

# WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

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

Summer 2023



***The  
Compassionate  
Friends***

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

# Grief

*I went on a walk today,  
And Grief came with me.  
We're constant companions now,  
In this new life I lead.*

*My Grief was not invited,  
It came crashing in last May.  
And Grief, my new companion,  
Is forever here to stay.*

*I'm learning to accept my Grief,  
I have to make it mine.  
It likes to grip my heart,  
Seldom with a sign.*

*Grief will squeeze, and hold on tight,  
Until I let it go.  
I really have no choice, you see,  
I need the tears to flow.*

*I've learned a good cry is soothing,  
I never am alone.  
Grief will always find me,  
Wherever I may go.*

*The emptiness inside me  
Will never fade away.  
Losing a son is tough, you see,  
And I'll never be the same.  
- Cynthia Kocsis, Kyle's Mom*

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Editors' Correction: Our sincerest apologies to Betty Valentine for the misspelling of her daughter's first name in the Spring 2023 edition of *We Need Not Walk Alone* magazine. The correct spelling of her daughter's name is Kara with a "K" and not Cara with a "C". We understand the importance that our children's, siblings, and grandchildren's names are correctly spelled, and we try very hard to make sure that they are with multiple proof-readings. Again, we are very sorry that Kara's name was spelled wrong.

*The views presented within this magazine represent those of the authors  
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# Reflections on Summer

Seasons are natural markers of time on our journey of loss. Each season brings unique reminders of the ways we lived with our child, sibling, or grandchild who died. Our loved ones shared the gifts of their lives differently with us depending on the season.

Summer generally brings the hope of family vacations, summer camps, leisurely days together, and time for special activities. Fun times such as swimming, family reunions, parades, or tending gardens create wonderful memories. Families can spend considerable time planning and organizing their time to gain the most from each new summer season.

As bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, we may recall this same excitement prior to our loss as we anticipated and planned earlier summers. If your loved one particularly enjoyed summer, you may have mixed feelings when each new season returns. These feelings may include happiness and gratitude for the joyful activities you had with them and the memories that remain. Feelings can also include sorrow for what began and could not be continued. Sadness may be present for the hopes, dreams, and plans that were never realized or maybe never began.

For some families, a child, grandchild, or sibling's death occurred during the more carefree summer months. Their most devastating experience may have happened while friends and other family members were enjoying a vacation, leaving a feeling of separate worlds from those around them. Subsequent summer seasons can feel conflicting as others continue to celebrate the more relaxed days of summer while bereaved families have remembrances of painfully difficult and life-changing anniversary dates.

The summer edition of *We Need Not Walk Alone* shares perspectives on this season offered by other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. Tools and tips that apply to some of the earliest experiences of loss are included as well as reflections on the later years from longer-term grievers. Finding ways to "take your loved one along" on those summer trips and including extended family members or friends in activities can provide support and meaning to balance the feelings of loss.

We hope that these writings from other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings are comforting and helpful. May you find peaceful messages of support and a new perspective or tool to enhance your days this summer. Know that wherever you are with your grief, *You Need Not Walk Alone*.

Warmly,

*Shari O'Loughlin, MBA, CPC*

CEO

The Compassionate Friends

# I Do Grief Differently Than You

I do grief differently than you.  
Some days I talk too much.  
Sometimes I am quiet and withdrawn.  
Sometimes I want to be with people and have their energy.  
Sometimes I cannot cope with other people.  
Sometimes I flat line and do not care about much at all.  
Sometimes I feel so much I am raw and blistered.  
Your pain, the world's pain, my pain.  
Sometimes I laugh, dance, and forget.  
Sometimes all I can do is remember.  
Sometimes my memories are so vivid and comforting.  
Sometimes my memories are foggy, and I feel like I am forgetting.  
Sometimes I know why I am still here.  
Sometimes I wish I were not.  
I do grief differently than you because my grief is mine. And your grief is yours.

