



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Apr - May 2011



I Stood By Your Bed

I stood by your bed last night, I came to have a peep.
I could see that you were crying, you found it hard to sleep.
I talked to you softly as you brushed away a tear,
"It's me, I haven't left you, I'm well, I'm fine, I'm here."
I was close to you at breakfast, I watched you pour the tea, you were thinking of the many times your hands reached out to me.
I was with you at the shops today, your arms were getting sore. I longed to take your parcels, I wish I could do more.
I was with you at my grave today, you tend it with such care. I want to reassure you, that I'm not lying there.
I walked with you towards the house, as you fumbled for your key. I gently put my hand on you, I smiled and said "it's me."
You looked so very tired, and sank into a chair.
I tried so hard to let you know, that I was standing there.
It's possible for me to be so near you every day.
To say to you with certainty, "I never went away."
You sat there very quietly, then smiled, I think you knew ... in the stillness of that evening, I was very close to you.
The day is over... I smile and watch you yawning and say "goodnight, God bless, I'll see you in the morning."
And when the time is right for you to cross the brief divide, I'll rush across to greet you and we'll stand, side by side.
I have so many things to show you, there is so much for you to see. Be patient, live your journey out ... then come home to be with me.

*Author Unknown
(Submitted by Tanya's loving family)
Tanya Van Raalte 22.5.73—10.2.09*

Grandparent Grief

I am powerlessness. I am helplessness. I am frustration. I sit with her and I cry with her. She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine. I can't help her. I can't reach inside her and take her broken heart. I must watch her suffer day after day.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back. I can't bring Emily back for her. I can't buy her an even better Emily than she had, like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child. I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away. I can't even kiss even a small part of it away. There's no band aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.

There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him. Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when

I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun-loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony. Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better.

Why can't I join her in the aloneness of her grief? As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness.

What can I give her to make her better? A cold, wet cloth will ease the swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears. What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that happy child smile back? Where are the magic words to give her comfort? What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this? He has told me everything else I've needed to know. Where are the answers? I should have them.

I'm the mother.

I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again. I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? this minute? this hour? this day?

I can give her my love and my prayers and my care and my concern. I could give her my life. But even that won't help.

I wrote this piece out of deep feelings of powerlessness. It seemed that no matter what I did, I could not take away my daughter's pain at the death of her 3 year old daughter, Emily. Were that not enough, I was devastated by my own grief at the loss of my precious granddaughter.

I could relate to my daughter's pain. I, too, had lost a child. In 1971 my six year old son, Arthur, was killed by an automobile. At that time there were no support groups. I didn't know how to grieve or that what I was feeling was normal. I thought I was losing my mind. The psychiatrist I saw after Arthur's death reinforced my belief by giving me drugs for my "depression".

I tried to do what people told me to do; count my blessings and be "strong." That meant not talking about Arthur, not crying, and not expressing any other emotions I felt. The result was five years of distorted, prolonged grief which eventually had to be resolved with the help of a professional who had training in bereavement.

When my daughter lost her child -- that very day in the hospital, with Emily growing cold under my hands -- I swore this would not happen to Dorothy. I didn't know how, but I knew I was going to do everything possible to help her. I knew what she had ahead of her.

I was shattered by Emily's death, but my grief lessened sooner than Dorothy's. Since Emily was not my child, I recovered many months ahead of my daughter. What didn't lessen was seeing Dorothy's pain. That continues, at times, even today.

As a parent of a grieving child, you have a unique opportunity to cement a deep and lasting relationship with your child.

*You have the opportunity to walk with your child through the most difficult life experience they will endure.

*You have the opportunity to help your child in a very special way and the bond that forms will never be broken.

It will not be easy, and the process is long and hard. You will feel powerless, frustrated and helpless many times.

But you CAN help!

...by Margaret H. Gerner
www.healingheart.net

If Only Our Children Were Easter Eggs

If only our children were Easter eggs,
Hidden safely in the grass,
We could search for them and pick them up
And hold them within our clasp.
We'd have a heavenly Easter egg hunt,
All with baskets in our hands,
Searching with a broken heart,
Only we can understand.
Oh, look I found your child over here."
"Hey, did anyone find mine?"
They are so beautifully coloured,
And they sparkle and they shine.
These aren't your usual Easter eggs
They each have their own special glow
That comes from way down deep within,
Only a grieving parent would know.
We gather up our special eggs
With excitement all around,
For the gift that we've been given,
For the treasure we have found.
We all now stare with wonderment
At our children that have died.
We want to hold them once again,
And release them from inside.
But we all begin to realise
We have to crack their beautiful shell
The one that makes them sparkle and glow,
The one they have earned so well.
We know we can't destroy their beauty
And take them from their place.
So we give them an understanding kiss
As a tear runs down our face.
One by one we take our baskets
With our beautifully coloured eggs,
And place them gently in the grass
As we turn and walk away.
We look back in amazement
As our eggs begin to sing.
We see them flutter and move about
"look, our eggs all now have wings."
Then the Golden Egg begins to speak,
"Your children are safe with me.
You'll be with them when the time is right,
Together for all eternity."
We stand there in a circle of love,
As we look up to the sky,
Watching our radiant eggs take flight
Knowing our children didn't die.

