grief would bring the new man back, at least for a while. There was no fixing her, just acknowledgement of the hurt and pain and helplessness we both felt. I was there for her as she was there for me and we bonded in our grief at depths we did not know existed. My son did not die to make our marriage better or worse and his death did not change what it fundamentally was and is. There is, however, a new level where we meet to hurt and feel together.

When a baby is born there is pain and tears followed by profound joy. If that baby dies before his parents, there is pain and tears and a longing for peace. No man can anticipate the number of tears that will flow during his rebirth. The half hour drive to work each morning was a time of nothing but tears and pain and guardian angels to provide safety for myself and those around me. The new man was every bit the good driver the old man was, but he wasn't there, he was far off being reborn in those unstoppable tears. Peace was nowhere to be found.

I am not going into detail into the many ways I think I have changed. Believe me, I have changed and so have you, fellow bereaved father. I cannot believe my son died to make me a better man. I do believe that my son's death shocked me into holding dear all that was always precious to me with the new knowledge that "it" can all end in an instant, and neither the old man nor the new man can ever fix "it". The protective shell is fading away and real peace is finding its way into my heart and soul. But the shell will never be completely gone and the peace will never blend into complacency. We are new men with new priorities and new things to do. This does not mean we abandon all that was of the old man, the newness is in our attitudes and understanding and acceptance of vulnerability.

Reprinted from Bereaved Parents USA website-http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/AP_Fathers.htm

For Grandfathers

By Margaret H Gerner From "For Bereaved Grandparents" TCF Victoria, Aug-Sep 05

If you are a bereaved grandfather, you may have special difficulty grieving the loss of a grandchild for two reasons.

First, your grief is minimized by people who don't consider a grandfather/grandchild relationship to be very significant.

Secondly, like most men, you have probably been taught to keep your feelings inside.

When a child dies, the concern of others is first for the mother, then the father. Occasionally some will be expressed for the grandmother. Rarely do people recognise that you are hurting too. When you weep or express pain, even among family and friends, you may feel embarrassed. A grandfather isn't expected to be upset. He is expected to concern himself with his children and his wife.

Once I saw a grown man cry,
"Now there goes a man with feeling!" said I.

He was strong, able, quite well-built,
with muscles, grey hair and charm to the hilt.

I moved toward him slowly and said, "What's wrong?"
The look he gave me was tear-filled And long
"I cry for a child, My grandchild has died."
So I sat beside him and Two grown men cried.

Lean on Me

By Teen Schreenan, TCF Vic, Oct-Nov 05 From Healing Hope and words of comfort

Lean on me for I have walked before you
Along the hard fought travelled road of grief
Confused, and hoping someone kind would lead me
To restore my life and rekindle my belief.

I'll touch your hand and shoulder oh so gently
To show you that I understand and care
My ear for you, forever will be open
For you can tell me "It all seems unfair,"

I pray you'll get the love that you're now needing,
Your soul can dry up just like flowers that die,
I know, for I once needed that help also it's a constant struggle -
To keep one's spirit high.

I pray for you- that yours will slowly strengthen
and soon some days will seem worth while.
I'll be your friend and helper while you're grieving and give you time,
for you have lost a child.

Letting Go

By Carol Rothwell, June 2008, TCF Qld

You have to 'let go' we hear them say
Just what do they mean by that
It's one of the clichés often heard
There are many they have off pat.

It got me to thinking about all of this
And what do these words really mean?
They seem to be harsh, but maybe they're not,
It's just me, and that's how they seem.

Do they mean that we have to forget our child lived
In our lives they will not be a part
So strong is the bond that we have with our child
They will always be here in our heart.

No! we will never 'let go' of our child

But we want to 'let go' of the pain
It just hurts so much, to carry this weight
It can feel like we're going insane.

But little by little, the pain seems to ease
And we're able to 'let go' for a while
And some days we find that through all this pain
We can even 'let go' with a smile.

