



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Dec 2008 - Jan 2009



Christmas Wrapping

By Hank Hewitt, TCF USA

We wrap ourselves for the holidays much like the presents we give. The brightly coloured paper hides what's within. When people look at us they only see the outside. We promise ourselves we will not come unwrapped. We will make it through the family celebrations, the church services and the big occasions. The paper, the ribbon will remain intact.

But it is the small things that manage to untie the bow. The little insignificant moment; the Christmas parade, the search for the tree, the discovered ornament, the special carol, the memory and the paper gets wrenched off. The true Christmas presence shows itself. The inevitable tide of feelings burst out of the artificially decorated façade. The emotions pour out. The intense anger wells up. The tears are shed and holidays come. These are as sure as the tides and the march of time. Only a compassionate friend, a bereaved parent, knows of what I speak.

Yet the answer isn't in fighting or in denying these feelings. We have paid the price. We have the right to grieve. The resolution of our grief is in the grieving. Our hope for you all is that you will make it through the holidays. We cannot take the pain away. But know that there are others who suffer with you. We have made it and together we will continue on.

Extract from TCF QLD, Dec 00/ Jan 01 Newsletter

Coping with Christmas

Gayle Cameron, TCF VIC

There is no right or wrong way to cope with Christmas, especially if this is the first Christmas without your loved child. We have compiled a list of ideas, gleaned from many sources. Hints that many other grieving parents have found helped them to get through Christmas. If there is a suggestion that you feel is right for you and your family hold on to it and let the others go, maybe next year you might feel like trying some other ideas.

Preparation:

Know that as a grieving person, you have physical and emotional limitations. Evaluate your priorities and decide what you want to do and what you are capable of doing.

You and your family come first, what is most comfortable for all of you is what should be done. Let these

needs be know to family, friends and relatives.

Discuss with your family how they feel and what they would like to do. Let them decorate the tree, make the cookies, wrap the presents, etc.

Ways to Include Your Child's Life and Memories:

Take time, maybe before dinner to ask everyone to have a moment of silence to think about your child. Ask them if they would like to share their thoughts.

Invite everyone to write down a special thought about your child and place it in his Christmas stocking to be read by anyone at anytime. This could be a special gift for you and your family to revive those special memories.

Burn a candle on Christmas Day in memory of your child.

Buy a gift your child would have enjoyed and donate it to charity to brighten another child's day, or make a donation in your child's name to his/her favourite charity.

Buy a helium balloon and get the family to write messages to tie to it and together release it.

Ask everyone to bring photographs of 'Christmases Past'. Photos of you as a child, your parents. You might find that the sharing of these photos makes it easier and leads naturally into the sharing of memories of your child as well as other family members who are absent (grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.)

Changes You Could Make:

Have a different type of tree, a smaller one, a white one instead of the traditional green, or maybe no tree at all this year.

Don't feel you should send out Christmas Cards, I'm sure your friends will understand.

Change the time of your Christmas meal, maybe tea instead of lunch or vice versa.

Attend a different Church of different service.

Do something for someone else. Focusing on others (elderly neighbour, someone with no relatives nearby) for part of the holidays will give you a respite from your pain and help another at the same time.

Some Things Not To Do:

Don't pretend you do not hurt.

Don't make changes in everything.

Don't forget that Christmas and holiday times often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. Experiencing the sadness that comes is important and natural. To block out such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved child alive.

Don't give yourself the additional burden of worrying about crying. Your tears shouldn't ruin the day for other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom. Remember your crying can't MAKE others cry, they cry because they too are affected by the death of your child.

You might not want to change anything; you may want to keep busy, not have time to think, hold back the pain. Don't get so busy that you will not have time to think about your loved one, it will catch up with

you and possibly hit you harder than if you had allowed yourself the freedom to hurt, to yearn, to wonder what might have been, to truly miss them and be allowed to say so.

This list was compiled from many articles from many TCF Chapters. The hints were found to be similar in many and some were found in just one; however the one important thing that was stated in ALL of them was—realize that no matter what we do, Christmas (holidays, birthdays, anniversaries) will come and that the anticipation and lead up is nearly always worse than the actual day. How true that is for me; is it the same for you?