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Mothers' Day

'Mum, what would you like for Mothers' Day?'
you asked me every year.
'Don't spend your money, just some time,'
was the answer you'd always hear.
So, on this day there you'd be
with a basket of goodies to make lunch for me.

Now all that has changed these last four years,
instead of laughter and joy,
my day now has tears.
Tears for myself, but mostly for you;
there were so many things you still had to do.

For the things you gave me
I can't put a price - your love and your laughter
and all things nice.
My boy, you were special and I was happy to see
You were the thoughtful young man
I always hoped you would be.

So, on this Mothers' Day and amid all the tears
I'll be thinking of you and I'll reflect on those years
that I was lucky to share with my beautiful son
Especially this day when I can say 'I'm Colin's Mum!'

*Sandro Sando, Mother of Colin, only child,
16.8.74—22.7.01 TCF WA*

I've lost two children, I hear myself say,
And the person I'm talking to just turns away.

Now why did I tell them, I don't understand.
It wasn't for sympathy or to get a helping hand.

I just want them to know we've lost something dear.
I want them to know that our children were here.

They left something behind which no one can see.
They made just two people into a family.

So, if I've upset you, I'm sorry as can be.
You'll have to forgive me, I could not resist.

I just wanted you to know that our children did exist.

*Betty Schreiber
TCF, Ashtabula OH. USA*

The History of the founding of The Compassionate Friends in the United Kingdom

On 21st May 1968, our daughter Angela and son Kenneth cycled to school. Kenneth was tragically hit by a council vehicle and swiftly taken to the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. Kenneth was admitted to the intensive care section. The diagnosis was extremely saddening due to Kenneth's head injuries.

Standing around Kenneth's bed, friends and relatives gathered.

In this group there was a young cleric named Reverend Simon Stephens of the Church of England Hospital Administration. He said to us "Can I be of any help—day or night?" We said, "Will you say a prayer for him?" By this time it was clear that a miracle was needed to save Kenneth. During the prayer he said "...and for Billy."

Some things you never forget. These simple three words had, as it unfolded, a significance no one could have foreseen. We said at the time "who is Billy?" Billy Henderson was a twelve year old boy, the eldest son of Joan and Bill Henderson, tragically in the terminal stage of cancer. We didn't know that children died of cancer; it was mostly spoken of as an elderly person's disease.

On this day Simon Stephens placed a small wooden cross into Kenneth's hand. Two days later, on 23rd May, Kenneth died. For three days we had witnessed our beloved son's life ebbing away. Our thoughts were - "How many more sheltered parents, siblings and grandparents, and friends have to suffer like this?" In our grief, we continued to follow the progress of Billy. Sadly Billy died on 26th May, following his courageous fight against the ravages of cancer. Following Billy's funeral, we connected with Joan and Bill Henderson. We were able to speak of our beloved deceased children - other established friends were not supportive and found difficulty in referring to the tragedies. Thus a special friendship based on the death of our two beloved sons, with the understanding and support between the families.

Simon Stephens kept in close contact with the families and asked to meet us again. He explained "When a child in hospital has to undergo an operation or painful procedure, I can pray for the child, for the skill of the surgeons, the nurses and all the other medical staff; but if a child dies, I, like all other ministers, do not have the appropriate words. But you do. It comes naturally to you. "Do you think it would work for others?" "Why wouldn't it?" we replied "Losing a beloved child or children must be like this to everyone. We all need love, comfort, and understanding support.

Simon asked if we would be interested in establishing a family support group for bereaved parents who could help each other. Ultimately approximately twenty invitations were sent to families who had recently lost a child.

On 28th January 1969 the group met in the Nurses Home at the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. We all sadly had a common bond and acknowledged the need for a support group. We conjectured on a name and subsequently titled it "The Society of the Compassionate Friends". The Committee was then formally established: Simon Stephens, Joe Lawley, Betty Rattigan, Bill Henderson, Iris Lawley.

