



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) June-July 2011

The final blow...

When does the pain stop?
I ask once again.
No one knows the answer,
There is no scheduled time span.
I wake in the morning,
And put on my actor's face.
No one likes to see the pain,
So I hide it, and show not a trace.
But in the privacy of my room,
I do not have to put on a show.
The pain surfaces,
And the tears begin to flow.
I fall upon my knees,
As I shudder and I cry.
It just doesn't seem fair
That you had to die.
Your life was so full,
Of love, smiles, and laughter.
We always thought you would be here,
We never thought of the ever after.
Everyone who saw you,
Could tell you were something great.
No one thought an early death,
Would be your final fate.
So when you walked out that door,
I smiled and let you go.
I never once suspected,
The impending deathly blow.
Now others tell me
That it just had to be.
But it doesn't matter what others say,
I just want you here with me.

*by Angela Belcher
Taken from TCF ACT & Queanbeyan Newsletter*

Putting the pieces together again

On May 30, 2003 my seventeen year old son, Brandon was killed in a single car wreck. He and his girlfriend Leah had gone to see the movie "Bruce Almighty" (and to this day, I still haven't seen it). After the movie they went to Milo's and got a quick bite to eat. Witnesses to the accident said they believed Brandon fell asleep.

When the officer told me that Brandon wouldn't be coming home, I went numb. My mind went into automatic. I had clothes on the couch that needed to be folded before my house was flooded with family and friends. I had to wake Savanna, Brandon's sister, and tell her before she was awakened by all the voices that would soon invade our home. I am so thankful for the numbness and the shock; I don't think I could have made it in the hours, days and weeks to follow without it.

After a few weeks everyone went back to their lives. The phone calls all but stopped and the cards that numbered in the hundreds trickled to only a few. That's when I realized my boy was dead, he would never again holler "Maw" from the top of the stairs. He would never tell me to look at his guns (that's what he called his arm muscles) and to kiss them (and I would). I would never see that grin on his face that went to one side more than the other.

That's when my next emotion hit and it hit hard, ANGER. Anger became my friend, I didn't go anywhere without it. It was always with me; I couldn't find my friends at times but anger never left my side. I was angry at myself. I thought as Brandon's mother I should have known that danger awaited him that night and I should have protected him. I was angry at Brandon who got behind the wheel of the car when he was too tired to drive. I was even angry at the girl at Milo's who put onions on his hamburger after he had told her to leave them off. But my greatest anger was directed a GOD. To say that for a period I hated God would probably be an understatement. I felt I had done as I was taught; if you ask God to be your savior, live a good life and show compassion to others, God would not fail you. We had our family in church; we picked up the elderly in the church bus every Sunday. We even took them out to eat at times after church. I helped with the children's choir. Now I don't even try to pretend that I am or have ever been perfect. But one thing I do know for sure, I have never done anything so bad that I deserved this.

Why was God picking on me? Religion is supposed to be a comfort in times like these, but it played against me. I really felt that perhaps my whole life had been spent believing in a fairy tale. And to make things worse I would hear people talking about someone who had been near death, who have been given a miracle.

Where was my miracle, why didn't I get one? Anger stayed with me a long time, it was my hardest emotion to gain control over, it did not want to leave. Anger was very comfortable living within me. Brandon's death was NOT a punishment just for me, his death affected many people. God doesn't want his children to be in pain. And I know now that he never left my side. He put people in my life to help survive this tragedy. God is not sitting on his throne deciding who's child will die today, whose will have Down's Syndrome or any other disease. Life is not fair; the good guys don't always win. But one thing I know for sure, on the day I die I will see Brandon's crooked smile and he will say "I have been waiting forever, what took you so long, Maw?"