Extract from TCF VIC October 04 Newsletter

Searching

Author Unknown

Here I sit all alone.....in the dark
searching for something I cannot find...
the answers to life and death...
Heaven and earth...disease and mankind.

Why does a child get disease???
Why do children have to die???
Why are some prayers answered? While others appear not?
Why do cures sometimes work? And other times they do not?

And the 'whys' keep running through my head...
just as the tears fall from my eyes...
when I hear of another family
that have said their earthly goodbyes.

There are just some things...
we will never know...
until our time comes...
and to Heaven we go.

That will be my first question
when it's my time to go...
Why these precious children???
For each one was loved so.

Please, God, bless each family with
Your comfort and Your love...
Guide them on their journey of grief...
with Your Heavenly blessings from above.

Submitted by Elaine Roebuck, TCF QLD, in loving memory of her daughter, Katie Roebuck.

Keegan Rhys Hardy

28/11/02 to 9/3/03

Waiting for the day to hold you again
From the very beginning we loved you

As we made plans for our family and our new twins

You were tiny and helpless that horrible day
The Sunday in February that you were taken away
Our hearts were young and broken,
the tears they fall like rain
We've never known such heartache and pain

We often wonder if you would look like your twin
Would you have his bright happy face, blue eyes and blonde hair?
Would you be a big tall boy like Bayden, or small?
We had dreams for you all that reached to the skies
It is now almost 6 years ago, and we still miss you so

Oh how we wish we could hold you again
And share the excitement of getting ready to start school
The soccer teams, the swimming, athletics and more
Are all the things that we wish we had to do with four
But it wasn't to be and we do these things with three
And think of you all the time and how different our lives would be!

All our love Mummy and Daddy

Submitted by Fiona and Michael Hardy, TCF QLD, in loving memory of their precious son, Keegan.

Troy

14/10/71–07/07/99

You came last night,
I held you In Dreams,
that's all I have
I felt your strong arms and heard you say,
"I love you MUM"
You were wearing your favourite Jacket,
and asked me how I was
I saw you disappear into crowds
I hardly knew when I would see you
In Dreams that's all I have
In Dreams it's where I meet you
Once I could see you every day
Then you went away,
far across the sea to London,
and in Newman's Passage you died.
I will never know what happened to you
or why you were there
I only know I will miss you all the days of my life.
In Dreams it's where I see you
In Dreams that's all I have.

I walked with quite solitude,
and I placed a plaque where you fell
In this place, this cold place, no one cared.
The light went out and the world was less,

for you not being in it
In Dreams is where I see you again, My Son.

Sent in by Kris Townsend, in memory of her beloved son

Louise

By Georgie Arthy

I bring to mind my friend Louise
Memories arrive soft as a summers breeze
Somehow the world is a lesser place
Now we can't see your pretty face

Your voice was gentle and your manner sweet
Then along came Anthony and you were complete
How do we justify this waste
Because of someone else's haste

Of all the animals you held so dear
Your unrivalled favourite was always clear
Loving horses was a guiding force
That set your life on an unwavering course

To be with horses brought you peace
And this great love will never cease
God has the finest horses and they need the finest care
I know you have to leave us now because he needs you there

Submitted by Rod & Lesley Ireland, TCF QLD in loving memory of their daughter, Louise

Sent in by Lyn Atkinson:

Conor's loving Nettie TCF, NSW

When my precious grandson Conor died, aged three on July 22nd 2006, I kept a journal and this is my entry for today which someone suggested I share. The first phone call was from a friend whose son has cancer and undergoing chemotherapy in the same hospital that Conor was treated. She was saying how she never understood what Conor and his family went through while he was undergoing treatment, until now. I believe this little boy will survive and I will rejoice but I will also wonder WHY he did and Conor didn't. This is not selfish; it's just part of grief.

Just as no one can prepare you for the cancer journey, no one can prepare you for the death of a child, or in my case a grandchild, no one can tell you how MUCH it physically hurts, how much you will miss that grandchild, how much you grieve for your daughter/son, their partner and the siblings, how it tears your heart apart seeing the sadness in their eyes and knowing that their grief is so immense and that you cannot make it better, the feeling of total helplessness, how you will often contemplate going to join that child, how tired grief makes you feel, how you sometimes feel as if you are losing your mind. How can anyone understand really unless they have walked in those shoes and even then each person's experience is different?