Following this inaugural meeting, we realized medical and religious establishments had no understanding of the enduring effect of grief following the death of a child. Thus the formation of TCF was within our new group acknowledged to support fundamental issues which "professionals" had not previously addressed (or understood).

Following the establishment of the Coventry Group, Simon attended our meetings and supported us with our initial efforts. He seemed to have been given leave of absence from his hospital and religious work and travelled up and down the U.K. helping to establish new groups. We appointed Simon the Founder of TCF UK in recognition of his work and the love and understanding he had displayed to us.

Shortly afterwards Simon had an interview with TIME magazine and was subsequently invited to Florida to meet a group of bereaved parents. Subsequently in 1972, The Compassionate Friends was founded in the USA, followed by Canada, Australia and South Africa. There are now more than thirty countries representing TCF globally.

TCF came into being because of one simple fact; only bereaved parents and their families understand the pain and anguish of losing a beloved child. They are able to help, comfort and love another grieving parent. I subsequently came to recognize what this is ... I call it "The Gift".

With much compassionate love, Joe and Iris Lawley. Mum and Dad of Kenneth who died 23rd May 1968, The Compassionate Friends of UK.

"Those of us who have walked through our grief and found there is a future, are the ones who must meet others in the valley of darkness and bring them to the light."

Canon of All Outer Russai, Dr. Simon Stephens, Founder, The Compassionate Friends.

Sisters and Brothers

Seeking a new identity

When someone has been a part of your life since birth, your identity is based on having them there. They form a part of the field or background from which you live your life, and as such, they are essential. They make up part of the unbroken wholeness that defines who you are. This relates to the concept of birth order.

When the first child is born, he or she develops certain characteristics and talents. Other siblings will most likely choose other characteristics to develop in order to differentiate themselves from each other. The first child may become a star athlete, while the next sibling excels in academics. The siblings support each other by their differences. In doing so, siblings actually loan each other their strengths, and when one of the siblings dies, that strength is lost, and the survivor's identity with it.

It takes time to learn how to live your life again. You have to grow within yourself the parts once carried by your brother or sister. You don't "get" over this as much as "grow through" it.

The loss of a future with your sibling

Not only have you lost the actual person and your relationship with them, but you have lost the part they would have played in your future. You go on to marry, have children, buy a house, succeed or fail, and each event underlines the terrible reality that your brother or sister is not there. Forever after, all events, no matter how wonderful, have a bittersweet flavor.

Anniversary reactions plague the surviving sibling on birthdays or holidays and other special occasions. Bereaved siblings need not be too hasty in making life changes at these times. They may unwittingly be "acting out" the loss unless they are conscious of the date.

www.thisisawar.com/GriefLossSibling.htm

Surviving Adult Siblings: The Forgotten Bereaved

Three months after my brother died, I bumped into a friend I hadn't seen in about six weeks. When she asked how I was doing, I naturally assumed she was concerned about how I was handling the grief. (This particular friend sent me a lovely condolence letter a few days after my brother's death.) When I told her that I was "doing as well as could be expected, considering the circumstances" she looked confused. "What 'circumstances'?" she asked. Feeling somewhat confused myself, I reminded her that my brother died just three months ago. She squeezed my arm and said, "Don't you think it's time to let go of all that stuff and get on with your life?" Having my grief reduced to a pile of "stuff" by someone I thought was a friend was almost more than I could bear; sadly, most grieving people are able to relate similar stories of insensitivity. This lack of compassion for the bereaved is especially commonplace in America, where our attitudes about death, dying and grief mirror our hurry-up, drive-through window culture.

There seems to be a preconceived timetable of grief in this country that tolerates mourning for about six weeks. After that, the message is clear: It's time to move on. But my friend's thoughtless comment actually points to a more complex reality: Not only are we allotted a specific time period for grieving, but there also seems to be an unwritten pecking order of mourners. For example, the death of children, parents, or spouses, are generally considered to be "major losses" (and they surely are!) while the deaths of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and pets are often relegated to the minor leagues by non-grievors. I want to believe that this unspoken ranking system is unconscious, but

experience has taught me otherwise. The truth is, all losses are relative to the mourner. For example, for one person, the loss of a treasured grandparent may be more traumatic for than the loss of a parent. The depth of our grief is directly proportional to the relationship and love we had for the deceased.