What Does the Soul Know

By Nita Aasen, St Peter, MN, "Living With Loss Magazine", Winter 2007

As part of their grief journey, many bereaved try to reconcile the daunting and haunting questions related to the interminable "if only's" following their loved one's death. "If only" I had set my alarm clock, we would have left for Chicago an hour earlier on that fateful Thanksgiving Day in 1994. After waking up, "if only" I hadn't pushed Erik and David to hurry up, we would have avoided being on that specific part of the road until minutes later. In every scenario of the "if only's" that I've played over and over in my head, we were no longer in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But then came the next question: What if this was part of a plan? Questions surrounding predestination quickly came to the forefront. With predestination, all of the "if only's" would not have made a difference. Everything that happened on that morning was predestined to happen. Another question that begs for an answer relates to what the soul might know about one's imminent death or the possibility of the soul's continuing to communicate with the bereaved after.

These predestination and soul questions began to seem more plausible when I heard the following stories associated with the deaths of my sons.

A friend related that a discussion topic during this last conversation with David the night before the accident was about, of all things, life insurance. This friend, who sold life insurance, questioned David about his decision to buy several policies when he was still single. David replied that he wanted to protect his future and, if something happened to him, he would be leaving a "nice gift for my parents". (Several scholarships were subsequently established in my sons' honour and memory).

During the same evening, Erik, a physical therapy student, was dictating his clinical notes for the last day of a clinical rotation. The staff said he routinely ended this dictation with a humorous remark. However, his last comment on this particular tape was, "And this is my last tape forever and ever. Alleluia." It was probably meant to be humorous, but instead it became ominously prophetic. What would have possessed him to say such a thing?

Was this just coincidence?

Happenstance? Or did their souls know what their conscious minds did not know? With a maturity level seemingly beyond their years, and an apparent awareness of the fragility of life were they, in a sense, "ready" to die?

In reading the literature and conducting research on post-death communication, Kay Woods (*Visions of the Bereaved*, 1998) asserts that a person's soul knows, even though their conscious self does not, that death is near. These instances seem to be associated most frequently with a sudden death. To illustrate, family members or friends often recall specific words or actions that did not seem completely out of place at the time, but post-death was taken as a "sign" of their impending death. At other times, finding an item such as a poem, song, or artwork among their child's personal possessions was also taken as a "sign" by parents that their child's soul was saying goodbye. Were my sons saying goodbye?

We learned about this next incident more than a year after the accident. During a visit David's friend Sarah tentatively asked me, "Do you believe in predestination?" I replied, "At this point, I have no idea what I believe-I'm open to anything." She then shared with us a telephone conversation she'd had with a friend about three months before the accident. This friend asked if she was okay; the answer was "I'm fine." He then asked her if she had been in an accident; the answer was "No." Next question: "Do you know if Aaron is OK?" Answer: "As far as I know he's okay." (A later call verified this).

After the accident this friend called Sarah and told her more of what had prompted the original call several months previously. This friend had dreamed of a car accident involving fatalities, and Sarah's name had been emblazoned across the accident scene along with the two letters AA. Those letters were now obviously interpreted to mean Aasen. Were these signs that the tragedy was going to happen and there was no stopping it? Were their souls trying to warn? Could the accident have been prevented? Questions without answers. Which brings me to the Christmas tree story.

After spending Christmas, 1993, at home, David decided to take advantage of the post-holiday Christmas sales before returning to his new home in Blue Earth, N. Just before dinner, he walked in the door carrying his purchases—a tree with all the trimmings. He then proceeded to go to the living room and set the tree up. I questioned him on the logic of setting the tree up when he was returning to Blue Earth after dinner. "I know," he said, "but I want to see what it looks like."

Soon David came out to the kitchen and said, "Mom, come look at the tree!" There in all its splendour—lights blinking and decorations in place—was his five foot Christmas tree. Standing back, grinning, he said, "Pretty nice, huh, Mom? I marvelled that this 25-year-old young adult was just as proud and excited as if he were still a young child. Savouring this moment, I smiled back and confirmed his assessment by saying it was truly beautiful. After dinner David proceeded to take down the tree and decorations, carefully returning everything to the right package before leaving for Blue Earth. It had been up for all of one hour. Yet if he wouldn't have set it up, he would have never seen it.

