

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

*For bereaved families and the people who care about them,
following the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild.*

Winter 2022



***The
Compassionate
Friends***
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

I Can Hold My Suffering

I sit by the shoreline and watch the birds for a long time.

*A strong breeze pushes in from a new direction.
The birds take one step, suddenly rise,
turn with their backs to the wind,
and lift up as the currents beckon them.*

*My thoughts flow back to an earlier time.
I was comforting my daughter by her bedside,
as I had done for nearly one year.*

*Then, one summer afternoon,
after she had held on for as long as she could,
she shifted,
turned from this world,
and lifted away in the wind.*

I sat alone shaking for a long, long time.

*The seasons changed and I robotically followed them.
I felt the sting of the sand on my skin;
I felt the harsh November winds;
I felt the snow curled under me.*

*And slowly I changed as the seasons did.
I learned to live through each time,
through each cool night, and the bitter cold,
and through the warm, gentle rains.*

*Each season has a different beauty
that does not escape me.
I appreciate the glorious moments,
and now, I can hold my suffering.*

- © Facing Into the Wind by Faith F. Wilcox



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Entering a New Year

As we begin a new year and think about the one ending, we often assess what went well and what we want to change in the coming year. Depending on the length of time we've been bereaved, it may be hard to identify much that was positive about our year, and painful feelings may be the most prominent ones as we start another year without our loved one.

Grief and profound loss, like that of a child, grandchild, or sibling, change us in many small and large ways. It can be easy to identify the ways in which we are forever different that we never would have chosen. For example, it might feel hard to be open and let new people into our lives. We may have difficulty trusting ourselves or the greater world around us. Our physical health may be worse with struggles of poor sleep, higher stress, and unhealthy coping techniques.

There are positive ways that we are changed as well even though those might not be as easily recognizable. Perhaps we stress a lot less over small things than we used to. We may focus on ensuring that our time spent with others is more meaningful and less concentrated on superficial things. Appreciation and gratitude may be new practices as we acknowledge the people and things around us that mean even more.

Deeply grieving and journeying through loss require more of us than we could have imagined. Honoring whom we've become through this process and how far we have come is important. This self-awareness and acknowledgment may not be what's most apparent amid the pain and longing for our son, daughter, sister, brother, or grandchild. If it's too early in grief for much to be evident, recognizing all that you've survived and how you've managed through the seemingly impossible is beneficial.

How will you honor the person you've become through your experience of loss as this year closes and a new one begins? May the words and sentiments shared throughout this edition by others navigating their path through grief help you gently enter the new year.

Warmly,

Shari O'Loughlin, MBA, CPC
CEO
The Compassionate Friends

The Holidays are Near ...

For many, there will be an unfamiliar sadness, perhaps a heavy weight, for some a reminder of obvious absence. This is a new place we are in without our loved one. I hope that gentle encounters will greet you throughout the busyness, excitement, intimate, and special moments of the season. I hope that we make time to hold tight to what settles the heart, to hold tight to a presence that yet remains even in absence. May we feel strong enough to hold love in new, unrestricted space.

May we look for peace, strength, and courage in unexpected encounters. In the places of support—speak your loved one's name and remember what captures the fullness and simplicity of your shared love.

When quiet tears flow; reassure yourself that it is okay. Find occasions to celebrate their life—no matter how young, no matter how fragile, how imperfect, complicated, innocent, delicate, strong, or strong-willed—find occasions to honor their life. Give yourself permission to take periodic pauses, to reflect, to rest.

May we find moments to possibly laugh without guilt—laughter can partner with pain on the grief journey. Sometimes laughter can override pain, or momentarily dismantle the grip of pain. Encourage others who are new grief travelers—who may find the grief period, and the season too difficult to walk through alone.

I wish for you, I wish for me—glimpses, traces of growth and recognizable, evolving hope.

May we find what is essential, as we move beyond where we are and what we understand.

Wishing you tenderness during this season.

- Pamela Hagens, Samuel's Steady
Honoring, celebrating and remembering all those who now occupy beautiful heart space.

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

To help us cope during the holidays, we remind ourselves that because our lives are now different with the physical absence of our daughter Naomi, it's perfectly fine if our approach to the holidays is different too. We need to be gentle with ourselves and do only that which feels okay to us. If that means skipping decorations or passing on get-togethers, then so be it. We also try to extend grace to family and friends who say or do things that are hurtful because we know they don't fully understand. We just try to grant loving-kindness to others—and ourselves.

Judy and Nate McClendon Naomi's Mom and Dad

Limp Stockings and Empty Chairs

by Elizabeth Brady



The holiday season after a loved one dies is exhausting. It is exhausting because the poignancy of each ornament, stocking, favorite dessert, and Christmas tree farm outing, crystallizes the pain of their absence and their continued presence in relentlessly concrete, visible ways from Halloween through the New Year.

How we live into this tension, honoring their presence and grieving their absence, is the ongoing, organic, at times sloppy, endless work of the bereaved. It is not easy to do.

As my family and I approach the 10th holiday season without our son, Mack, who died suddenly on New Year's Eve 2012, two weeks shy of his ninth birthday, I would like to share a few practices that seem to help each of us, though in different ways.

A Stack of Permission Slips

We have heard it a million times: everyone grieves differently. This is true, but it is very annoying.

It is annoying because I have had to learn to be patient with my husband, C, in ways that I would never have before

Mack died. And, of course, he with me. The same moments truly do hit us differently and it still takes me by surprise. We have learned to give one another space, "I'm just feeling the feels," we say to one another to give permission to feel what the other may not feel without question or judgement.

The first Christmas after Mack died, in 2013, we continued our tradition of cutting a fresh tree and putting it up in the family room. While C and Mack's big sister, Iz, wrestled with the tree lights, I hung the stockings above the fireplace and decorated the mantel.

Tucked inside Mack's stocking was a miniature stocking for Fiona who was his dwarf hamster. Mack had written Fi-Fi, her nickname, in marker across the top of the mini stocking and drawn a picture of her as well as he could with a Sharpie.

"That's supposed to be Fi-Fi," Mack explained when he hung it during the Christmas of 2012.

"I got it," I smiled. And smiled again as I hung Fiona's small stocking on the same hook as Mack's and felt him near.

C came up behind me and whispered in my ear. "Mack's stocking looks so sad. It's so empty," he said with tears. "It pains me."

"It pains me, too," I nodded. "But, I don't know how to do this any other way? Iz deserves the best of us."

A friend had shared with me at Mack's wake that his brother had died when he was 15, the same age of Iz at that time, and that his parents essentially died as well. "I lost all of them," he said, "even though my parents were still there." His comment pierced me, stuck with me, and I determined not to lose both children, one to death and the other to my grief. C and I had spoken of this many times. I didn't need to say it again. He knew.

"I know, I know. I agree. I just hurt," he said.

We still hang Mack and Fiona's stockings alongside ours. And, so that it doesn't look so limp, we encouraged one another to drop mini Legos, Swedish Fish, or fun gifts that remind us of Mack into his stocking throughout the month. Then, on Christmas Day, Iz volunteers to open Mack's stocking and we delight in the little surprises and trinkets that have made their way into his stocking throughout the month. Somehow the visible gifts are an invitation for his joyful presence to be with us.

Plan Ahead

If your child, your parent, or another loved one has died, and this is the first holiday without them, nothing can prepare you for the feeling of gathering around the familiar dining table with an empty chair. But, you can prepare their favorite apple pie.

As awkward as it feels, you want to talk to whomever is hosting ahead of time about how to remember your loved one as you gather for the holidays. You do not want to assume someone else is taking care of it. Or worse, that everyone arrives at the table and realizes the absence of that person has become a giant presence in the room because no one has acknowledged it!

Think of things like favorite desserts, a special nametag, or a candle, as a gentle opening for your loved one to be present with you.