- Hilary Anne Scott, Tyler's Mum

# What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?

*Mandy died when her sweet daughter, Addison, was 5 years old, a very difficult time for our sweet Mandy. We learned that taking small road trips with Addie was precious for all three of us. It was so much like being with Mandy for a short while. I know in my heart Mandy was right there with us for all the times we were able to have Addie for vacation that summer.*

Bob and Mary Lane, Mandy's Mom and Dad

# Memories and Connections

by Joan Baker Scott



Recently, I was shopping for a sympathy card and many of the cards had a message that essentially said, “May your memories bring you comfort.” I received cards like these when my son, Danny died. Perhaps you received similar cards when your child died. My reaction to the sentiment in the cards was that, not only did memories not bring me comfort, but they were a painful reminder of my son’s absence. I didn’t need memories, I needed him back. It’s been 11 years since Danny died, and today I have a different perspective. Those memories that were once so painful, now help keep me connected to my son.

The summer memories are the best. Every summer for 20 years, we would load up the car with bikes, kayaks, boogie boards, and lots of sunscreen and set off for Cape Cod for a week’s vacation. We always had a competition to see who would be the first to see the bridge over the canal. The time away from school, work, and routines became a much-anticipated tradition for our family. When the kids got older, my husband and I offered to take them to other places for vacation, but they both still wanted to go to the Cape. When

Danny was in middle school, he wrote a poem about the Cape that captured his feelings about those special times. Here is a snippet from his poem:

*“Cape Cod is the place for me to be me,  
to relax by the sea.  
There is nowhere I have to be.  
That’s the life for me.”*

After Danny’s death at almost 21 years old, I went to a healing concert with Alan Pederson put on by our local TCF chapter. At one point, Alan asked the audience to recall a memory of our loved one and stay with it. The memory that came to mind was of Danny running along the beach when he was about two. Later I wrote about it in my journal: “The sky is a vivid, cloudless blue. The sea sparkles and dances as it stretches to meet the endless sky. The sun slants over the dunes, casting a golden glow over us. As I walk, I watch you. Running, laughing, you are so free and so happy. And I am happy too. Your life has so much potential, so much promise. This golden memory makes me feel warm all over and I want to keep it with me.”

With such ties to Cape Cod, it is no wonder that in my darkest time of grief, I returned there to try to find some peace. I remember vividly that first summer after Danny died. I was at the beach, and I pulled my sand chair into the surf. As the waves rolled over my feet and the sun beat down on me, I just cried and cried and cried. Another day found me pulling my bike off the bike path, plopping down by the side of the trail and sobbing, overcome by memories of all of us riding on this same trail, perhaps with an ice cream shop as our final destination. Long walks on the beach allowed me time to process my grief and gave me the space I needed to start to heal. Sometimes I came to the beach with my journal and pen and wrote letters or poems to Danny. The beach is where I feel the most connected to Danny because of our shared love of this special place.

With my husband’s impending retirement last year, we considered a move to the Cape. This had always been our dream, but after losing Danny, I didn’t think I wanted to leave the town where he grew up, where he was buried, and where we had made 36 years’ worth of connections. I was afraid that moving away would diminish the connections I had with Danny. After all, he had never been to the house that we would be moving into. After much thought, we decided to make the move. We have made a conscious effort to bring reminders of Danny with us to our new home. His poem about the Cape hangs in our bedroom along with photos of him at the Cape at different ages. His drawing of a fishing boat that he did in high school hangs in our living room. My

husband fishes with Danny’s fishing gear (he was passionate about fishing.) Although he was never here, he feels so close to us. And of course, as I walk the beach, I feel him walking right there beside me. When I found a pair of angel wing shells, I knew for sure that he was with me.

As the years have passed, I have found comfort in my memories of Danny. Not all my memories are “golden memories” because Danny struggled with mental health issues, and we had many difficult times. However, I have learned to choose which memories I want to focus on and which to allow only a fleeting entrance into my consciousness. I still don’t buy those sympathy cards about comforting memories though because I know that that comfort only comes with time.

Perhaps this summer, you will find new ways to nurture your relationship with your child. Our children’s lives on earth may end, but our love for them and their love for us lives on forever.