I've learned to take my solace whenever and wherever I can find it. Even though I have no "for sure" answer what the soul may know prior to death or if the soul can communicate with loved ones after death, the process of searching and wondering can continue. With this possibility, there is the hope that there will be some nugget of information or glimmer of insight into these mysterious soul-searching questions that will bring some additional meaning and comfort while continuing to live with loss during the holidays or any season for that matter.

P.S.: following the accident, we drove to David's home in Blue Earth to get some of his personal items and mementoes for the memorial service. All of a sudden it felt like he was saying to me, "Take the tree home, Mom." But where in the house would it be? I started looking by opening the entry closet and there everything was—just as if he had led me to the door saying, "Here it is." Less than a month later we decorated the tree for Christmas and I imagined David standing back, excited and grinning with pride, as he said, "Pretty nice, huh, Mom!"

www.wilsonpublishinghouse.com - naasen@wilsonpublishinghouse.com

7 Forms of Post Communication "Vision of the Bereaved, Hallucination or Reality"

By Kay Witmer Woods, PhD, TCF, Central Iowa Chapter Newsletter Aug 2005.

1. The Feeling of the Presence

This is a sudden feeling that you are not alone. You know there is someone near you and the feeling is over-whelming. It may also be accompanied by a wonderful feeling of peace and love. Although you

cannot see him, you know your loved one has come to visit. This experience is so real and alarming, many people state the hairs on the back of their neck stand up.

2. The Waking Vision

These visions appear spontaneously any time during the day or night. You may walk into the kitchen and see the deceased sitting at the table, or you may awaken during the night and see him standing at the foot of the bed. He usually has an expression of love and happiness. And if he communicates at all, it will be telepathically with a message that states: "I love you. Don't worry; everything is OK. We will be together again."

3. Hearing A Voice

You may hear the deceased call your name. The voice may come from without or within. The message will always be one of love and assurance that all is well. This is most likely to happen in the hypnologic state (half asleep and half awake).

4. Feeling a Touch

This is a gentle touch or caress. I know a mother who felt a kiss in the morning when she was awaking from a dream of her deceased son. Many times it is a loving touch on the shoulder.

5. Smelling an Odour

The bereaved smells a particular odour that is associated with the deceased. This could be perfume, tobacco, a favourite flower etc. The odour is usually over-whelming and fills the entire room.

6. Dreams

These dreams are not confusing or full of symbolism as are regular dreams. During the dream, you are fully aware that you are dreaming and in the presence of the spirit of your deceased loved one. This is not a dream that he is alive again, which is a very common dream of those who grieve, but a real and vivid dream which brings a feeling of peace and love. I have experienced several dream visits from my son, Andy, and I find these dreams hard to express in "world" terms.

7. The Physical Phenomenon

Objects may move. Pictures may fall off the wall. Radios and televisions will turn on by themselves. I know of a mother whose deceased child's music box keeps going on by itself. Birds and butterflies are often involved with physical experiences.

They'll Never Know

By Kim Bauer, TCF Qld

No time for silly comments
From those that will never know
Don't want to know their sorrow
This is my loss, too great to compare
Far beyond the imagination
A loss I cannot share
So save your comparisons
And don't feel sorry for me
I must endure this pain alone
Which has now become my journey.

The Robbery

By Ron Lunn

There's been a robbery!
Something's been stolen,
it's part of my spirit, part of my soul.
Nothing substantial, nothing to grasp,
it's part of my future, part of my past.

Something is missing, something so sad,
it's part of my reason for being a Dad.
Something was taken, it's torn me apart.
Something is gone, it's part of my heart.

Maybe in time I can accept this terrible crime?
Then at last I might find something substantial,
something to grasp, and look to the future
But remember the past.

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