Because Mack was our young son, we were able to step in as his parents and plan his remembrance at family Thanksgivings. We trade off Thanksgiving every other year between my family and my husband's family, and the first Thanksgiving after Mack's death happened to be with my family. I am the eldest of four, so Mack and Iz had six young cousins at that time - three more have been born since he

died. We supplied balloons and markers and invited each family member to write a note to Mack, or draw a picture, on the balloon before blowing them up with helium and tying them together to the back of a dining chair as a way to include Mack and allow space to speak of him in a light-hearted way.

Since that first year without Mack, I still send a note to my parents and each of my siblings ahead of time to share the plans so that everyone is aware and there are no surprises. The whole family is supportive - "just tell us what you want us to do!" has been the response. Now, remembering Mack has become a part of the Thanksgiving tradition, even for the younger cousins he never met in person. We offer the opportunity and materials, but participation is not required, and not everyone does.

Put the Mental Abacus Away

It is hard, but important, to remember that grief is as unique to each person as their personality and giving permission for each family member to respond, or not, as and when they choose is a gift of generosity. Everyone at the table has passed through a threshold into a new terrain and learning how to live into life after the death of someone takes time and many permission slips.

Added to the death of your family member, everyone brings other losses to the table, some known and some unknown to those gathered. It helps for each of us to put the mental abacus away, to resist the urge to weigh and measure one another.

Above all, give yourself permission to remember and celebrate your loved one! There may be some members of the family who are strangely silent and disapproving of your ideas. You do not need to wait for permission to remember someone you love.

Bake the pie, light the candle, buy the gift, hang the stocking, make a donation in their name, cry sloppy tears, and laugh out loud at an outrageous card that you definitely would have given them were they still here, and buy it anyway!

Truly, truly, love does not die. Their absence is painful and their presence is endless love.

Elizabeth son Mack died suddenly on New Year's Eve 2012. Elizabeth teaches at Penn State and her essays on learning to live with loss can be read on Open to Hope, Modern Loss, and Mackbrady.com. She has participated on the panel "A Flower Picked Too Soon" at several national TCF conferences, including Houston in August 2022. Elizabeth served on the content advisory board for the Public Television documentary "Speaking Grief" that seeks to help us all get better at grief. (speakinggrief.org)



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Struggling to Reclaim Christmas

by Dennis Apple

The first Christmas after the death of our son, I was living in the fog of grief. Even though his death happened ten months earlier, I was still reeling from the shock of having lost him suddenly.

When Denny died, I was serving as one of the staff pastors in a large church, just south of Kansas City. While others in our congregation were excited about the special Advent services, I was sinking lower into the dark hole of unbelief and doubt. Let me explain.

It will soon be thirty-two years since it happened, but I can easily recall the exact moment when I found the body of our eighteen-year-old son. We were planning to go on a ski trip with several other friends. Suitcases were half packed and we were anticipating three days of fun-filled excitement in the Colorado mountains. However, it all changed in a split second when our lives were shattered by his death. He had been diagnosed with “mono” just two days prior and given meds to help with his pain. We learned later that he had an allergic reaction to the narcotic in one of the meds. His death certificate simply describes the cause of death as, “Complications from Mono.”

In those first moments after I discovered his body, I desperately tried to resuscitate him, but I knew he was gone.

I recall the very first words that came screaming out of my throat, “Oh God, this isn’t supposed to happen to me.” Those words revealed the faith and attitude that I held about God, up until that fateful moment when I found him... dead!

I have been a pastor all my life and, prior to our son’s death, felt that if I prayed and asked God for protection over my family, my prayers would be honored. In other words, I felt that I had a free pass, given to me, straight from God. I was on God’s side, a pastor. I felt as though I was living a charmed life, free from the disasters that struck other families.

After Denny’s death, the church surrounded us with overwhelming expressions of support and love. Our son’s funeral was held in the same church where I had served for so many years. Even to this day, I feel in debt to them for the way they helped us as we experienced the worst. Two weeks after the funeral, I tried returning to my pastoral responsibilities. Looking back, I realize it was too soon.

It was about six weeks after Denny’s death, and I was alone in my office. Overcome with grief, I screamed out, “Oh God, why didn’t you step in and save my son? Why didn’t you alert me or wake me up so that I could take him to the

emergency room? Why, Why, Why? I had the strongest urge to pick up my desk and hurl it through the window. I was dripping with adrenaline, raging against God. The rage didn’t stop.

I often heard parishioners tell stories of how their guardian angels spared them from an awful accident. Hearing their stories only intensified my anger but I felt I could tell no one. As the days continued, my anger turned to indifference toward God. I reasoned that God had ignored my prayers so now I was going to ignore him. This may seem strange to many, but I kept on doing what pastors do: weddings, funerals, teaching classes, counseling but inside, I was questioning the very existence of God. The rhythm of my week was to also visit the sick in hospitals. I can easily recall those moments when I prayed for a patient and then, following the prayer, walked out of their room thinking, “I might as well be praying to the Easter bunny or tooth fairy. God doesn’t care about that sick person, and he certainly doesn’t care about me and my family.”

Soon after the initial shock wore off, my personal spiritual practices went away. I didn’t read my Bible or other spiritual books. I didn’t pray as I had done formerly. I was still trying to help others while I could be best described as a closet atheist. All the things I had previously thought about prayer, God, and God’s guidance and protection over my life were being brought into question. These thoughts were swirling around in my mind as I continued in my pastoral role. No doubt the members of the congregation thought I was doing well and gaining closure over my son’s death. I wasn’t. Instead, I was walking around with a gnawing question about the very existence of God. While I continued in the role of pastor, in my mind, I was hanging out near the backdoor of my faith, thinking seriously about the existence of God, the meaning of life and how I should live into the future. I pondered these questions for years.

While I was still trudging along through those early years with my questions, I discovered The Compassionate Friends. I read the Credo carefully and was pleased when, included in their statement, were these words, “Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.” I settled into a support group and began to realize that a TCF circle was a place where an atheist could sit next to a religious fundamentalist, and both would be safe. Both could share the deep sorrow over the loss of their child, grandchild, or sibling. We could even talk about our spiritual struggles. At first, I was

reluctant to let others know about my doubts. Everyone in my group knew I was a pastor, and I certainly didn’t want to be the cause of anyone losing faith. However, I soon learned that others had similar doubts and that it was okay to share our thoughts with one another. Those moments of honest sharing were the beginnings of a new thing that was stirring in my own soul.

I cannot fully explain here how my attitude toward God has changed through the years. However, I know that, at some point in my journey, I came to a fork in the road where I decided to embrace the deep mystery of God and to try once again to follow the teachings of Jesus. Even though I still have doubts and questions, I now live with the hope that one day, I will understand more.

Shortly before our son died, he was active with the mission efforts of our church and was on a team that went to the poorest parts of Kansas City to feed the homeless. Later, he wrote about that experience and said, “this world is not a good place for a person to be alone.” He understood that the true meaning of Christmas is found in the gift of caring for one another, especially in times of great need.

Getting back to the TCF support groups, when we pull up a chair into the circle of our TCF friends and give careful attention to their stories, we are giving a special gift, a safe space where each person can share, without judgment. It is a “Christmas” moment when members of a support group share their grief, knowing that others in the group are bearing witness to their story. Then, after the story is told and the tears are dried, to watch the relief wash over their face as they begin to breathe again.

It took many years for me to experience the joy of Christmas again. However, I have come to see that one of the best gifts I can give to a grieving parent, grandparent, or sibling, is to listen to their story, cry with them, and offer hugs. It may cost me something but when I do it, I experience the true meaning of Christmas.

Dennis Apple is co-leader of the Johnson County TCF group, and also serves as a staff pastor at The Church of The Resurrection in Leewood, KS. He facilitates a weekly online support group for bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. He is a bereaved father who lost his son, Denny, in 1991. He is also the author of two books: Life After the Death of My Son and Runaway Grieving. He is a frequent workshop presenter at the national TCF gatherings. Dennis and his wife, Buelah live in Olathe, KS. They have one son, Andrew, who lives with his wife, Amber, in Seattle, WA.



