



# The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

*Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings*

## Newsletter (Extracts) Aug - Sep 2009



### Fathers Day

*By Gerry Hunt TCF Vermont USA*

Every father believes in his role as protector of his family. He has been assigned the job of fixer and problem-solver. He has been told since his youngest days that he must be strong, must not cry. But each father among us has had to face that point where no amount of fixing, problem-solving and protecting has been able to stop his child's death. Inside, we must ask ourselves about our failure and we must face our lack of omnipotence.

Fathers' Day is often a forgotten holiday, over-shadowed by the longer standing tribute to mothers. But for the bereaved father, it is a poignant reminder of bitter sweetness; sweet in the memory of a loved, now lost child, and bitter for the death and pain and recognition of the inability to stop what happened.

Fathers do not often have a chance to share their hurts and concern. Often they are unable to do so—a remnant of childhood learnings about strength and stoicism of 'big boy'. A father may even be uncomfortable opening up to his wife and the wife who pushes him to talk may be pushing him too hard.

Fathers' Day does not have to be a time when everyone pours out of the woodwork to say, "I'm sorry we haven't talked. Let's do it now." It can be a time when the family gives Dad a hug, does something special, helps with the chores and mostly lets him know how important and needed and loved he is; some of this has been lost with the death of his child.

Like Mothers' Day, the day set aside for Fathers does not have to be limited to a Sunday in September. It can be any day and every day.

Fathers hurt differently, often internally, but they do hurt.

*Taken from TCF Vic Inc. No 172 Aug/Sept 07 Newsletter*

### If I Knew

*Sent in by Jo Ross in memory of her precious Jade Ellen Ross 7/6/05-27/11/08*

This piece of writing is one that I wrote not long after my precious special daughter Jade died 4 weeks before Christmas last year. I was wracked with such incredible guilt that it was so completely overwhelming. I needed to vent it and this is how it came out. I still struggle with guilt 7 months down the track but I am trying to learn to accept the fact that I did the very best that I could under the circumstances and when it comes down to it, love was all that really mattered.

## If I Knew

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have pondered so often the life I felt you took from me,  
Or instead would I have enjoyed and been thankful for the life I had and you gave to me.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have read so many trash magazines by your hospital bed  
Or instead would I have read you stories that swept you to a land of fairies and dreamland to divert your unending pain.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have not gone out to places because it was too hard for 'me',  
Or instead would I have embraced the challenge to allow you to enjoy more experiences in your short little life.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have left you half dressed lying on your bed to attend to your sister,  
Or instead would I have dressed and made you comfortable before leaving the room.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have left you in the shopping aisle as I went about my browsing,  
Or instead would I have included you, asking your opinion even though I knew you could not speak.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have left you alone so often with a DVD, TV or window to look out of,  
Or instead would I have taken more time to lie by your side, hold you close and be your mother and your friend.

If I knew what little time I had  
Would I have pushed you so hard with your therapies to the point of seeing tears in your eyes because 'I wanted' to see results,  
Or instead would I have done enough to keep you going and spent more time doing things 'you' enjoyed.

If only I knew what little time I had.  
If only I could grasp that precious time back.  
To have positive thoughts, to read that book, to take you out, to attend to you first, to include you, to be close to you and to allow you to enjoy more things.

But its too late now, you are no longer here,  
I am left with only empty hours, a lonely void and the forever unanswered question of  
If only I knew what little time I had.

## The Club

*By Bob Wyborn 18/10/06*

I want to tell you about one of the most exclusive clubs that I am aware of on this planet. It is so rare that very few people even know about it. It is not widely publicised nor do you receive invitations to join it, either in the mail or by any other form of solicitation.

It has global membership. You will find fellow members in all nooks and crannies of this universe. It has no age restrictions or colour barrier. Gender is not an issue nor your belief system. It is not a club that

you are asked to join nor would you want others to enlist. The membership is the highest that can be paid. The cost.... the death of your child. The manner of death is not a prerequisite. It has an open exclusivity about its qualifications.