Fear. The first fear I had was that I would lose Savanna too. Shortly after Brandon's death another child at the school he attended was killed in a car wreck, her brother was killed in a car wreck the year before, leaving those parents with no surviving children. This only added to my fear, yes it could happen to me. But I couldn't reflect this fear onto Savanna. I worked hard to try and conceal this fear from her. It would be two more years before she would be a licensed driver and when that car left our driveway for the first time without me in it, I really thought that I might go over the edge. I believe that I heard every siren in Tuscanloosa County that day. I don't think I breathed well until I heard the garage door open and she was safely in the house. She's twenty one now; I still worry about her, but I think I worry only like any other parent now.

My greatest fear now is that Brandon will be forgotten. I think every parent who has lost a child feels this way. The kids that he was close to have all grown up. They have gone to college, some have married, some even have children. They are busy living. But just when I think no one remembers no one cares, someone will show up at my house, a card or note will arrive, the phone will ring. Brandon's life did matter. During my grief journey I have often felt HELPLESS. I have so wanted to be an inspiration to

other grieving parents and other people that were looking to me for direction. But it's hard when I felt so lost and so alone. I do want to be very clear, I had a good support system, but I just didn't believe that anyone fully understood my pain, my loss. And even though I wanted to be strong and be that "role model" it would upset me when someone would comment on how well I was doing. Couldn't they see I was dying, struggling to keep my head above water? The emotions just flooded my body day and night.

I am embarrassed to admit that I had a lot of RESENTMENT. Of all my emotions this is the one that shames me the most. I would see parents with their children; maybe the parent wouldn't be paying attention to their child's desperate cry for attention; maybe they said no when I thought they should have said yes. So often I would see a parent lose their temper with their child. I would want to go over and shake them and tell them how lucky they were to have a child, even if they were behaving badly. Every day there seemed to be reports of child abuse, girls having children and abandoning them in garbage bins. It even was hard seeing loving, caring parents, especially mothers with their sons, without having that feeling emerge. I did not; I do not want this to be my life. I was the best mother that I knew how to be, I told Brandon everyday, several times a day that I loved him. I still don't understand why Brandon died; even if I did it wouldn't make it any better. Parents shouldn't have to bury their children.

This journey of grief has seemed so long and has been so hard to travel. But, finally, I feel HOPE. Hope for the future. No I didn't get to see Brandon graduate or get married. I'll never see him hold his children (he would have made the "BEST DADDY EVER"). But I am able to look ahead and not always look behind. I have been able to forgive myself for the things I have felt I should have done different, or better. I have been able to let go of the anger and accept the joy of life. I now can recall the wonderful memories of Brandon; and I don't dwell on his death. I know that the best way to honor Brandon is to live a full life.

The picture is not as beautiful as it once was. But the pieces of my life are coming together. There are some cracks between those pieces but they are getting smaller with time.

The greatest help in my grief journey has been and still continues to be The Compassionate Friends. It is a place where I can say what is on my mind. No one judges me because they too have traveled this road. I will admit I still go to the dark places, but it's just for a quick visit, never for a long stay.

*By Joanna Jacobs, Alabama, USA
TCF TUSCALOOSA*

In loving memory of Andrew Joseph Caltabiano

On his 9th Anniversary

Lovingly written by his mother Vera Caltabiano

If only they knew that when I speak of him I am not denying his death but keeping his memory alive. He was a huge part of my life for 31 years and a much loved and very important member of our family. This memory can not be put aside for those who feel uncomfortable with my grief.

If only they knew that when I am alone I constantly talk to my beloved son. I cry for what I have lost, for what he meant to me and for a future cut short. Oh how I miss that beautiful smile and his presence in my life. I know that I have to slowly come to terms with this loss as I have no other choice.

If only they knew the feeling of deep loss and emptiness that pervades my soul, the dreaming of what could have been. The deep pain and dull ache that is with me constantly, hidden by the perfect mask is something that I bear with pride.