An Open Letter to Grandparents

by David Dieterle

Dear Grandparents,

We grandparents are put into the unenviable double role with the death of a grandchild. Not only do we lose a grandchild, but we find ourselves in the helpless position of watching our children grieve the loss of their child. Several of the challenges with which we are faced as bereaved grandparents include communicating with our children, being a good listener (often very hard for us grandpas), and trying to understand our roles with our children, other family members, and friends as we face being strong for our children yet giving ourselves room for our grieving process.

As grandparents, one of our greatest challenges is asking 'why' did such a tragedy happen to our family. As the family matriarchs and patriarchs, in our minds we are the ones who are supposed to die first. Not our children, and most definitely not our grandchildren. The death of a grandchild goes directly against everything we consider the natural order of our family's life. The natural order is for us as the matriarchs and patriarchs to go first. Yet here we are faced with the reality of a grandchild's death before ours. If you are asking 'why' or more specifically 'why not me' (as I did), you are a normal and loving grandparent.

As grandparents, we also must deal with what I call the double whammy of grief. All our grandchildren are very special to us. Each one is uniquely blessed to touch us in a way no other child does, not even the other grandchildren. My first whammy was the loss of that grandchild's uniqueness in our heart and our life. My dear BB (our loving nickname for Briellynn Bullard) died within 72 hours of the diagnosis of her cancer. The hole in my life and heart was sudden. BB's uniqueness is gone. That is an emptiness we will never refill. No matter the time it takes, grandma and grandpa, the hole in your heart and life is sudden. Give yourself time to process and grieve in your own way and time.

The second whammy is the grief and helplessness in comforting our children, the parents of our lost grandchild. We as parents have devoted our lives to the comfort and best for our children. Suddenly we are thrust into a position in which we are very unfamiliar. We are helpless in our ability to comfort our children. Stay involved with your children but give them space to grieve in their ways. Process their grief as you process your own.

In our position as leaders of the family it is important to remember that all family members will grieve differently.

We grieve differently than our children (parents) who grieve differently than any siblings (other grandchildren). Remember there are different ways to grieve. Some will grieve by being quiet while others will keep busy occupying themselves with work or hobbies. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Give your family members space and allow various ways of grief.

Always remember there is also no timetable for grief. Some family members will take time, some a very long time. Grief has no timetable. Grandparents, don't try and push your other family members to adhere to your, or any others, timetable. Grief does not tell time. Grief does not own a clock or calendar. Grief has no timetable for anyone.

I mentioned this earlier to you but feel it is worth mentioning once again before closing my letter. Be careful you get so concerned and involved in your children's grieving you forget your own grief. This can be especially difficult for grandpas. It definitely was for me. We grandpas want to fix things, especially those of you of my generation. Please don't forget you, grandma and grandpa, need to also grieve. Pay attention to your grief. Have someone, or somewhere, to go with your pain and grief. You must take care of yourself, or you won't be able to take care of others.

As I close, remember you most definitely are not alone. The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is indeed your friend. At TCF you are amongst friends who understand your grief and your pain. If your surviving grandchildren view you as their 'hip' grandma or grandpa, you are probably a techie. You can access the TCF Facebook Group/TCF-Loss of a Grandchild to be with other grandparents experiencing the same grief, pain, and issues that come with being a grieving grandparent.

I am concluding my letter with our Grandparent's Credo. Read it often and remember, you are not walking alone.

Grandparent's Credo

We are the grieving grandparents, shepherds of our children and grandchildren's lives. Our grief is two-fold. We seek to comfort our children in the depths of their grief and yet we need the time and space to face our own broken hearts. We have been robbed of the special tender touch a grandparent shares with a grandchild. We have lost a symbol of our immortality. As we walk by our child's side, we both give and draw strength. We reach into their hearts to comfort them. When they reach out to us in their distress, we begin the journey to heal together. Even though at times we feel powerless to help, we continue to be their guardians. We allow traditions to change to accommodate their loss. We support the new ones, which symbolize the small steps on their journey. It is in their healing that our hearts find comfort.

Thank you for reading my letter.

Your grieving grandparent friend,
David

David was a professor of Economics at Walsh (Troy, MI). In 2015, he retired as President and Chief Academic Officer of the Michigan Council on Economic Education. Being a widower, David was aware of the grieving process of losing a spouse. As a widower, watching his daughter and son-in-law go through the grieving of losing a child was much worse as a grieving grandparent. Thankfully, David found The Compassionate Friends. Through TCF's support, his family found a safe place to be themselves, to grieve and move forward on their terms. The Compassionate Friends has helped him through the double grief of grieving for his daughter, son-in-law, and other granddaughter, as well as his own grief of losing his granddaughter.

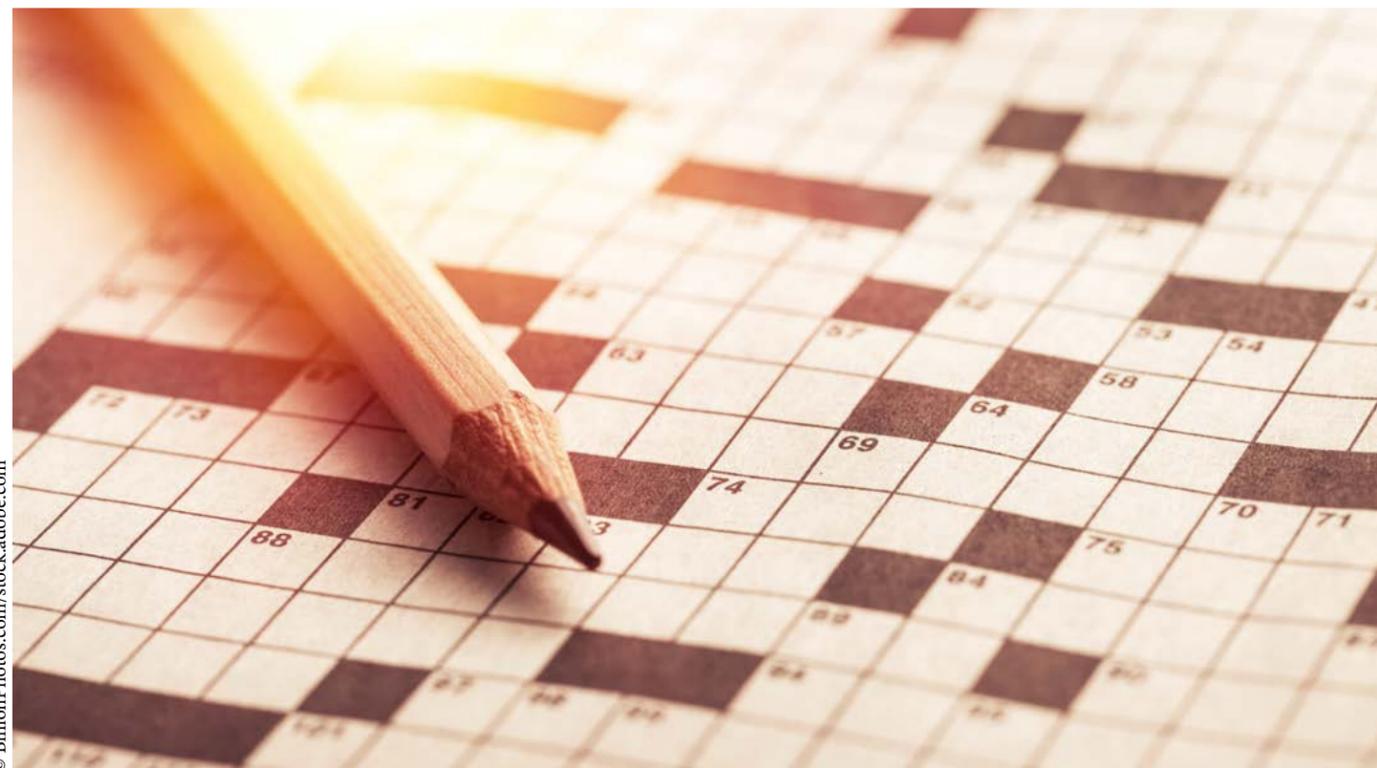
What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

With the holidays coming, my thoughts turn more to our stillborn granddaughter, Natalie and her uncle, Mitch, who died by suicide. I find my joy being surrounded by my other children, in-laws, and grandchildren. We include both in our celebrations by remembering how they each touched our lives. We talk openly about our grief and allow the sadness to be a part of the day. However, we also know they would want to hear the joy and laughter we create.