In the case of adult sibling grief, a split occurs. The death of a brother or sister in childhood brings condolence, support groups, and books in great abundance. The death of a brother or sister in adulthood, however, is a different story entirely. When an adult sibling dies, surviving siblings are usually cast into the role of caregiver rather than legitimate mourner. Condolences are reserved for the parents, spouse, and surviving children (if there are any), while surviving siblings are instead assigned tasks. In lieu of sympathies, others admonish us to take care of our parents or to look after our deceased sibling's spouse or children. And, when a condolence is given, it's usually in form of an inquiry about "legitimate grievers": "Your brother/sister died? How awful! How are your parents?" Few condolers seem to recognize the fact that we've experienced a profound loss, too.

The sibling relationship is more complex than nearly any other, a mixture of affection and ambivalence, camaraderie and competition. Aside from our parents, there is no one else on earth who knows us better, because like our parents, our brothers and sisters have been beside us from the very beginning. Unlike our parents, however, our siblings are people we assume will be part of our lives for the rest of our lives. In terms of the span of time, the intimacy, and the shared experience of childhood, no other relationship rivals the connection we have with our adult brothers or sisters. From schoolyard bullies to teenage broken hearts, from careers to marriage to dreams unfulfilled, our siblings have been there through it all, life-partners in our journey through time. They are the keepers of secrets, perennial rivals for our parents' affections, and a secure and familiar constant in an often precarious and uncertain world. Why then, are surviving siblings often passed over and even ignored in the grief process, not only by condolers, but also by the so-called grief professionals?

As I began to speak more openly about this topic, I found that there were countless cases of unresolved grief among other surviving siblings. As one bereaved sibling put it: "How could I go into mourning when I had my brother's wife and children to take care of, not to mention my parents? I can't recall anyone ever asking me how I felt during that time." I soon reached the conclusion that adult sibling bereavement is what psychologists call a disenfranchised loss, which, in simple terms means that society fails to classify our mourning as a legitimate loss. After my brother's death, I felt a special need to connect with other siblings who might understand my grief. I hoped that they could offer me some insight, some comfort, some practical advice that might help me through those first difficult weeks and months. I wondered: How had they survived this? There must be some special formula, some secret that I didn't know about. But, much to my dismay, I soon found that there was very little information and virtually no support groups in place to aid the nearly 4.2 million adults who experience the death of a brother or sister each year.

Almost all the information concerning sibling loss was geared almost exclusively towards young children. Not that those resources aren't necessary and pertinent (losing a sibling at any age is a devastating event), but I recall asking myself: "Are we suddenly expected to stop caring for our siblings once we enter adulthood?" After all, the endless resources available to aid youngsters in dealing with the death of a sibling indicate the importance of the sibling relationship in shaping our lives. And why would this initial relationship lose any significance as it ripened into adulthood? Wouldn't it render itself only more important (and certainly more complex) than it had been to start with? Surely there must be others, I reasoned, who felt as I did; that the death of an adult sibling is a profoundly painful, life-changing experience.

As it turned out, I was right. Two years after my brother's death, in an attempt to heal my own battered soul, I started a non-profit web site for bereaved adult siblings. Surviving siblings flocked to the site and, soon, a caring community of bereaved brothers and sisters quickly formed. The web site, www.adultsiblinggrief.com presently attracts over 80,000 visitors per month and our interactive message board receives so many postings, we've had to establish an archival system. The site also has a popular memorial page, weekly chat, and a sizeable compendium of resources.

Three years after the web site was born, my book, *Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies* was released and entered almost immediately into a second printing (since then, it is in its fourth printing). I regularly receive letters of gratitude from both surviving siblings and caring professionals who have searched in vain for resources to aid surviving brothers and

sisters cope with such an overwhelming loss. All of this confirms my initial hunch that surviving siblings are indeed the forgotten bereaved.

During the past ten years, I have been honored to speak with thousands of bereaved brothers and sisters who have helped me to both understand and articulate this often-neglected type of grief. In many ways, I feel as if I have been drafted into a club no one would ever voluntarily join. My fellow club members—my brothers and sisters in grief—travel beside me down a path riddled with potholes and pitfalls. Some navigate the path better than others for their path is well worn. And there are those who embark more tentatively, afraid and uncertain where their journey may take them. I have observed an odd solace and comfort in the company of the “liked bereaved,” unspoken truths we all hold within our hearts. But more than anything, my kindred siblings have taught me that when we reach out to others, we heal a little, too.

(Source: http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Surviving_Adult_Siblings_The_Forgotten_Bereaved.html)

Dr TJ Wray has written two books: 'Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies' (2003, Random House/Three Rivers Press) and 'Grief Dreams: How They Help Heal Us After the Death of A Loved One' (2005, Wiley). Although the article is titled 'Surviving Adult Siblings' the experiences TJ writes of I believe are also applicable to the experiences of bereaved adolescents and children.

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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