*Joan Baker Scott is a bereaved parent who lost her son, Danny, to suicide in 2012. She has had her poems published in her local chapter’s newsletter. Joan has published a book for bereaved parents, **Getting Through the Days: A Journey from Loss to Life** and has spoken about her book. She is a volunteer for Comfort Zone Camp and Jeff’s Place Children’s Bereavement Center in Framingham, Massachusetts. Her poetry has also been published in the newsletters of both these organizations. Joan and her husband, Dan, were awarded the 2022 Grace Johnson Volunteer Appreciation Award from the Parmenter Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to helping grieving families build resilience and facilitating their journeys toward healing. Joan is a retired school librarian and lives on Cape Cod.*

*What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?*

*I remember feeling empty and lost that first time leaving home without Sebastian with us. We quickly realized that, especially for all family trips, to take him with us and include him. We accomplished this by taking a framed 8x10 of him with us and incorporating it (him) in family photos. For our family, it is second nature now to include him on trips and holidays. We now have numerous family photos at Disney World and other places that include all of our family together.*

**Brian Mayle, Sebastian’s Dad**



# A Grieving Dad's Post Father's Day Blues

by David Contreras

For many a grieving father the days immediately following Father's Day can be just as hard to get through as the actual day itself. For some who may observe a grieving father on Father's Day, it wouldn't be too off base to have sympathy for them for having survived the day and returning to some sort of normalcy. But in reality, a post-Father's Day emotional wave may linger a while longer, and the week following a Father's Day can resemble recovering from a post-surgical wound.

But even with a pre-Father's Day planned preparation to maintain an attempt to keep up appearances, a post-Father's Day emotional debriefing may be necessary. The fact is that the grieving father may need to shore up emotions that were spilled out on Father's Day, or there could be a need to release suppressed feelings that were kept inside.

For some fathers whose grief is still fresh, it is understandable that a before, during, and after emotional wave will occur. But for other fathers like myself whose grief journey has entered double digit years, our present circumstances, and the place where we may be emotionally,

can result in Father's Day becoming an emotional trigger. It is a trigger that one may have to go through from year to year in various degrees, regardless of the time passed since they lost their son or daughter.

Don't get me wrong, the trigger of emotions may not always be negative, they could also be positive. I have become a proponent of the philosophy which I first heard from a twice grieving father named "Joe Biden," that as time passes, a smile will come to my lips before a tear comes to my eyes when I think of my late younger son. But how we approach Father's Day may depend on so many other factors that we may or may not have control over.

Father's Day can be a mixed bag; for example, if we have other children, or if our own fathers are still alive. In my case, I have an older son who now has a son of his own, and my father has just celebrated his 90th birthday. So, I still have reasons to celebrate the day both as a father and a son myself. But I still recognize that every year when Father's Day comes along, one of the major reasons for me to have previously enjoyed the day is no longer here on earth to

wish me a Happy Father's Day. And I never know if my reaction will be tears for his not being here or smiles while reminiscing of the wonderful years I had him.

But there are other grieving fathers who no longer wish to take part in the day, and I do have empathy for them and their reasons. I have participated for almost 10 years with a group of fellow bereaved fathers who meet monthly, and in doing so I have come to know some good men who may have lost their only child, but in addition to that loss, they may no longer have a father alive. For those two reasons alone, some have come to the personal belief that Father's Day is a day they would prefer to avoid all together. And I can understand their feelings and reasons why.

As for me, many might think that after eleven years it should get easier and easier each year to get through it. But this year prior to Father's Day, I came upon a movie on Netflix called "A River Runs Through It." Each time that I have seen this movie since my son died, I have experienced emotions brought on by the movie's story. When I watched it this time, it triggered emotions in me that would linger prior to, during, and after Father's Day. In the movie the main characters are two brothers whose similarities mirrored my two sons. Both are loyal to each other, and both can be adventurous, but the younger son is way off the charts in that category. And of course, the younger son dies at the end of the movie. But what got to me this time was not just their relationship with each other, but their relationship with their father, and that hit close to home with me.

I thought I was prepared for Father's Day this year. I wrote about it in a group page I have, and I tried to anticipate any emotions I may feel in not having my younger son for another Father's Day. And I will say that for the most part, Father's Day itself was nice. I enjoyed spending lunch with my son, my grandson, and calling my dad on the phone. But by the end of the evening like many other Father's Days, I was feeling emotional because once again I was missing my younger son, even after all these years.