Marcie Knase, Natalie's Grandma and Mitch's Mom

The Holidays for Bereaved Families Across the Religious and Philosophical Spectrum

by Susan Cyr



The winter holidays are, at least for those of us in the northern hemisphere, a time of cold and dark. We spend more time indoors, and perhaps more time in the quiet of our own minds. The winter holidays – namely, Christmas – are a time of traditions, gathering with people we love, and sharing meals and gifts. Because those holidays have been so special, they are imbued with memories that can be especially painful for bereaved parents. Our deceased children's absence is even more intense. Regardless of our religious beliefs, the Christmas season is particularly painful for those families who've lost a child.

The Christmas tree has its roots in pagan traditions. I have always loved Christmas! I cherish a great deal of family history with Christmas trees. So many associations, from the aluminum tree (and color wheel) my family-of-origin had for a few years in the 1960s to the many years when our

children were young and we hunted for Christmas trees at one particular tree farm.

All our local relatives and our dogs met at our favorite tree farm on a bluff above the Stillaguamish River, with Mount Baker glowing in the winter sunshine, followed by breakfast at Willa's Diner. In other words, we already celebrated Christmas in our way, not associated with Christianity at all.

And then our son died by suicide. Now, Christmas is for me a time of terrible longing for him, a craving for my family to be intact again. I begin dreading The Holidays (Thanksgiving included) in October. Spencer died in October. The Holidays (including Halloween) exaggerate his absence.

Our Christmas ornaments (many of them gifts to Spencer) remain untouched, eight years since he died. They are the

sharp edge of the knife for me, the heart of the love, the history, the memories. He is missing from everything, and it all is imbued with memories, every year, always. So . . . we get through, best we can.

And getting through is different each year. During the pandemic, we were not able to gather with our beloved family as easily as before. And yes, that has added to the pain. Two Christmases we got very small trees. Our living son who was with us, just popped out to the store and got new lights. (Not getting out the ornament boxes!!) And that was all we had.

Some years my husband and I have been utterly alone when our living son and his partner travel to be with her family. Those lonesome holidays, we leave home entirely, retreat to a small hotel. We treat ourselves to Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner in nice restaurants. One Christmas Day we walked a lovely outdoor labyrinth and had the place to ourselves. We always go walking among the tall trees, as nature is a support and a solace.

We keep it small and just try to listen to ourselves and each other about what would be OK this time around, each year. Ok is as good as it gets. We share a few special foods. We drink a lot of coffee and a lot of tea. We always have a fire in the fireplace. We play games and do crossword puzzles out

loud together. We cry. We look at pictures and remember. We sometimes exchange a gift.

We no longer send Christmas cards. We don't go to parties. Since Christmas has never been terribly commercial for our family - and it has never been religious - it is very personal. And because it's very personal, it's very painful and it's very precious. We just try to do things in a simple way and not add to our suffering. And that's all any of us can do: not add cultural or social obligations to our suffering.

As bereaved parents, our hearts are irreparably broken and we owe no one anything more; we have to get through The Holidays by not getting overtired, not forcing a smile or obligatory appearances at gatherings beyond our capacity. We get through best by being true to ourselves, to our grief. While I cry a great deal, simply remembering is all I really want to do.

Susan Cyr and her husband Craig lost their beloved son Spencer to lengthy mental illness. He was 24 years old when he died by suicide in October 2014. Susan and Craig live in Langley, WA, on Whidbey Island. They are part of the TCF group in Kirkland, WA. Susan is a psychotherapist and has a private practice centered on grief counseling for bereaved parents. The Cyrs have one living son - Forrest - who lives on the East Coast. The three of them miss Spencer terribly every day, and especially on milestone days and holidays.

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

As the parents of two sons who no longer live in this world, we know that the holiday season will never again hold the same sparkle, happiness, and excitement it once did. We get through it by doing all we can to share remembrances of Dylan and Gavin as best as we can. Some examples are putting a tree at their grave and one in the local park; being involved in our annual candle lighting service; mentioning their names and memory in our Christmas cards, and also hanging their stockings (in which I write them each an annual letter and add it to each stocking.) We personally feel the extreme emptiness the week in between Christmas and the New Year, and often plan a small trip to remember them more intentionally and get away from home for a bit.

Lora and Dave Krum, Dylan and Gavin's Mom and Dad

Bring Joy Back to the Holidays

by Jason Wendroff-Rawnicki



'Tis the season to be Jolly. Are you kidding me? How can people be walking around all happy and stuff while I am a hot mess of sadness and angst? Even before my sister Lauren died, I would always be mindful of spreading holiday cheer because I knew there were people struggling. Then, I became one of those people.

Lauren's favorite holiday was Halloween. She loved to dress up and go trick-or-treating. My favorite costume of hers was when she dressed up as a California Raisin (I know that ages me). Thinking back, I may have only seen the costume in pictures, but it was incredible. After she died, the holidays were really rough. I just wanted to get through them as fast as possible. Then it dawned on me that I was being selfish. My grief was preventing me from having fun (not just during the holidays) and wanting to get through 1/4 of the year as quickly as possible. I was letting my grief dim my light. If Lauren knew what I was doing, she would slap me upside the head and tell me to snap out of it. She would want me to be happy and rock out amazing costumes.

I had the "What" I wanted to do, I just did not know the "How." Do we try to keep the old holiday traditions the same, or do we do something completely different? For the first few years, my mom, "The Guardian of Thanksgiving," could not bring herself to host like she did in all the years

prior. So, it was pretty obvious that traditions needed to change. My wife and I picked up the task of hosting Thanksgiving. As for Hanukkah, my in-laws picked up the hosting duties. And we still continue to do the Jewish Christmas (Chinese food and a movie - pre-pandemic).

Now after 24 years of holidays without Lauren, these are my Top 10 Tips for my fellow siblings to make the holiday season a little more bearable. And, for the parents with living children, here are some questions you should ask yourself. Use them as conversation starters with your living family members so you can bring the joy back into the holiday season for everyone.

Tips for Sibs

1. Before talking to any family members make sure you know what you want to do to honor your sibling.
2. No is a complete sentence. If family members choose to do something that does not honor your wishes and/or boundaries, respectfully decline the invitation.
3. Have an escape plan. Make sure you drive yourself so you can leave if you need to.
4. Discover a Safe Space to take a break. Find an area you can go (bathrooms are great to get away without any questions being asked) if you need a few minutes to have feelings.

5. Be compassionate to everyone involved. They too are grieving. Some people make the grief about themselves rather than about your sibling. Recognize that it is the way they are coping. No judgment.
6. Do something special and private that is only for you and your sibling. I wear a piece of her jewelry under my shirt. She is with me and no one else knows.
7. Find a Grief Buddy. A friend that has lost a sibling that you can call up at any time when you are struggling. That person will be an important resource to remind you that you are never alone in your grief.
8. Take time to get outside in the sunlight. If you can make it into nature, even better. Sunshine can help lift your mood.
9. Engage in any form of self-care. Take a shower, eat, put on some nice clothing, journal, draw. Do something that will make you feel good.
10. At the end of the day, reflect on what went right and what went sideways. Write down how you will make it different next year.

Questions for Parents

1. Are you being overbearing to your living child/children?
2. Are you neglecting your living child/children?
3. Ask your living child/children if they agree with your answers to 1 and 2?