The second call was from a friend asking for help to prepare for the first angelversary of her grandson. I really had no answers because once again each person's grief is so personal. Was the second year easier than the first, I don't think so. Maybe one learns to expect bad days, to expect the tears. Maybe you learn to cope a little better on those days. Perhaps you have more moments of peace than you did in the early months but easier...I don't think so. You probably accept that grief will ALWAYS be part of you and so you learn to live with it which allows you to find hope and joy that was missing in the first few months of raw grief.

The days we know and expect to be difficult are sometimes not the hardest ones. Some days are ones of mixed emotions, sadness and happiness. Your grandchild's birthday and the days before it are always going to be hard, angelversarys are a date we wished we had never had to think about, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, the birthday's his parents have to survive without their little boy, going on holidays, for me the day Conor's baby sister was born was one of mixed emotions, the first day of school and all the milestones we hoped to celebrate and share with ALL our precious grandchildren are difficult. When I watch the family I always see a space, the place that Conor has left. Many, many more days jump out from the calendar but I think the hardest days of all are those unexpected days when the waves of grief tear you down. Sometimes the trigger is unknown, other times it is something just unexpected. My birthday is a day I find difficult because

I remember my last birthday with Conor, just a couple of weeks before he died. On that day his Mummy bought a little blue thong (flip flop) for Conor to give me to hang my car keys on. Last week I lost it and that brought me to my knees, I cried and cried. Such a small thing but I treasured that little blue thong that Conor had held. Conor's little brother's third birthday was a sad day because all I could think of was Conor's last birthday, his third. His big sister's birthday when he should have been sharing in the fun, this year a tea party, painted nails and all. Watching his little brother play sometimes brings me to tears as I wish so much that he had his big brother to play with, a brother who is very much part of his life but one he cannot play with. Those mixed emotions again because I also find joy in watching his little brother play and being part of the other children's special birthdays and know that I am lucky to have my grandchildren in my life. I am also very aware that there is always someone who has experienced more sadness than me.

Some days grief tears you apart, other days it clothes you in gentle warmth, some days it makes you angry. I have no answers to make it easier, it is just part of who I am now. Life is made up of the person I was before Conor died and after. For me to give to others in Conor's memory or to donate or work for charity helps. Some days to sit quietly by his grave and thank him for cherished memories, for the gifts he left us and just for loving me helps, other days it just makes me terribly sad. Some days just looking at the moon and stars gives me peace, really enjoying and appreciating nature and its beauty is comforting.

Talking to Conor, writing letters to him, these things do help me but for others that may not bring them comfort. Visiting and enjoying his siblings brings joy as does remembering him amongst the family. I find being alone on those "difficult" days is very hard but I also know sometimes that is the way it has to be. There are no rules to grief, no time frame. It is just living day by day. When my heart aches I try not to think of it as being broken but believe it is the imprint Conor has left in my heart. He was the bravest most amazing little boy and I miss him. May you all find ways to find hope, joy and peace as Christmas approaches again.

Remembering Rebecca Six Years after She Left Our Lives

It was on that awful cold Christmas Day,
God took you home to heaven to stay,
We cried and cried when you went away.

But alas,
we have come to learn

It was Him calling you, it was your turn.

For God was missing an Angel,
so He chose you,
Best Darling Angel we ever knew.

We don't understand how this had to be,
God has taken you to heaven,
but now you are free.

Free from pain,
free to run,
free to dance and play again.

We really are missing you,
We miss all the beautiful things you do.

But we understand,
you are there in his precious hand.

Go prepare a place for us,
Someday we will join you,
that we must.

Go now our sweet one,
dearest Rebecca,
We are thinking of you in every way.
We all hated to see you go,
but alas you must rest so.

Into God's hands we place the very best,
rest now sweet Rebecca and twice be blessed,
you brought us so much happiness.

Till we meet again, we will think of you often.
On that you can depend,
you were our very special angel, daughter, partner, mother, sister, friend.