*Like all that occurs in our grief journeys, it takes a while for the smiles to come before the tears.*

What triggers a man like me who has had eleven years to come up with ways to get through another Father's Day, and yet still end up experiencing more of that emotional pain? Well this year I blame that movie I spoke of. In the movie there were two scenes in which the father rejoiced in the moment he had spending time with his two grown sons. My younger son was 13 when he died, and as much as I treasure every moment I have with my older son, it still hurts that I can never have that moment with both my "adult" sons. Time has not extinguished

the yearning I have for wanting that moment when my sons and I as men, would have a beer together, share stories and laughs, and share memories of Father's Days past.

Yes, I got through Father's Day again this year, but the annual emotions I went through will likely never go away. Like all that occurs in our grief journeys, it takes a while for the smiles to come before the tears. But they will and they do come. And even though I am experiencing some post-Father's Day blues once again this year, I am smiling because I know that Father's Day isn't just one day a year for me. Be it good or bad, happy or sad, I believe that I am blessed to have a Father's Day every day.

Why is it I choose to believe Father's Day is every day for me? I think it is because I like the reminder that I will never forget that I am and always will be the father of two sons. I have the one son who is here, who I can call, hug, and have a beer with. And then I have the one son who waits for me in what I believe to be heaven, and who I can see when I close my eyes and smile, just before I open them with tears of joy because I have two sons.

*David is a retired high school history teacher, athletic director, and coach. Married for 35 years to his wife Kirsti, they are the proud parents of two sons. Their hearts still broken, they lost their younger son Nick, age 13, in January of 2011. David and his wife help facilitate a chapter of Grief Share, and David facilitates a small father's bereavement group. He has felt compelled through writing or sharing of his experiences to better help other grieving parents to not have to walk through their grief journey alone.*



# My Compassionate Friends

by Tonya Woods

They call themselves the Tuesday Tinkerbells, my mom's Tuesday-afternoon card group. The women are all at least semi-retired and consider their weekly game therapy. They are wise and not wrong. In the summer of 2019, my mom asked if my sister, cousin, and I would like to "sub" for vacationing Tinkerbells. The three of us are teachers, so playing cards with that bunch of women once a week now and then seemed like a lark. "Subbing" turned into playing each week and becoming Tinkerbells in our own right. When summer ended, the group instituted monthly Friday night games so we three teachers could keep playing. I didn't know it at the time, but one of my strongest support systems was woven into place and another was a seed waiting to be planted.

Fast forward to 2020. In the spring, the world shut down. By summer, we could cautiously mask up and interact with small groups. We were back to playing cards, but at home my son Cooper was in a slow, tortuous decline. That was the hardest summer of my life; Tuesday card games were an emotional respite. In August, we returned to in-person, masked, socially distanced school. The afternoon of the fourth day of school, the coroner knocked on my door and my world imploded. Cooper had driven to a rural cemetery, called 911 to inform them of his actions, and killed himself. His anguish was over, but mine was only beginning—a fresh wound that even now oozes.

That evening, within hours of his death, friends reached out. Some showed up at my house, lingering in the yard where we could spread out and speak without masks. Others messaged me with their condolences and promises of support. The condolences and kindnesses and promises continued over the next days and weeks, but the world continued to turn. Other lives went on, even as my own seemed to stop.

Meanwhile, the pandemic monopolized our contact and activities. School alternated between in-person and remote. We wore masks everywhere. None of that mattered much to me. The occasional weeks of remote learning were a needed break from the in-person learning that exhausted me; that fall and winter, I used most of my energy just trying to survive.

Remote friendship and grief don't work well together. Any even semi-formal grief support in those Covid-plagued months came via the TCF Facebook groups. There were no in-person groups of any kind, TCF or otherwise. There, though, in those private online groups, I was safe. I could share and commiserate. The real world was another story. No close contact with friends, very few hugs, no literal crying on shoulders. No long, therapeutic lunches or solving life's problems from opposite ends of the couch. No sunroom chats or family dinners. No Tinkerbells. Playing cards would've been irresponsible; the vaccine wasn't ready.