Its members are drawn from all the walks of life. There are the rich and there are those who are not. Some hold high office and some do not. Life has been kind to some whilst to others not so gentle. There are those whose life experiences have created great wisdom and those who are still on the learning trail. There are atheists and believers. For some these roles have reversed. They range from the very young to those who have lived for many years. Its members are Mums, Dads, Brothers, Sisters and Grandparents.

What is it that you get for the terrible price of your membership?

In the beginning your "dues" simply bring the most intense pain that is imaginable and one the rest of the world does not know or understand; and that is only the start. The mixture of all your emotions in turmoil and chaos produce in you a very bitter dish which is stewed daily by its own almost toxic ingredients. This club appears to have a strange policy in the way that it treats its members.

As the messages of time and experience are slowly shared by other members you come to realise that this club has specific knowledge that is not known by non members. It is really quite like "secret members business." You come to understand that those who have not paid their "subs" quite simply do not understand some eternal truths.

The Club endows you with special knowledge and insight that really changes you forever and disallows a return to your former days. The reality is that whilst you have irrevocably changed; those changes are not all negative and you become privy to some very powerful "Secrets".

You come face to face with your eternal reality and thus an understanding of mortality. You can not have life without death. What is inordinately hard to accept is the order in which it visited your family. You learn from this premature act that you truly know the depth of your love where those outside of your club have not had this test. This knowledge empowers you in your relationships with other family members and society.

You can no longer listen or read a story relating to the death of a child and not feel deeply affected. You really know the profound meaning of John Donne's words that, "no Man is an Island." You are part of the same soil and have an insider's understanding.

Your awareness of the pain of Grief is heightened to a level that produces true cognisance and this will help you in time to be a true friend to other new members. You will come to understand the journey that is Grief and the power of healing that your pain brings you. This great enigma takes some time to resolve.

This self same enigma is what creates the unwanted hurt delivered by those who have no membership. Your pain is not understood and therefore it must be likened to some, oft times, minor experience that the speaker relates to your child. A pet canary is totally dissimilar to a human however; this does not stop the earnest comforter who feels a contribution to your healing is mandatory.

The word love is "sanctified" by the death your child and you are given your special and secret knowledge of this much misused word. You can truly find the depth of your love by the depth of your grief for they are directly related. However the length of your grief is not determined by the length of time with your child. Your attachments vary greatly by vastly different factors and expectations.

Another "Secret" is the law of Perspective. The blinding revelation of what is really important in this world is suddenly made known to you.

You see what you did not know as an eternal truth and it is as if you always had this truth. The darkened glass is now your crystal ball from which you scry as you often cry. The importance of a broken finger

nail or a lost football game resumes is rightful triviality. You “see” reality. The balance of what really is significant in life is placed in your understanding and frees you from the unnecessary distortion of self importance, self pity and blindsidedness.

This can also have the side effect of making you very impatient with those who have not experienced your enlightenment.

Your level of compassion is greatly enhanced and you come to a real understanding of the word “empathy” as opposed to the far less committed term “sympathy.” The Club teaches you the significance and power of feeling with someone as distinct from feeling for someone.

As your membership lengthens your imagination will foster hope; this hope will lead to your healing and recovery. The hope that you do not have to feel that way forever and that grief is not a life sentence. It will become apparent from observation that other members are rediscovering happiness, a sense of purpose, understanding, acceptance and even exhibiting a life full of joy.

The Club will teach you many more secrets; all of which will fashion you into a person of greater substance. Above all it will teach you the awesome power of the human spirit and you will come to realise that there is absolutely nothing on this earth that you can not overcome. The power of the human spirit is almost beyond comprehension and it is the most energising and uplifting piece of reality that the Club bestows.

The question that I ask of those members that have come to discover these secrets is this; “When will you release this information to those that need this knowledge?”