We understood you were only on loan,
now dearest Rebecca you are home.

In the somber light of the waning moon,
God took you home way too soon.

It's losing you we regret,
God had His plans for you already set.

*Submitted by Patricia and Dudley Cotterill (TCF Qld) (taken from the Internet)
In memory of our daughter Rebecca Ann Cotterill
who passed away in Amsterdam on Christmas Day 2002, aged 25 years.*

A Pair of Shoes...

Author Unknown. Enigma Magazine Summer 2007

I am wearing a pair of shoes.
They are ugly shoes.
Uncomfortable shoes.
I hate my shoes.
Each day I wear them, and each day I wish I had another pair.
Some days my shoes hurt so bad that I do not think I can take another step.
Yet, I continue to wear them.
I get funny looks wearing these shoes.
They are looks of sympathy.
I can tell in others' eyes that they are glad they are my shoes and not theirs.
They never talk about my shoes.
To learn how awful my shoes are might make them uncomfortable.
To truly understand these shoes you must walk in them.
But, once you put them on, you can never take them off.
I now realize that I am not the only one who wears these shoes.
There are many pairs in this world.
Some women are like me and ache daily as they try and walk in them.
Some have learned how to walk in them so they don't hurt quite as much.
Some have worn the shoes so long that days will go by before they think about how much they hurt.
No woman deserves to wear these shoes.
Yet, because of these shoes I am a stronger woman.
These shoes have given me the strength to face anything.
They have made me who I am.
I will forever walk in the shoes of a woman who has lost a child.

Michael - Our Son

You are the sunshine of our lives.
You made us laugh,
You made us cry,
The hugs you gave us
Will never be forgotten
Our Boy,
Our Man,
Our Son
Most of all you made us proud.
Our Buddy,
Our Pal,
Our Son.

Submitted by Roxanne & Trevor Beetham, TCF QLD, in loving memory of their precious son, Michael Beetham (26/04/89 - 04/02/08)

Christmas - A Different World for Us.

Tracy Veale-Chan Mother of Bailey: Twin brother to Rhys and Lost brother to Jessica TCF (WA)

As once again I watch the lights go up around the streets, the trees and decorations adorn the shops—earlier each year—my 'countdown' is set in motion. The countdown to my baby's death, the series of events that unwind, again and again each year, as we tick closer to Christmas Day. For it was Christmas Day, 1998, when we had to make the heart-wrenching decision to turn off our son, Bailey's, life support machine. At 12.24 on Christmas Day, when other children played and laughed excitedly with their new toys, our son lay in my arms and took his last breath. His toys lay beside the tree, unopened by his tiny excited hands. A day of joy for so many, but a day of devastation for us. I remember buying his toys, the Thomas the Tank Engine roller blades he so desperately wanted and the Thomas the Tank Engine underwear Santa was bringing him because he had just toilet trained days before.

But our sadness was deeper than this and more confusing and complicated. For as we kissed our baby one last time and walked from the hospital, we faced Bailey's twin brother, just 2½ years old, full of excitement about Christmas but confused about sitting alone with toys and no-one to play with.

It will be five years this Christmas (surely not! Wasn't it yesterday!?) yet we still struggle to decide how to 'handle' Christmas this year. Family and friends cannot 'give up' this special day to grieve for our son. They cannot 'infect' their joyous day with such sadness and grief. They suggest we 'just put it aside for the day and let the kids enjoy Christmas'. Or 'take the morning to think of Bailey, then spend the afternoon enjoying the day'. I've even had someone suggest we 'could have picked a better day'. Am I bitter? Yes! And my confusion grows stronger as this year I watch my three-year-old daughter, who was born after Bailey died, cry out in delight at Christmas decorations and I swing between joy and grief. I am aware of our family and friends' barrier of 'self protection', of their need to keep this day happy ... but I am aware too, of the desperation I feel that I no longer have this 'joyous day' to share with the rest of the world. During this 'season of joy', dare I get a moment's reprieve where I am not consciously thinking of my son, that it is shattered when a stranger says "Merry Christmas" and I am dragged down once again, drowning in memories and grief.