By spring, though, things began to change. The vaccine was available and small social groups began to gather. Specifically, the Tuesday Tinkerbells were back at their card tables. In March or April of 2021, our monthly night games resumed. The first game was my first truly social group event since Cooper's death. I was terribly nervous about being around those women I'd grown to love. By then, I'd learned to drive myself places rather than carpool; knowing I could leave if I couldn't handle the situation helped ease my anxiety. I pulled up to the house and sat in my car for a few minutes, gathering my wits, taking my anxiety medication, trying not to cry. I was the first person there, and as soon as I entered the house, the Tinkerbelle hostess pulled me into the hug I'd needed. I cried (yes, on her shoulder) then tried to get it together before the other Tinkerbells arrived. I doubt I laughed much that evening, but it was nice to spend time with friends. I survived. I was exhausted by the end of the evening, but I'd survived. We played again the next month, and there, in that beautiful safety net of friendship, I truly and thoroughly had a good time. I laughed—really laughed!

Here's the thing with the Tinkerbells: out of a group of sixteen, four of us are "Moms-Who-Know." I think that the percentage of child loss is surely higher than average. Somehow, I landed in a group—was already part of a group—of women who understand what it means to be a Mom-Who-Knows. All the "Tinks" are compassionate, loving women; four of us have lost adult children. I treasure my steadfast friends. These are the people who know me well, who know me beyond "the mom who lost a son to suicide." These are the trusted, familiar, comfortable friends who accept who and what I've become and love me anyway, the people who understand that child loss and suicide aren't contagious and that grief cooties don't exist. They knew my baseline "Before," and they've learned my baseline "After." They continue to get me through my days with an understanding look or delightfully inappropriate comment during passing periods or an "I see you and I love you" text, with a Facebook post about Cooper or a new-to-me story about one of his adventures. They listen to my words and read my writings, sit for hours at a restaurant talking and listening and remembering. These men and women were my friends "Before" and remain my friends "After," but they haven't outlived their children; their worlds haven't been wrecked by this unimaginable loss.

The very night of Cooper's death, a high-school friend who'd lost her son not long before Cooper died reached out to me in a Facebook message. A Mom-Who-Knows. She talked me through many rough days and nights during those first months, even though we hadn't seen each other in person for years. A couple months later, a surprisingly persistent, long-lost acquaintance reached out. When I didn't respond, she

tried again and again. Phone call, Facebook call, and finally, an online message. We spent hours talking on the phone and online. She wasn't afraid of my tears or occasional silence in a conversation. She'd lost her son 10 years earlier. The last time I'd seen her, I was hugely pregnant with Cooper.

Near the first anniversary of Cooper's death, one of the Tinkerbells—a sneaky angel and stellar human—connected me with a friend of hers who'd also lost a son to suicide. That friend created an entirely new network of Moms-Who-Know—suicide survivor moms.

If one can be lucky in this journey, I was. I had existing friends who had lived with child loss for decades and a growing web of new, interconnected friends who also knew my sorrow. Those friendships—those immediate, deep friendships—allowed me to relax into my grief, to drop the pretense of being more okay than I was, to acknowledge just how difficult this new existence can be. I could just be Tonya. I had a hug-on-request, listen-as-needed, unlimited-refills prescription for friendship.

It was those friendships that led me to form a local chapter of TCF. I knew what a difference the Moms-Who-Know had made and continued to make in my journey, but I also knew not everyone had a built-in friend group. The need for support in our rural area was tremendous. The closest TCF group was over 60 miles away; the second nearest was more than 80 miles away. When we reached the first anniversary of Cooper's death, I made my intentions known; as soon as I hit the recommended 18-month mark in February 2022, I submitted the information required to form a new chapter. We had our 12th meeting in March 2023.

Our group is the manifestation of what I know to be true: we need these people—these compassionate friends—in our lives. Once a month, I'm in a room where everyone understands. Once a month, my shoulders loosen themselves from my ears and my heart wanders onto my sleeve. Once a month, emotions are open and true, compassion is abundant, and stories are shared without judgment. Once a month, I visit the Vegas of grief—this room of beautiful souls, each of us surviving our incomprehensible realities, sharing stories we know won't leave our group. Once a month, I savor the sanctity of my Compassionate Friends.