*(Bob is a bereaved Dad whose 11 year old son Brendan died of Adrenoleukodystrophy in 1999. One of his brothers died four months after Brendan and his marriage finished during the very painful experience of his Son's illness. 1999 was a tough year and he discovered that the help he needed was not readily available. He realised that he had a lot of work to do to resolve his grief and the personal growth that was required for him to be a functional and joyful person again. He undertook a journey that encompassed all those areas of his being that needed to be readdressed and he learnt that love and forgiveness are the most powerful forces involved in Healing. His life long passions and commitments are the resolution of Grief, Paediatric Palliative Care, Dying Well (holistically), World Indigenous People, Young People and an abiding passion for all to be able to feel the hand of support when life appears to have deserted them.) Thank You to Bob Wyborn for allowing us to publish his literature. Bob is also a valued member of TCF QLD.*

## Where Does A Father Find Support?

*By Clara Hinton, 18 March 2002*

When child loss occurs, for some reason most of the sympathy expressed is pointed in the direction of the mother of the child. Maybe the feeling is that mothers mourn losses more deeply, or perhaps the reasoning is that fathers are the stronger ones. The reality is that fathers grieve the death of their child too, and need support during this difficult, lonely time.

Because of the differences between men and women, men cry less often and less openly than women. That one fact often attributes to the thinking that men grieve less. That is so incorrect? Men will work through grief in a different way than women, but the pain of losing a child can run just as deep for a father as for a mother.

A husband wants to be the strong supporter of his wife during the painful months following child loss. There comes a time, though, when a man must do his personal grieving. Often a man will pull away from his wife during this time, telling her that it is time to move on in her grief. This can be very hard on a

relationship. Very rarely will a husband and wife grieve together on the same level and time frame.

Because men by nature are the ones who “fix” problems, fathers look at grief as a fixable problem. A man will often withhold his feelings of pain, and will instead work long hours away from home, or he will think of work projects to keep his time occupied. His wife will often interpret this as a lack of genuine caring. There needs to be a much greater understanding among people about the differences in male and female grieving!

Where does a father find support when child loss occurs? Men are not as social as women, and therefore do not seem to need as much social interaction as women. Men also do not seem to like the idea of support groups or counselling as much as women because of the uncomfortable feeling of expressing their deepest emotions to others.

Many men can find it a great support to privately journal their feelings when child loss occurs. What is found to be so difficult for a man to verbalise can often be easily expressed on paper. Journaling thoughts can be a great support to a father during the personal emotional adjustment to child loss.

Something not often talked about is a man’s desire to be sexually intimate with his wife as a means of working through his grief. Many times a father will feel stripped of a portion of his manhood when a child dies, and by expressing himself sexually he can work through some of the deep feelings of loss. A wife can misunderstand this, as she might not at all be ready for sexual intimacy. Husbands and wives need to be aware of their differences in grieving! Sex, to a man, is often a very real, very basic way of expressing his feelings.

Finding a work project can also lend support to a father. Many men have the ability to “build” using a hammer and nails. A father might choose to do something positive such as to build a special photo box or bookshelves that will hold pictures and other remembrances of the child who has died. This “hands on” work is a positive way of working through the grief of child loss.

A father needs support through his grief, but it will often come in ways very different from a woman’s support. Men need to be given permission to grieve in their own way!

*Author of “Silent Grief” <http://www.silentgrief.com/> Article taken from TCF QLD Aug/Sep 04 Newsletter*

## That’s Normal

*Author Unknown*

If you think you’re going insane—that’s normal

If all you do is cry—that’s normal

If you have trouble with most minor decisions—that’s normal

If you can’t taste your food or have any semblance of appetite - that’s normal

If you have feelings of rage, denial and depression—that’s normal

If you find yourself enjoying a funny moment and immediately feel guilty—that’s normal

If your friends dwindle away and you feel like you have the plague—that’s normal

If your blood boils and the hairs in your nose curl when someone tells you it’s God’s will—that’s normal

If you can’t talk about it but you can smash dishes, shred old phone books or kick the garbage bin down the street—that’s normal

If you can share your story, your feelings, with an understanding listener, another bereaved parent—that’s a beginning

If you can get a glimmer of your child’s life, rather than his or her death—that’s wonderful

If you can remember your child’s smile—that’s healing

If you can find your mirrors have become windows and you are able to reach out to other bereaved parents—that’s growing.