I wish I were writing an answer here. Something you can read and be inspired to use for your own grief process. But I don't have an answer. I don't know how to be (truly!) happy (for I can certainly paint on the right face now) on my living son's birthday, for it is also the birthday his twin brother is not having and I don't know how to be (truly!) happy for the joy I see in my living children's eyes on Christmas Day, for clouding that is sweet Bailey's last breath.

For this year then, once again, on goes the painted face as the world laughs and sings and smiles "Merry Christmas" to each other—each time, my heart breaks more deeply. My day of grief cannot be a private one and it is stained with feelings of selfishness.

To all the pained and desolate bereaved parents, I wish you SPACE this Christmas, away from the 'joy' we are expected to share with others, space to grieve the absence at the table, the presents you wanted to buy and the laughter you cannot hear. My thoughts and empathy are with you all.

Taken from 'Reflections' TCF WA, Dec 03/Jan 04 Newsletter

Helping Yourself Cope with Grief and Loss

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loved one in a journal, or write the person a letter saying the things you never got to say. Create a scrapbook or artwork about the person; create an appropriate memorial in his or her honour (for example, if the person loved flowers, plant or fund a garden); get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him or her.

Take care of yourself physically. Get enough sleep, eat sensibly, and engage in regular exercise. Do not use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially. (That may even apply to antidepressants meant to ease the sadness of grief; because grief, unlike depression, is not a disorder, masking the pain with meds may be less productive than working through the sadness.) Healthy habits will help you with grieving, but substance use will impede recovery and can lead to long term dependence.

Don't let other people tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." At the same time, it's okay to be angry at the person who died, to cry every day if you need to, to yell at the heavens without being embarrassed. Conversely, it's okay to laugh, too. If watching the entire oeuvre of the Marx Brothers helps you heal, no one has the right to tell you it's inappropriate.

Plan ahead. Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones in life can be particularly challenging. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honour the person you loved.

Extract taken from Internet Resource: Guide to Grieving and Bereavement
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm

Coping with All of the Firsts

When we become parents we look forward to all the firsts in the life of our child(ren). The first night they sleep through, the first smile, first tooth, first time to sit up, first step and then later their first school report, first date, etc. The list goes on.

What we don't expect is having to survive all the firsts that we face after the death of our beloved child(ren). The first birthday—of theirs and other family members—the first Easter, Christmas, New Year, Mothers' Day and Father's Day and then horror of horrors the first month of their death comes round again. Not that the pain stops after 12 months have passed. Unfortunately, we know better than that.

There are other firsts that need to be faced later on too, like special birthdays of family and friends, engagements, weddings and births. The list seems endless.

When my younger son, Matt, died in 1992 I made a determined decision to make all the firsts different from what or how things had been done in the past. No matter what I did or what happened I would miss his presence terribly but by doing something different I wasn't making the comparison with what it was like before.

I have found, for me anyway, that this has worked. In doing something different I've had to face up to the event before hand and being prepared for the event does have it's benefits.

I will illustrate this by describing my first New Year's Eve without Matt. I had never been 'over the top' about New Year's Eve and my kids were all adults. On that New Year's Eve I chose to be on my own and worked in my garden (usually good therapy for me). As the evening wore on I felt tearier and tearier—what was happening? Finally, it dawned on me. I was about to face another year without my precious son! Now I would have to say he died last year not this year. And, I hadn't been prepared—I hadn't braced myself.

Some of the things I've planned and done have been a picnic breakfast on the back lawn, going to the beach on Christmas Day with the dog and a sandwich, going for long walks. I've done some significant things like releasing 21 bright balloons on Matt's 21st—his first birthday after he died—and planting

roses on anniversaries and I've had memorial services at church with family and friends.

What has become a ritual on these days is taking flowers to Centennial Park and spending time there, burning a candle, looking at photos, crying, remembering, loving and more tears. Hope this may be of some benefit to other bereaved parents. It has helped me to survive somehow.

Written in the cherished memory of my adored sons: Matt, who died as a result of a motorbike accident in June 1992 aged 20 and Paul, who ended his life in September 1994, aged 26.

Kind regards, Betty Swalling, TCF Adelaide, SA

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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