*Tonya Woods is a high school English teacher, blogger, and hobby photographer from Industry, Illinois. Tonya and her husband Jeff have three children, Logan, Cooper, and Cassidy. They lost Cooper to suicide in 2020. Since then, Tonya has written numerous essays on life after the traumatic loss of Cooper. Tonya continues to work toward educating and helping others and herself on life after loss. In her free time, Tonya enjoys reading, writing, photography, and all things creative. Above all, Tonya cherishes every moment she can spend with her family. Much of Tonya's writing can be found at woods-writes.com.*

# They Matter

by Alan Anderson



## Dashed Anticipation

My wife and I have six grandchildren plus five grandbabies in heaven. We have a sense of the pain of grieving grandparents. The truth these babies did not make it to term does not diminish the pain of grief or how their births were expected with great joy. For whatever reason, we will never relish being in the company of these children.

The news of the passing of these little ones hit me hard every time. Each pregnancy loss brought about a dashed anticipation, like Christmas being cancelled. Joyful thoughts of holding the babies and playing with them as they grew ended. An added misplaced comment hurt like a hard punch in the guts. Someone informed me my grief was not as bad as when a child was born then dies. This did not help in the slightest.

## What to do with the Grief?

Grandparent grief because of the death of a grandchild is often overlooked and hidden in our modern society. To see life through the eyes of grandparent grief is a unique perspective. While we may not speak of our grief often, what we say is meaningful. Perhaps without intending to be, our grief words are poetic. This was confirmed to me when I began interacting with other grieving grandparents. A question kept going through my head. What do I do with my grief?

In 2017, I began an online group for grieving grandparents on Facebook. One approach taken as the group formed was a decision to cap the number of members of the group. There are similar groups with an open membership, but by keeping the group to a few people, it is also more manageable. This is where I became more aware of the various grief experiences of grandparents. As group members, we found a setting for mutual support. This group still exists.

## Writing as Healing

The online group is one way where I processed my grief through the company of other grandparents. Another way is through writing. In 2017, I had the privilege of having four short stories published in an anthology on grief. I retired from my work as a chaplain in healthcare in September 2018. From this point on, I had more time to devote to writing.

As a writer, I find “Expressive Writing” an effective tool as I faced my grief. Dr. James Pennebaker has been a leading researcher in emotional or expressive writing since the 1980s. His area of focus is on traumatic experiences in life. I found his research invaluable not only as a writer but as a grieving grandparent as I explored my grief.

Expressive Writing allows one to write about trauma or grief to find meaning in the experience. Expressive Writing helped me rewrite my personal story of how grief changed

my life yet also helped me move forward with my life. Perhaps in a future article readers can learn more about the value of Expressive Writing. A main thought to leave with readers here is we need not be stuck in our grief.

## A Journey into Poetry

Although I enjoy writing short stories and non-fiction articles, I currently focus my writing on poetry. My current major writing project is focused on grandparents who grieve the death of their grandchildren and those who live with alienation from their families. Poetry is a way to express grief in fewer yet honest words. Poetry is intimate and allows the poet to get close and personal with the words she or he wants to convey.

Poetry is as honest and real as the poet chooses. Writing poetry helps slow life down and allows thoughts to caress and heal one’s mind. A slower pace helps one focus on the message of the poems. I write for other grieving grandparents because they say they need a voice. Many grandparents keep their grief hidden from even those who love them. We are the hidden mourners of society, but we can change this if we choose.

## Plant a Memorial Garden

I planted a garden in memory of my grandbabies. My wife and I call it our baby garden. There are no graves or headstones for them. A memorial garden is my way of

acknowledging they mattered and still matter. As my life goes on into my older years, I think of all my grandchildren, including those I grieve. When I look at the garden, I do so with a bittersweet sense of sadness and joy. I will never walk along a dike with them, watching the ducks and geese common to the area in which I live. The joy, however, is knowing they are still loved and not forgotten.

Like writing, I find time spent in the baby garden is therapeutic. Every plant in the garden was planted with my own hands. I chose where to place them as well. The garden seemed like a replacement for being present with my grandbabies. I covered the roots in a careful manner like the gentleness of how one tucks babies in at night. Gentle hands bring comfort and help babies to feel loved and not alone.

The baby garden as a memorial is a constant reminder of the brevity and beauty of life. This is part of the reason I planted the garden. If I do not nurture it, the plants will wither and die as if they never mattered. When I make sure the plants are watered and I keep the weeds under control, they bloom and smile at the sun. They remind me life is precious and a gift never to be taken for granted.