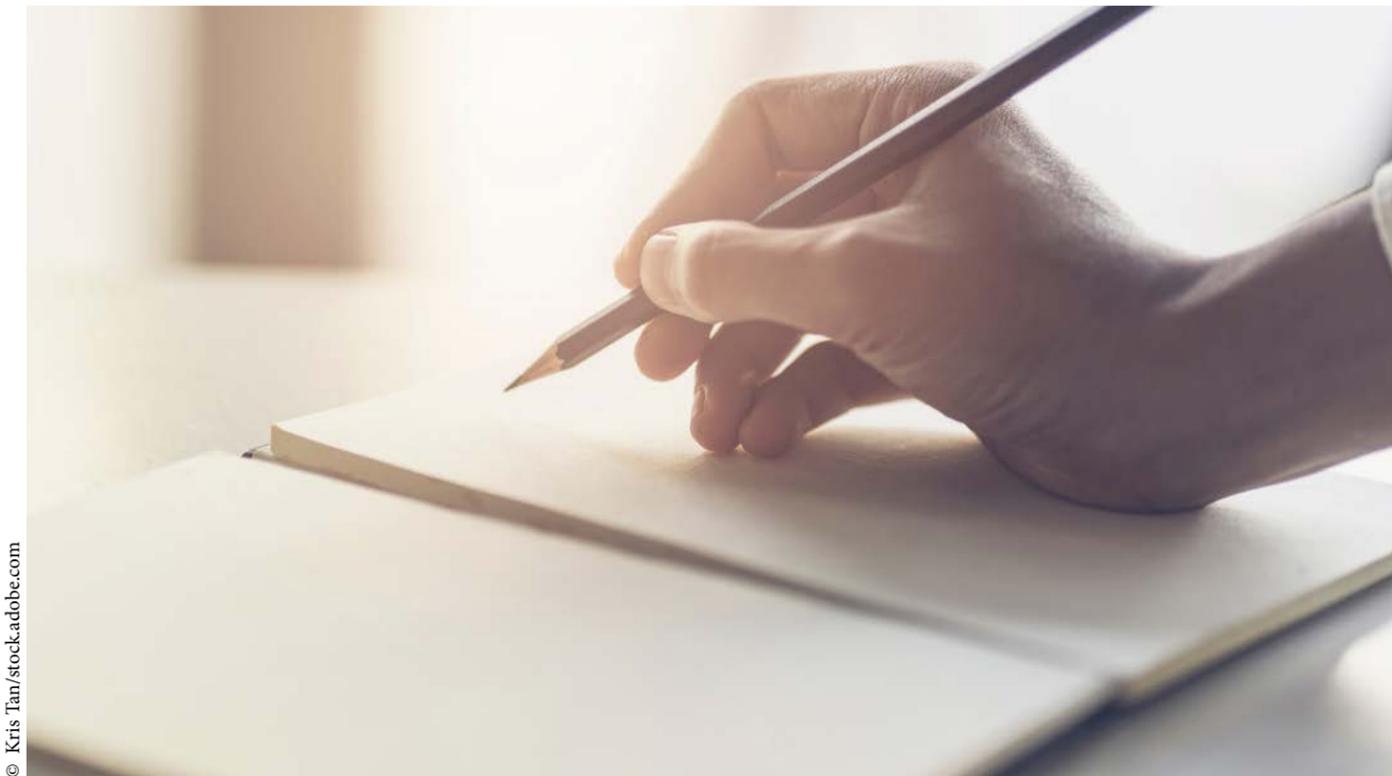
4. What do you want to do to honor your deceased child for the holidays?
5. What does your living child/children want to do to honor their deceased sibling? ASK THEM.
6. How does what you want and what your living child/children want fit into the plans of the extended family? Have a family discussion.
7. Do you have a plan if something triggers you (excuse for leaving a gathering, safe space to take a beat to honor yourself, a way to get home if you need to leave early, etc.)? **Create one before the holidays.**
8. What were your old holiday traditions?
9. Do you try to preserve everything like it was before your child died?
10. Can you create one new tradition?

Jason Wendroff-Rawnicki is a certified yoga educator, MA in psychology and dōTERRA Essential Oil Gold Leader, who is passionate about facilitating transformation and committed to empowering individuals and families with simple and effective tools to naturally manage their mental, emotional, and physical health. In June of 1998, he lost his sister Lauren in a car accident. Knowing that he needed more than talk therapy to deal with his grief, Jason turned toward a body centered approach. Jason has a course for bereaved siblings at jason.mastermind.com/directory/. You can sign up for his weekly updates about weekly Zoom Peer Support Meetings at SiblingIsland.com.

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

The holidays can be a difficult time after your sibling dies, it was for us. We've found that one of the things that has helped us the most is connecting with other bereaved siblings who "get it." The TCF Sibs Facebook page is just one way to do this. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays, do what works best for you. Some of us wanted to hold on to our traditions, while others wanted to let them go. Honor what you need as a sibling and try to communicate those needs to others. You may want to pay tribute to your sibling's memory; if it's too painful for you to do so, ask someone else to do it. Give yourself the gift of self-care during the holidays, and remember you are not alone; lean on other sibs for support. Our hearts go out to all our TCF sibs, and we are thinking about you during the holidays, as sibling loss really does suck!

Heidi Horsley, Scott's Sister; Cindy Tart, Dennis' Sister; Tracy Milne, Andrew's Sister;
Allie Franklin, Austin's Sister; and Karen Snepp, Dave's Sister
Bereaved Siblings who met at TCF over 20 years ago, and have become best friends



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Guilt

It's What Our Brain Does

by Dr. Bob Baugher

After your loved one died, did you find yourself saying things such as: I should've, I shouldn't have, If only, I wish I would've, or Why didn't I? If so, you are part of a very large group of humans who have felt guilty following a death. It doesn't matter whether the death took place thousands of miles away or in your home. It matters less whether your loved one died in an accident, in a war setting, or due to an internal war. What matters is that this precious person is no longer in your life.

You awaken each day with the harsh realization that the worst has happened. Your future looks uncertain. Those around try to help, but your grief is a dizzying array of emotions and thoughts. And one of the most common emotions of grief is guilt. As we examine this grief reaction, the most important fact to keep in mind is that guilt is a feeling. You cannot talk someone out of a feeling. That's why, when people say, "Don't feel guilty," we don't respond with, "OK, thanks. I feel much better now."

Next, let's look at types of guilt and suggestions for coping with it. See if any of these apply to you.

TYPES OF GUILT

Survivor guilt: You feel guilty because you are alive and your loved one is not. Or you think it should have been you who died instead of your loved one.

Benefit guilt: Did money come to you following the death? If you received any sort of benefit, guilt will raise its financial head.

Role-failure guilt: You look back on your life and feel bad because you weren't a good enough (pick one): spouse/parent/sibling/grandparent/friend/relative. When a death occurs, your brain goes back into the past and reviews all the events and interactions with the person who died. It's easy to dwell on all the past wrongs.

Death-causation guilt: Although you didn't directly cause the death, you may have felt that you should have or could have done something—anything—to prevent the death. If so, you are experiencing death-causation guilt.

Grief guilt: Have you somehow felt that you weren't grieving right: crying enough, angry enough, sad enough, tough

enough? Or perhaps you felt that you were crying too much or overly angry or too depressed or weak. Remember, you grieve however you grieve. There is absolutely no right or wrong way.

Moving-on guilt: Have you laughed again? Done things for pleasure? Gotten involved in new activities? Have you felt guilty about it? This is one of the most significant challenges in coping with a death. After someone we love dies, we still get out of bed (even though we may not feel like it). Time keeps moving and suddenly it's a month. You know when it's been exactly a month because that date has been forever etched in your brain. Months turn into years and you realize that you have no choice but to live your life, even though it's not the one you wanted. Time has forced you to move on. You realize that moving on does not mean forgetting. You will never forget the life this wonderful person lived. But time has moved you forward and guilt arises.