If only they knew what it's like to lose part of your being, to feel the pain tugging at your heartstrings. I wear my grief as a badge of honour for the great love I feel for the one who is no longer with me in flesh but is buried in the very fabric of my life. I know that I will find true peace and tranquillity when I am reunited with my much loved and much missed son. Till then I will try to walk this earth with understanding and compassion and will try to listen with my heart as well as my mind.

In the words of Saint Francis:

"It is in giving that we receive and it is in dying that we are born to everlasting life."

Reflection of a step parent

I watched my mate go through pure hell. And I felt helpless, useless and sometimes ... invisible. Other times—I stood strong while bearing the brunt of my love's anger that lashed out at the world - as an angry God would open the heavens with roaring thunder and lightning. I was accused of not understanding and surely ... I could not.

I felt heavy with pain for my stepchild, the one I took as my own. I grieved for the good times we had together, the tugs at my heart that always pierced through any resentments.

The guilt weighed heavily on my shoulders for the times we didn't communicate and I wondered if ... I could have made it better.

At the funeral home, I felt a pang of .. Yes .. Jealousy toward the natural parent of my beloved stepchild, knowing that they and my mate shared a private room from the past that I could never, ever, enter.

Life must go on ... this day-to-day existence, but things are different now.

I offer my support as I see eyes staring off into a distant land. I hold a hand and kiss away the teardrops.

With an added sorrow, I wonder if my love will return to me or stay in that far-off land ... forever. For deep in my heart I know that this tragedy will bring us closer together or tear us completely apart.

Peggi Hull

(Taken from TCF SA Apri/May 1998)

Writing Your child's story

The possibility of forgetting even the smallest detail of our child's life is a fear most of us have. In truth, over the months and years many of these details do dim. Writing them down is a way to keep from losing these memories. This way we will not only have a permanent remembrance of our child for ourselves, but this will be a legacy for the brothers and sisters, family members and friends. Here are some suggestions:

- Write in a spiral notebook or in any place you are sure that what you write will not get lost.
- Begin at the beginning. Write all the details of your child's life from his or her birth through the death day.
- Use your child's pictures to help remind you of occasions and happenings over the years
- Ask friends and relatives to tell you anything they remember about your child. (This may make them a little uncomfortable at first, but let them know how important it is to you). Also write any thoughts and feelings you remember having at that time.
- Record the bad things your child did and said in his or her life as well as the good things. (It is important to write both so we can remember them as real persons).
- Write about your child's death. Record as many details surrounding it as you care to retell.
- Write about the days before the burial/cremation, funeral, the days after, two weeks, a month and so on.
- Record how others helped.
- Write a letter to your child. Include:
 - What I wish I had said to you
 - What I wish I had done
 - What I wish you would have done
 - What I wish I could ask you
 - What I wish I hadn't said to you
 - What I wish I had not done
 - What I wish you had not done
 - What I would like to tell you
- Pour out your feelings to your child. Tell him or her of your anger, your guilt. Tell your child how much you loved him or her. Tell your child GOODBYE.
- Don't worry about whether you write well or not. Don't worry about form or grammar. Just write.

- Keep your notebook handy. Write anytime you feel you want to say something to him or her or when you remember some detail that suddenly comes into your mind. The many times you have trouble sleeping, write down the things that keep coming into your mind.

Writing about your child or to your child will be emotional. It will probably make you cry. Don't let this stop you. Crying can be extremely helpful in releasing your tensions and will help you with your grief work.

REMEMBER - WRITING IS JUST TALKING.... WRITTEN DOWN.

*By Margaret Gerner
TCF St Louis, MO*

Grief and the single parent

The death of a child is an unanticipated, shocking, devastating event in any family. In the single parent home, the death of a child or children can be more difficult than in the two parent home. Families have a difficult enough time coping with this life passage without the added burden of making arrangements and paying expenses. When adults have gone through a life crisis like divorce, the stress of dealing with the necessary arrangements presents another barrier on the long road of restructuring the single's life. We may be on speaking terms with the ex-spouse and that is helpful to a point. Those who are not on speaking terms are faced with even greater stress.