*Alan lives in Deroche, British Columbia, with his wife, Terry, and their poodle, Charlie. He contributed stories to Good Grief People by Angel Hope Publishing, 2017; Story by Story: The Power of a Writer, Unstoppable Writers Publishing, 2018; Easter Stories & More by InScribe Christian Writers. Alan is also currently developing his website and blog to focus on the grief of grandparents, <https://scarredjoy.ca>.*

*What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?*

*From the earliest time of my loss, I have found comfort in looking for my son’s presence wherever I might be. Whether it be a dragonfly or a rainbow to a beautiful sunset on the ocean. I always feel as if he is seeing the same sights as I am; just from a different place. Once in Montana in September, he sent snow! Look for them wherever you may be!*

**Candace Hulsey, Steven’s Mom**



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# The Decade Difference

by Maggie Bauer

In the beginning I didn't know how I was going to survive to the next day, my first thought when I awoke was oh, no, my brother is dead. The physical heartache, tears, lethargy, fatigue, loss of concentration; my body even forced me to stop eating gluten and dairy. There was a deep heaviness within me and how I saw the rest of the world. Some days it felt like a depressive cloak over me that I couldn't remove. As time moved forward, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chris' death day protruded out in my mind and on every calendar, I looked at. The anticipation of another month or year of my brother not being in my physical life. How could this be? Chris has been gone 3 months, 9 months, 4 years and now 10 years and 9 months to the day. The difference in a decade; I decided in order for me to move from survival into some form of thriving, I had to be a more active participant in my own grief process. I went to local grief coalition meetings. Attended the monthly TCF chapter meetings. I started back in individual therapy. I became certified as a grief specialist and grief educator. I learned the language to help advocate for myself and other grieverers too. The difference in a decade; when I felt well enough to give back to the same organizations that had given me compassion,

understanding, validation and allowed me to find my voice again in my early YEARS of grief. Actually, I was able to remove the depressive cloak through being an active participant in my own grief journey. I no longer feel the debilitating heartache because of the death of my brother. Of course, I get sad. Of course, I will miss him to my last breath. This is the difference in my first decade without Chris. It will be interesting to see what my second decade of grieving my brother looks like. I know one thing; he is always within me, encouraging me from beyond.

In honor of Christopher Daniel Bauer, who died by suicide August 22, 2012. Written by his little sissy, Maggie Bauer, April 22, 2023.

*Maggie's beloved brother Chris died from suicide in August of 2012. Chris was Maggie's older brother and only sibling. After the shock, numbness then intense pain decreased, Maggie moved back home to Minnesota where she found more resources including the Grief Recovery Institute® and became a Grief Recovery Specialist®. Maggie attended TCF Minneapolis Chapter for 5 years and is now on the steering committee and the sibling loss facilitator. In the almost 11 years since her brother's death, Maggie has spoken to hundreds of people about the loss of a sibling and general grief and in 2022 received the national Karen Snapp award for her advocacy as a bereaved sibling. Her goal is to help people get a grip on their own grief so they can live a full life again.*

# Sanctuary

Susurrations of the sea.  
Susurrations of the sea.  
The soothing sound is surrounding me.

Feet, free from shoes,  
feel the soft sand seeping through my toes.

Blowing breezes brush across my skin  
like gentle caresses from heaven.

Summer sun shines down on me,  
its golden glow gladdening my broken heart.  
This place is my sanctuary.  
This place is my respite from the world.

Walking along,  
I search for a sign of your presence.

I spy a seashell in the sand.  
Stooping slowly,  
I see that it is a pair of angel wings.

Carefully cradling my treasure,  
I know that you are with me here.  
Here in this holy place.  
This place that was your special place.

In this sacred space,  
I can find some peace.  
Though it is as fleeting as the  
sandpipers skittering across the surface of the sand.

- Joan Baker Scott

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*What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?*

*I lost my sister Lauren after I was out of college, so summer vacations were a thing of the past. It did take my family 18 years before we were ready to take a family trip together. It was a pivotal moment where we decided not to live in the past and make new, fun memories together. Since then, we have been on a few trips together and have incredible new experiences, never forgetting Lauren.*

**Jason Wendroff-Rawnicki, Lauren's Brother**

© Nick Brundler/stock.adobe.com





# We Watch

by Dr. Bob Baugher

We watch from above,  
 as they all arrive at the hotel.  
 Some have flown,  
 Others have driven.  
 They enter, pulling suitcases, carrying bags and purses.  
 To the casual observer they look like anyone else,  
 Signing for their room key,  
 Picking up their Conference bag at Registration.