*Taken from April/May '98 TCF Qld Newsletter*

## My Photo Album

*By Jeanne Losey Shelbyville, Indiana, Bereavement Magazine Mar/Apr 91*

The photo album of my mind  
Holds treasured thoughts of you,  
And I can almost see again  
The things we used to do.

I hear your voice;  
I see your smile;  
I feel you close to me.  
The photo album of my mind  
Shows how we used to be.

Time may have changed us through the years,  
But I will always find  
You're just as I remember in  
The album of my mind.

And, as I turn page after page,  
Such precious scenes I see.  
The photo album of my mind  
Is very dear to me.

It holds the pictures of our past  
Like reels of film unwind.  
I cherish all those photos in  
The album of my mind.

*Sent in by Joy & John Van Raalte, in memory of their precious son  
Mark Andrew Van Raalte, 29/3/75—2/9/93.  
Brother of Tanya (dec'd) & Karen,  
Uncle of Joshua, Tyler, Georgina & Ella.  
Sadly missed and forever in our hearts.*

## What Is Normal?

*Written by Clara Hinton*

Following a loss, well-meaning friends and family members have often said, "I wish that he/she would act normal again. It's been so long since we've had any fun together. I can't wait until the old person returns." Unfortunately, what most people don't understand is that life will never, ever again be the same for the parents who have lost a child. The fact is that the parents often realise early on, "I forget how to feel normal! I don't even know what normal is anymore!"

When a child dies, no matter what the surrounding circumstances, life as was once known, is turned upside down for a while. Nothing makes much sense. The things that kept life so busy before the death

of the child don't matter anymore. Who cares if the laundry is clean? Who worries about keeping the garage neat? Why bother to think about buying groceries? Food has lost its taste, and there is no energy to cook a meal. For a long time following the death of a child, life seems void and meaningless. Friends and family members find this part of grief particularly disturbing. Others are ready to move forward in life, taking on the mundane routines of living once again. For the parent, though, life will never be viewed quite the same again.

Normal takes on a new meaning to parents who have had a child die. Things such as fine china, fancy furniture, and collectible knick-knacks don't mean anything. It is of no interest to discuss the make and model of the car you are driving. What matters is finding some way to help you get through this time of acceptance and healing.

There is no set of rules for normal living following the loss of a child. Some people would prefer there to be a book of rules. It would make life a lot easier for everyone to have special grief guidelines to follow. Instead, we must learn to accept as normal whatever anyone chooses as his/her way of working through the particular grief of the day. We must each remember that grief is individual, and grief will touch every person just a little bit differently.

Tears. Anger. Frustration. Excessive talking. No talking. Working longer hours. All are normal ways to work through the tremendously difficult emotional swings of child loss. A parent will often think that he/she will never again resume normal living. In a sense, that is correct. Life will never again be the same because losing a child changes the way a parent views life. Grief never leaves. It becomes more gentle, but it never completely goes away.

All of this is not to say that life will never be joyful again. Joy will return, but probably in different ways than you experienced joy before the death of your child. Priorities in life will change. Small things will carry great meaning. A flower will take on the look of a miracle. The blue sky will give a feeling of renewed hope and inspiration. Somewhere deep down inside you will know that your new "normal" is a more simplistic, more abundant way of viewing life.

If you are feeling like you have forgotten what normal is since your child died, you are not alone. Every parent who has experienced child loss goes through a time of questioning. Following the questioning, though, is a renewed sense of self and a new perspective of life. Grief never leaves, and you'll never feel like your old normal self again. But, you will feel hope and joy as you continue on in your journey of healing from the deep, life-changing grief of child loss.