COPING WITH GUILT

Let's look next at some suggestions for coping with guilt. These suggestions came from bereaved people themselves. For my book *Understanding Guilt During Bereavement*, I asked many people what helped them in coping with guilt following the death of their loved one. Here is what they said:

Educate yourself: By reading this article you have taken a step toward making a little more sense of your guilt.

Watch your self-talk: For a time, go ahead and beat yourself up with the should have and if only thoughts. But pick a date in the future, such as the birthday of your loved one and make a decision to cease using these negative terms. When you start to say, "I should've" catch yourself by saying, "Okay, stop this kind of talk." Consider it a gift from your loved one.

Compile memories: Write stories or record them on a voice recorder or video. It can be called "I remember the time when..." Contact friends and relatives to ask them for stories, pictures, and videos of your loved one.

Forgive yourself: At various times during the week, ask yourself, "What would it take for me to begin to forgive myself?"

Write a list of all you did wrong and all you did right: It is important to get all the things you feel guilty about out of your head and onto paper. It's easy to beat yourself up for the negatives, but you also need to look at the positives.

Perform a guilt ritual: In a workshop I presented at the TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors) conference for families who's loved one died in the military,

I passed out small, polished rocks to each participant, telling them it was their guilt rock. They were to take it home and, as time went by and they began to feel less guilt, they moved the rock further away until they could finally throw it away. Another example of a guilt ritual was shared by a TAPS mother whose support group used a guilt candle. She thought about the guilt she felt for letting her son join the military, and when she blew out the candle, it felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

Find individual or group support: If you have found that your guilt and your grief are interfering with your ability to work on your activities of daily living, finding a counselor who understands grief and loss may help. Some people have discovered that a support group, such as TAPS where people share feelings of grief and suggestions for coping with it, has been the best thing they've done for themselves since the death occurred. Many people have said to me, "Bob, without TAPS, I don't know where I'd be today. It saved my life."

Create a chat with your loved one: This is an exercise some people find difficult to do. Put down this magazine for a minute and do the following: imagine that your loved one is going to visit you for 20 seconds and say something to you about all the guilt you've been feeling since the death. Imagine that this person is standing in front of you. Listen. Go ahead, do this now. What words do you hear? Next, take out a pen and paper and write down those words. Understand that these words are a gift that this person has given to you. Accept the gift.

Channel your guilt: One way people cope with the guilt and anger over the death of a loved one is to channel it into a worthwhile project. Ask yourself, "What can I do now to help others in the name of my loved one?"

Guilt is a natural reaction to a significant loss. As the years go on, you may find that guilt may still pay you a visit. Guilt feelings are our brain's way of attempting to make sense of something that defies logic. I hope you will find something in this article to give you insight into the types of guilt and tools for coping with it. I wish you a life filled with little guilt and many positive memories of the life this person lived.

Dr. Bob Baugher is a psychologist and certified death educator who teaches at Highline College in Des Moines, WA. He is the professional adviser for the South King County Chapter of TCF. Bob is the author of grief-related books and several articles on coping with bereavement. For the past 25 years, he has been invited to present workshops at most TCF national conferences.



On My Birthday

by B.J. Jewett

Several weeks after our son died, I opened a card from his lady, Mary. She would have been my daughter-in-law later that fall. She already was in my heart.

The envelope was beautiful, her writing distinctive, with its loops and angled letters. Holding it in my hands, I couldn't contemplate what it might hold, couldn't believe she had remembered my birthday. I knew she was struggling to simply hold on. We all were. I held her card, the weight of it settling into my being. My birthday. I would still get to have birthdays. Our son, Jesse, would not.

I opened it, finally, hands shaking, not sure I was ready for whatever message it held. It was blank inside except for her simple hand-written note. "I hope you find a little piece of joy today."

A little piece of joy.

I felt a flush of anger. Joy. How could she wish me joy? There was no joy for me these days. How could there be? I couldn't even imagine happiness. But I knew her heart, and I knew this wish had come from her goodness. I took a breath, pulled her card against my chest. A little piece of joy. Maybe I could look for it. A little piece.

A few hours later, we met our daughter, Megan, and her family for brunch. I didn't want to go, had tried to talk her out of it. But our daughter insisted, "Mom, you need to get out. Join us for lunch. Lily wants to see you." It was clear Megan was unwilling to allow me to ignore the day.

We met at a new restaurant in town where the Chef was a friend of ours. He greeted me with a deep hug, told me how sorry he was about Jesse. I fought back sobs. He was the same age as Jesse. He had just opened this restaurant. He was here, he was alive. I tried to swallow the resentment rising inside. Why did he get to live?

The server placed us in a corner by ourselves, at a beautifully decorated table with floral linens, crystal glasses and fresh flowers. While we waited for our food, our granddaughter, Lily, cheerily played with the silverware. "Why are there so many forks?" she asked, and that gave us something to talk about for a bit. "Why is my napkin on my plate?" So many questions when you're two.

Numb to our meal, I don't remember what we ate. When I was handed cards and a gift, I began to cry. Lily helped me open my birthday card, proudly pointing out where she had signed it with squiggles of purple ink. Inside the gift bag, a framed picture. "I figured you'd like a new one," Megan said. A photograph of Lily, smiling, wearing a sundress, standing in the blueberry patch at our place the past weekend. Her cheeks stuffed full of berries, juice dripping down her chin.

Afterwards, we walked outside along the sidewalk to our car. Lily, between my husband and me, holding our hands

tightly, pulled us along calling out loudly, "Babby, PaPa... come on!"

Heads bent, fighting tears, holding her tiny hand inside each of ours, we followed this girl with her wild curls and eyes like the ocean as she skipped down the sidewalk between us, giggling. And in that moment, a little piece of joy slipped in.

And in that moment, a little piece of joy slipped in.

B. J. Jewett spent her career working with children and families, as a registered nurse and, later, as an educator. She is the author of a children's book, Letter

Trees (A Publications, 2017). Her second book, You Don't Fall Out of the Universe (Friesen Press, 2022) was written in response to the loss of her adult son, Jesse, to cancer. Unable to find resources that aligned with her beliefs and needs, she wrote this book as an offering to others suffering a grievous loss. B. J. lives in rural Missouri with her husband of forty-four years, three dogs and two cats.*

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

We start the season by helping plan the Worldwide Candle Lighting locally and attending the event, continuing to encourage others. Jill loved the holidays, so we celebrate the season and decorate with the new ornaments she selected the year before she died. We adorn the tree with all the "Precious Moments" ornaments purchased each year in her memory. We exchange gifts with our family, which was her favorite part of the holidays, always making lists as she did by December 1st, and in all these things.....she's right here with us.

Sharon Staniforth, Jill's Mom



A Tree Full of Memories

by Cathy Seehuetter

Christmas was my absolute favorite time of the entire year; every nook and cranny was filled with yule adornment. Not a corner of the house was safe from this Christmas decoration obsession that I possessed! One year we even hung assorted ornaments on a fake palm tree, lovingly dubbing it the ‘Bahama-Mama’ tree, because in my family, only one Christmas tree was never enough! The kids even had small tabletop trees in their rooms. My teenage daughter, Nina, even strung her daybed in Christmas tree lights! The upstairs tree was the decorator tree, the one with the fancy, color-coordinated ornaments, to be handled by only me. The downstairs tree was the family favorite and trimmed by the children. Hanging from its branches were the ornaments that I had purchased every year for each of them from the time they were born and others who bought them decorations for it. I always looked forward to finding just the right one that would represent their individual interests at that time in their lives.

But, the holidays as we had known them forever changed after our precious children, siblings, or grandchildren died. And so, it was for us the Christmas of 1995, our first without Nina’s shining presence after her death at 15 years old in a drunk-driving accident. I was positive that I would never decorate again. It was just too painful.