The emotional ties that at one time connected us to this lost child are no longer present, yet to many it points to the hurt of the past. Survivors search for something or someone to blame. Widows / widowers are confronted with compounded grief. Unfortunately, most of us do not get through life with only one crisis. Dealing with the past rekindles the hurts of the past. As parents, we would be well advised by the legal system and counselors to make an effort to be amicable and/or courteous to the ex-spouse; papers must be signed.

Grandparents, siblings, relatives and friends are also grieving. We must deal with them all. Who can our remaining children turn to if not us for guidance through these crises? If you have a companion who has suffered this loss, be patient. If you are the parent who has lost a child, ask your companion to be patient with you. The grief process is longer than we knew it would be.

To the non-bereaved parent, the grief process is longer than you can know. This life passage is not something we want for any of you. The death of a marriage is not comparable to the death of a child. Often the widow / widower or the divorced person may remarry. The loss of a child is not a void which can be filled. There are entirely different emotions to be dealt with. Many of us survive but will forever have emotional scars. Stand by us and we will be forever grateful.

*by Jacque Stockhausen, TCF St. Louis, MO
(Taken from TCF NSW April/May 2004 Newsletter)*

Sisters and Brothers

Sibling loss – a personal perspective

I can still remember the call that told me my younger brother was dead. It was from my grandmother. Funnily enough I'd been contemplating that my grandparents were getting old and that I needed to prepare myself for their death. I never expected that I would receive a call from them to tell me that my brother had crashed his car into a lamp post on the way home from a concert and was killed immediately. He was 17 – I was 22.

The death of a sibling is strange. Everyone asks how your parents and their partner are but everyone seems to forget about you. It's as if you are not important. Your role is there to provide support to everyone else. Somehow it didn't surprise me when I went looking for information on the internet and found that siblings were known as the "forgotten mourners".

The relationship between siblings is unique. There is no-one else in the world that you have such a love-hate relationship with. I know that I would curse my brother harshly but if anyone else did, then I would attack them for it. Siblings have a right that no-one else has. It means that you can show your worst to them and know that they will still forgive you afterwards and speak to you like nothing was wrong.

Some people attribute this gift to parents too. Yet it is different. As a sibling you are allowed to know hidden activities, beliefs, attitudes and dreams that are never shared with parents. As your sibling grows older this perspective can be transferred to partners but siblings seem to share the most information.

When you lose a sibling you also lose your identity. Your sibling has always been part of your life. They have helped define who you are and your role within the family. It leads you to question who you are and what your life purpose is.

If you are younger like myself, you also lose the chance to develop a relationship based on friendship with someone who has known you their whole life. I know that my relationship with my brother was changing as he died. Although he was my younger brother, his wisdom at times made him appear to be my older brother. I was grateful for someone who was looking out for me. And I was so angry that this had been taken away from me. I was also angry that I would never see him get married, have children or grow old so I could tease him about how ugly he was getting.

Your sibling is also your peer so it leads you to question your own mortality. It also leads you to question why them and not me. In my attempt to make sense of this question I moved into the realm of helping others affected by loss transform grief, find peace and feel more positive about the future. It was my way of justifying my brother's death.

It's now been over 8 years since my brother died and I am at peace with it. It's ok that I'll never fight with him again or hug and make up. It's ok that I'll never know what man he would have grown into. I still think about him every day and I talk to him a lot. I've created a new relationship with him that continues on after death. After all, he is my brother and always will be. Not even death can take that away from me.

Author's Bio

Tabitha Jayne is a professional grief and loss transformation coach that helps people transform grief, find peace and feel more positive about the future so that they can create happier, healthier, more meaningful lives as tributes to their loved ones. Find out more at <http://www.tabithajayne.com>.

by Tabitha Jayne

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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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