*Adapted from Internet Resource <http://www.silentgrief.com/>*

## Sisters & Brothers

### How Losing A Sibling Really Affects You

*By Sarah Davis*

This is an article I found on the Internet (<http://www.medt.com/-brunerjs/siblingloss.html>) and I personally found it to be of great benefit and found myself feeling the same way. I lost my brother Mark, nearly 16 years ago, but fortunately I had my older sister Tanya and we were able to find comfort in each other and share many stories as we had the same feelings. I too believe that having a surviving sibling to comfort each other, to share and understand the same feelings is the best support. It is like heart to heart counselling, talking to someone who has had the same tragic loss of the same experiences. Unfortunately, in February this year I lost my beautiful sister Tanya to cancer. Prior to her being

diagnosed with the horrendous illness, she was happy and healthy and we had our future mapped out. Now I am faced with being an only child and having no sibling to share my feelings with. I now have to face the future on my own and many of our dreams have been shattered. Not one day goes by that I don't think of my brother or sister and I include them in our lives with my children on a daily basis. I promised my sister that she will never be forgotten and she will always be spoken about everyday with my two children and with her two children. My children talk about 'Uncle Mark' (their uncle, who they never got a chance to know), and 'Aunty Tan' like she has never left us! I am fortunate to have a beautiful friendship with my best friend of whom I've known for 20 years and she was also there for me when my brother died. I do confide in her with how I am feeling as I feel I have no one else and I don't want to burden my parents with the extra grief that I am feeling and don't want them to worry more than they should have to! I hope you find Sarah's article of interest and can help you in some way. I will pull more excerpts out of Sarah's article in future newsletters, so they can be of some help to you. Next newsletter I will touch on Sarah's and other siblings views on Denial and Anger. Take care, until next time, Karen Kirkpatrick (Newsletter Editor).

Not many people realize just how hard it is to lose a sibling. No one who hasn't experienced it can understand how it changes your life and how it really affects you. Everyone needs to talk about their innermost feelings involving their grief. Losing a child is definitely the "worst loss", but losing a sibling has a special grief all in its own.

What do you wish everyone could know about losing a sibling? Because no one who hasn't been there understands how it really affects a person to lose a sibling, this question was asked. The answers were many different things and included are many of them; it was just too important a question to leave much of anything out. You can never know how much your sibling means to you until they're gone. You cannot possibly realize how much influence your sibling has on your day-to-day life or how many small things you love about your sibling until they are no longer in your life. You lose your part of your past and your future as it "should have been" with your sibling, and there's a hole there, an emptiness that will never again be filled. It wasn't "just" a brother or sister, they were a part of us, that one person who has known us from birth until death, and we miss them and grieve for them every day and always will. Siblings are the forgotten griever, but our pain is very real and intense. It doesn't just happen to that other person, the neighbor or a stranger on the news, it can happen to anyone and does. The pain is infinitely worse than any imaginable, and the pain never goes away. Your life is forever changed, the way you see everything in the world is utterly and completely altered, nothing is unaffected. And even though we know that certain things such as looking through pictures, listening to songs, or watching old home videos are going to upset us, we're going to do it anyway because they bring comfort along with the tears. Over all, appreciate and treasure your sibling, never take them for granted, live each day like it could be yours or their last, it very well could be.

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## I'll Light a Candle

I'll light a candle  
for you  
let it burn  
solitary  
in a wind  
of adversity  
watch it flicker  
sputter  
nearly extinguish  
then claw slowly  
back to life  
triumphant.

*Sent in by Gillian Bradshaw*

*"Lighting a candle for my brother, Edward Wayne Moriarty, who lost his fight to terminal cancer on 19/10/05" (This poem first published in 'The Mozzie' poetry Magazine Vol.16 Issue 7, Sept 2008)*

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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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