Yet, something happened three Christmases ago. One night as I laid in Nina’s bed, wrapped in her Afghan blanket while staring blankly at the ceiling, hot tears softly rolling down my cheeks, I remember wishing it was January 2nd and I could put the faux ‘cheer’ of the holidays behind me for another year. Somehow, despite the overwhelming melancholy I was feeling, I found myself suddenly rise from her bed and walk to the closet where all the holiday decor was stored. I searched furiously until I found what I was looking for—a box marked “Nina’s Xmas Ornaments.” I brushed away the collected dust and carried it up the stairs to the corner of the living room where a forlorn and neglected-appearing 2-foot tree stood. I recall sitting on the floor in front of the sad-looking tree, sighing deeply, and gingerly opening the box; I was afraid what the depth of my emotions would be when I saw those long untouched ornaments of Christmases past; afraid of the feelings that I had learned to hide so well from the rest of the world; afraid the floodgates would open and the tears would never stop.

I carefully lifted the cover and tenderly held each one in my hands. I found myself even smile as I recalled the beautiful memories of previous Christmases that I had tried to bury for too long, the days of excitement when my beloved daughter was alive, and our hearts and souls were

not shrouded by our deep grief. The first one I removed from the box was the pink-and-white gingham baby buggy with pipe-cleaner handles I bought for her first Xmas at a craft fair, followed by Teddy bears with Santa hats, and crocheted Sesame Street characters from her toddler days. Then the priceless picture ornaments taken by her nursery schoolteacher showing 4-year-old Nina with her then-blond, wispy hair and blunt-cut bangs grinning back at me. There were the handmade ones from early grade school that she affectionately created with felt and glitter; the violin and piano ornaments symbolizing her musical attempts; the self-explanatory ‘Shop-Until-You-Drop’ ornament; the more sophisticated ornaments for a teenage Nina, and finally the last one before her death at the young age of 15 commemorating her reign as our city’s Miss Teen. I gently held them, reliving the stories behind each one and savoring the precious memories they brought with them as I placed them on the tiny tree. Then I unearthed from hiding the ornaments I bought after her death. Even then, I couldn’t bear to stop buying them for her. I found dark-haired angels like Nina, and butterflies of every shape and color, now symbolizing for me her eternal life, and appropriately hung them along side the others.

Though tears fell as I cautiously placed them on the bare branches of the little tree, I felt warmth radiate throughout me, slowly thawing the icy cold I felt for what seemed so long. I smiled again, knowing in my heart that this was a Christmas gift somehow coming directly from my “baby girl”, my Nina. I felt it was her way of telling me that perhaps it was time to find some peace and hope again in the holiday season. Not that it would or could ever be the same

as it was before 1995, or that I would ever stop missing her presence, but perhaps could now begin to remember some of the joy found in priceless memories of holiday’s past.

If you are in those early months and years of your grief, you might believe you will never again feel any enjoyment in the holidays. However, allow me and other seasoned grievers to be the bearers of hope, those of us who have already been through those first challenging years without our beloved child at the holidays. At one time early on, just like you, we felt much as you did. Whenever you feel ready for even a small spark of pleasure in the holidays (the time of which can be entirely different for each person), let it return to your heart again. I sincerely believe our children, brothers and sisters, and grandchildren hope—with as much time as we need—that we will accept their spirit gifts of renewed joy, peace, and hope sent to us from them with much love.

With peace and gentle thoughts through this holiday season and always, *Cathy*.

Cathy Seehuetter’s beloved daughter, Kristina “Nina” Westmoreland, was killed by a drunk driver on Cathy’s birthday while her family was vacationing in Florida in May 1995. In June 2012, her police officer stepson Chris died by suicide. She has been involved in The Compassionate Friends (TCF) as an active volunteer for over 20 years with the St. Paul Chapter, served on the TCF National Board of Directors, Regional Coordinator for Minnesota, TCF National Conference chair in 2011 and 2018. She is a Certified Grief Service Provider through Dr. Darcie Sims’ American Grief Academy. She was a contributing writer to Chicken Soup for the Christian Family Soul; Open to Hope, Intimacy and Sexuality During Illness and Loss; The Tincture of Time, and numerous other grief publications. She is a member of the Staff with TCF National since 2015. Her family is her greatest pride and joy.

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

With the coming holidays we have beautiful, as well as sad memories related to our son/brother Scott and husband/dad Phil. This Thanksgiving we will remember them with a toast at Thanksgiving dinner to those we have lost, and with gratitude for our living children and family members. We will also remember them at Christmas time with a rose and picture on a side table, as well as a little ritual when we hang their favorite ornament.

Dr. Gloria Horsley, Scott’s Mom

The Wisdom of Darcie Sims

Not Ready Yet for the Holidays

We should know better by now. It shouldn't keep surprising us, but it does. No matter how hard we try, no matter what we do to prepare ourselves, it still happens. Year after year, generation after generation, it arrives without hesitation or delay. It stays too long and never lasts long enough. It is filled with anticipation and dread, and we never learn enough and we know far too much...

It is greeted with great joy and heavy despair. And it is always announced by the universal cry of "I'M NOT READY YET..." The holidays are coming, and I haven't even cleaned up the fireworks from the 4th of July. I'm still unpacking boxes (we've moved.... again!) and the calendar says it's time for the annual migration of memories and the "great stuff the turkey" contest (the turkey won last year). Because we're in another new place, there will be the dilemma of where to put the tree and how do we explain to the company about that one empty stocking?

Nothing fits this year! I can't find the ornaments. I haven't memorized my address and the grocery store is in the wrong place. We'll have to figure out where to hang a wreath and should we go electric this year in the yard?

I keep forgetting where I've hidden gifts I bought during the summer, and nothing seems to fit in this place like it did in the last one!

We were comfortable in the last place ... but then I forget that is what we said when we first moved there, too. We always seem to be more comfortable in the last place — at least we knew where the memories were and where to put them and how to handle them. Here, in this new place, no one knows our "story." No one knows our history. It is as if we have no past. It's easy to blend in, but not so easy to settle in. And the holidays are coming and I'M NOT READY YET!

"I'M NOT READY YET" is the universal cry of all living beings. I'm not ready yet for first grade, for crossing the street by myself, for sleep-away camp, for junior high, for getting married, for getting a job, for having children, for burying someone I love. I'm NOT READY YET for grieving, for handling the holidays, for stuffing a turkey,



Gene Caligari, Brendan's Dad

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

As a seasoned bereaved parent, I demonstrate compassion and understanding to the newly bereaved during this difficult season. I also give myself permission to say no thanks to holiday gatherings that I'm not comfortable attending. I also work hard to focus on the blessings our families share and pray daily that Brendan is at peace.

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for finding a place for everything, for living where no one knows my story.

I'M NOT READY YET for Thanksgiving, for Hanukkah, for Christmas, for New Year's, for Three King's Day or for anything!

I'M NOT READY for the annual flood of memories that always spill out as we unpack the stockings from their tissue wrapped nest. I'M NOT READY yet for the clutch of pain that still wraps my heart in grief as we place the ornaments on the tree. I'M NOT READY YET for opening the door to greet strangers who are fast becoming friends but who may never know the effort it has taken to be who I am now.

I'M NOT READY YET to be "normal" and take my place among the normal people of the world. We look normal, and for the most part we act normal. We are normal... except for OUR STORY and for the tears in our family fabric. But no one knows those tears anymore and I don't think I'm ready not to have a past just yet. I don't think I'm ready for no one to remember our hurt, let alone the joy our loved ones gave to us.

I unpacked the silver today, intending to polish it and place it in the dining room so it would add its shimmer to the festive decorations. I wasn't ready for the flood of memories that came back as I traced my fingers over the delicately carved designs in the coffee pot, remembering my mother patiently teaching me how to polish good silver. I wasn't ready for the loneliness that swept over me as I placed the teapot on the tray and suddenly wanted to call MOM and tell her I was, at last and again, home. She had taught me that silver always spoke of a comforting home, and now that I had found it and set it out, I wanted someone to remember with me.

I'M NOT READY YET to live only on the surface of life. I want to share my history with my new friends, yet it seems unfair of me to spoil their holiday season. It's not the same for me. There is still a lot of empty in my heart. Not as much as BEFORE, but now the emptiness comes from being too new somewhere to really belong.

So, I'll just have to figure out how to handle the holidays I'm never going to be ready for in places I may never be settled in. As long as we have the stockings up and the silver is polished and ready, then let the holidays come! We'll figure out how to tell enough of our history so we won't be lonely and so people will understand about the empty chair and the joy that lights up our life when we clasp hands together in the family circle.

*The heart never forgets,
even when the world does.*

We'll decorate our new house (our new life?) with the treasures that speak of our history, finding joy in the memories they spark. We'll bring some of the old, add a few pieces of new and practice the art of

blending yesterday with today in hopes of creating another memory for tomorrow.

I guess it doesn't matter whether you have moved or have never left the same place for generations, it is still an unsettled feeling that for the first time no one remembers the journey you've been on. The first time no one mentions THE NAME starts a hollowness in our being that leaves us empty and feeling alone. It is as if the world has made its move again and everything that once was so awkward and out of place has now assumed a "normal" atmosphere and most of the world "forgets" the price we paid for this "new normal."

I'll hang the special ornaments, enjoy the silver teapot and cherish the warmth of the love these gifts of remembrance bring. No one else has to know the story for me to acknowledge it and remember it. No one else has to know the pain for me to share the joy of having these things be a part of my now.

We'll gather together and count our blessings, not only naming the ones around the table, but also including those whose lives have touched ours in countless ways. One does not have to be present to be alive in the hearts of those who shared a few moments of the journey together. The heart never forgets, even when the world does.

Continued on page 24

No, nothing fits this year, just like nothing fit last year or the year before. But it's getting better, improving either with age or experience or patience. Or maybe it is because it is simply becoming a thread in the continuing fabric of our lives. We will probably always be a bit unsettled, unnerved when the roll call finds a name missing or a chair empty. But, then why shouldn't we be a little sad when a light goes out in our world?

So, this holiday season, gather in your blessings and count them ALL. Count the blessings of the people in your story

and find the peace that comes with counting a holiday of joy remembered and love shared.

Peace to us all — wherever we may be.

The late Darcie Sims wrote hundreds of articles over the years on grief and loss which have been extremely popular and shared in hundreds of TCF publications. We Need Not Walk Alone is proud to honor her by featuring selections of her work in a column titled "The Wisdom of Darcie Sims."

What do you do to help you get through the holiday season?

At Thanksgiving, I say a silent prayer of gratitude that Helen and I had Jesse for 15 years. At Christmas, I set up a tiny "Jesse" Christmas tree with ornaments that remind us of him (hockey skates, fishing lures, etc.) I also set limits for myself on the amount of time or number of celebrations because I'm aware of how draining they can be.

Pat Saum, Jesse's Dad

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TCF Sibling Zoom Meetings

Grief Writing - Meets Mondays at 7:30 pm ET

Book Club - Meets last Monday of the month at 7:30 pm ET

Meeting with Jordon - Meets Tuesdays at 7:00 pm ET

Growing Up with Grief (*death of a sibling when you were a child/teen, regardless of your age now*) - Meets Tuesdays at 6:00 pm ET

Creative Expression - Meets Wednesdays at 7:30 pm ET

Meeting with Jason - Meets Thursdays at 6:30 pm ET

LGBTQ+ Sibs Meeting - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays at 9:30 pm ET

Twiiins Only - Meets Fridays at 9:00 pm ET

Sunday Connection - Meets Sundays at 4:00 pm ET

To sign up for TCF SIBS newsletter, visit siblingisland.com or scan the QR code.



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Connect with Other Bereaved Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings Every Day on TCF's Online Support Community

The Compassionate Friends offers "virtual chapters" through an Online Support Community (live chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling. The rooms supply support, encouragement, and friendship. The friendly atmosphere encourages conversation among friends; friends who understand the emotions you're experiencing. There are general bereavement sessions as well as more specific sessions:

MONDAY

10 AM EST | 9 AM CST | 8 AM MST | 7 AM PST
(open depending on moderator availability)
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

10 PM EST | 9 PM CST | 8 PM MST | 7 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

WEDNESDAY

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

FRIDAY

10 AM EST | 9 AM CST | 8 AM MST | 7 AM PST
(open depending on moderator availability)
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Pregnancy/Infant Loss

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

SUNDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Suicide Loss

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

TUESDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Loss to Substance Related Causes

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Bereaved Less than Three Years

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Bereaved More than Three Years

THURSDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
No Surviving Children

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

SATURDAY

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

Visit www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/online-support/ for more information and to register.

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The Compassionate Friends Private Facebook Groups

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

TCF – Loss of a Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofachild/

TCF – Loss of a Stepchild

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofastepchild/

TCF – Loss of a Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofagrandchild/

TCF – SIBS (for bereaved siblings)

facebook.com/groups/tcfsibs/

TCF – Bereaved LGBTQ Parents With Loss of a Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflgbtqlossofachild/

TCF – Multiple Losses

facebook.com/groups/tcfmultiplelosses/

TCF – Men in Grief

facebook.com/groups/tcfmeningrief/

TCF – Daughterless Mothers

facebook.com/groups/tcfdaughterlessmothers/

TCF – Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren

facebook.com/groups/tcfgrandparentsraisinggc/

TCF – Sudden Death

facebook.com/groups/tcfsuddendeadth/

TCF - Loss To Substance Related Causes

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstosrc/

TCF - Sibling Loss To Substance Related Causes

facebook.com/groups/tcfsiblinglossstosrc/

TCF - Loss to Suicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstosuicide/

TCF - Loss to Homicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstohomicide/

TCF – Loss of a Child With Special Needs

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchildwithspecialneeds/

TCF – Loss to Long-Term Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstolongtermillness/

TCF – Loss to Mental Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstomentalillness/

TCF – Loss to a Drunk/Impaired Driver

facebook.com/groups/tcfdrunkimpaireddriver/

TCF - Loss to COVID-19 or Other Infectious Diseases

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstocovid19/

TCF – Loss to Cancer

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstocancer/

TCF – Loss to Miscarriage or Stillbirth

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstomiscarriagestillbirth/

TCF – Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Loss of an Infant Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/miscarriagestillbirthinfantgrandchild/

TCF - Infant and Toddler Loss

facebook.com/groups/tcfinfantandtoddlerloss/

TCF - Loss of a Child 4 - 12 Years Old

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchild4to12/

TCF – Loss of a Child 13-19 Years Old

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchild13to19/

TCF – Loss of an Adult Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofanadultchild/

TCF – Loss of Your Only Child/All Your Children

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofonlychildallchildren/

TCF - Loss of an LGBTQ+ Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofanlgbtqchild/

TCF – Grieving the Loss of a Child as a Single Parent

facebook.com/groups/lossofachildasasingleparent/

TCF – Bereaved Parents With Grandchild Visitation Issues

facebook.com/groups/tcfgrandchildvisitation/

TCF – Inclusion and Diversity

facebook.com/groups/tcfinclusionanddiversity/

TCF – Grieving with Faith and Hope

facebook.com/groups/grievingwithfaithandhope/

TCF – Secular Support

facebook.com/groups/tcfsecularsupport/

TCF – Finding Hope for Parents Through TCF SIBS

facebook.com/groups/tcffindinghopeforparents/

TCF – Reading Your Way Through Grief

facebook.com/groups/tcfreadingthroughgrief/

TCF – Crafty Corner

facebook.com/groups/tcfcraftycorner/

The Compassionate Friends Chapter Leadership (for anyone currently serving on a Chapter steering committee)
www.facebook.com/groups/tcfchapterleadership/

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WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

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Save the Date

TCF 46th National Conference

July 7-9, 2023 in Denver, Colorado