That is, until you see their name tags that include our names.

Until you watch them deciding which of 16 workshops to attend across seven time slots,

Until you observe first-time parents, siblings, and grandparents comforted by long-timers.

Until you view old friends hugging in the hallway, laughing at lunch, and saying, “It’s good to see you!”

Friday and Saturday evening we see them select among some 20 sharing sessions,  
 With topics relevant to the way we left this earth.  
 We listen as they say our names, tell our story, question, laugh, cry, sit in silence.  
 Although difficult to watch, we know that long, slow healing is taking place.

At Saturday night banquet, there they are sitting at a table with seven others,  
 Who share a journey, some ahead, some behind.  
 As the rolls and butter are passed around, caring questions emerge,  
 “Where are you from?” “How long has it been?” “Can I see your picture button?”

As the speaker finishes and the desserts are eaten (Hey Dad, don’t eat two!)

The candle-lighting ceremony begins.  
 Each candle is lovingly lit for us.  
 Even we gasp as more than a thousand candles light up the darkened room.  
 The ceremony concludes with new friends hugging, chatting, and exchanging contact information.

Early Sunday, we see them on their walk—for us, of course.  
 Tee-shirts, banners, signs, and pictures, so tenderly held by those who miss us.

Hundreds of moms, dads, brothers, sisters, and grandparents quietly chat as they move down the street,  
 All the while each carrying love in their heart.

The closing ceremony bids them all a safe trip.  
 And, as they head to the airport or to their cars,

They take with them memories of a weekend brimming with care and love,  
 Of workshops and sharing sessions, of new friends and old, and promises to keep in touch.

But most importantly, they take what they came with,  
 Their enduring love for us.  
 We watch as they head home having experienced a long-remembered gift,  
 The gift of a TCF Conference.

*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.*



*What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?*

*It was really hard to go on trips after my son died because I felt like I was leaving him behind. It really helped me to have something of his with me, usually his class ring. I could touch this grounding object and feel a special connection with him*

**Dana Young, Nathan’s Mom**



© Pellini/stock.adobe.com

# The Reality of Losing My Brother and Grieving with My Parents

by Larissa Martin

My brother died a year ago. When it happened, I received love and support from everyone around me. Soon after it happened, a couple of my friends came over to check in on me and give their condolences.

I often heard (and still hear) sentences like, “I can’t imagine what your mom is going through” or “I don’t know what to say or do,” especially after seeing my mom for the first time after it happened. I understand where my friends were coming from; I really do. Losing a child is the most unnatural and horrific thing that can happen to a parent. No one’s supposed to bury their child before they die themselves. It’s not natural or fair in any way possible, and I don’t wish that unimaginable pain on any parent.

Here is the thing, though: Yes, my mom lost her son. And while I don’t know what that’s like for her, I lost someone too. I lost a sibling. Someone who was a piece of me. Someone with whom I was supposed to grow old and celebrate things

together. And now, that will never happen. I get to have this constant reminder of my loss, and I wouldn’t wish this pain on anyone.

This kind of loss and pain changes you forever — not in a good or bad way, but in a way that leaves you changed forever. And you will never be the same.

When a parent loses a child, and there are other kids in the picture, I think their siblings are often forgotten about. Their grief and sadness are seen and validated for a brief time, but after a while, it dissipates. Unfortunately, after some time, all the focus goes back to the parents. Because they lost a child, and that is a traumatic experience for them. They lost their baby.

There is truly nothing more heartbreaking than that. But at the same time, their siblings went through the same experience. But this is often overlooked because a parent is grieving a child, which is often deemed more important.

Please remember that just because the parent-child relationship is different from the sibling-sibling one, it doesn’t make your loss less significant than your parents’ loss.

While it’s not a contest to see who’s in more pain, we should try to remember that that loss is a loss, no matter who experienced it. Grief is not a competition. Instead, it’s something that needs to be healed and definitely not compared with the parent and sibling.

When someone we care about loses a loved one, we need to focus on them and their entire family.

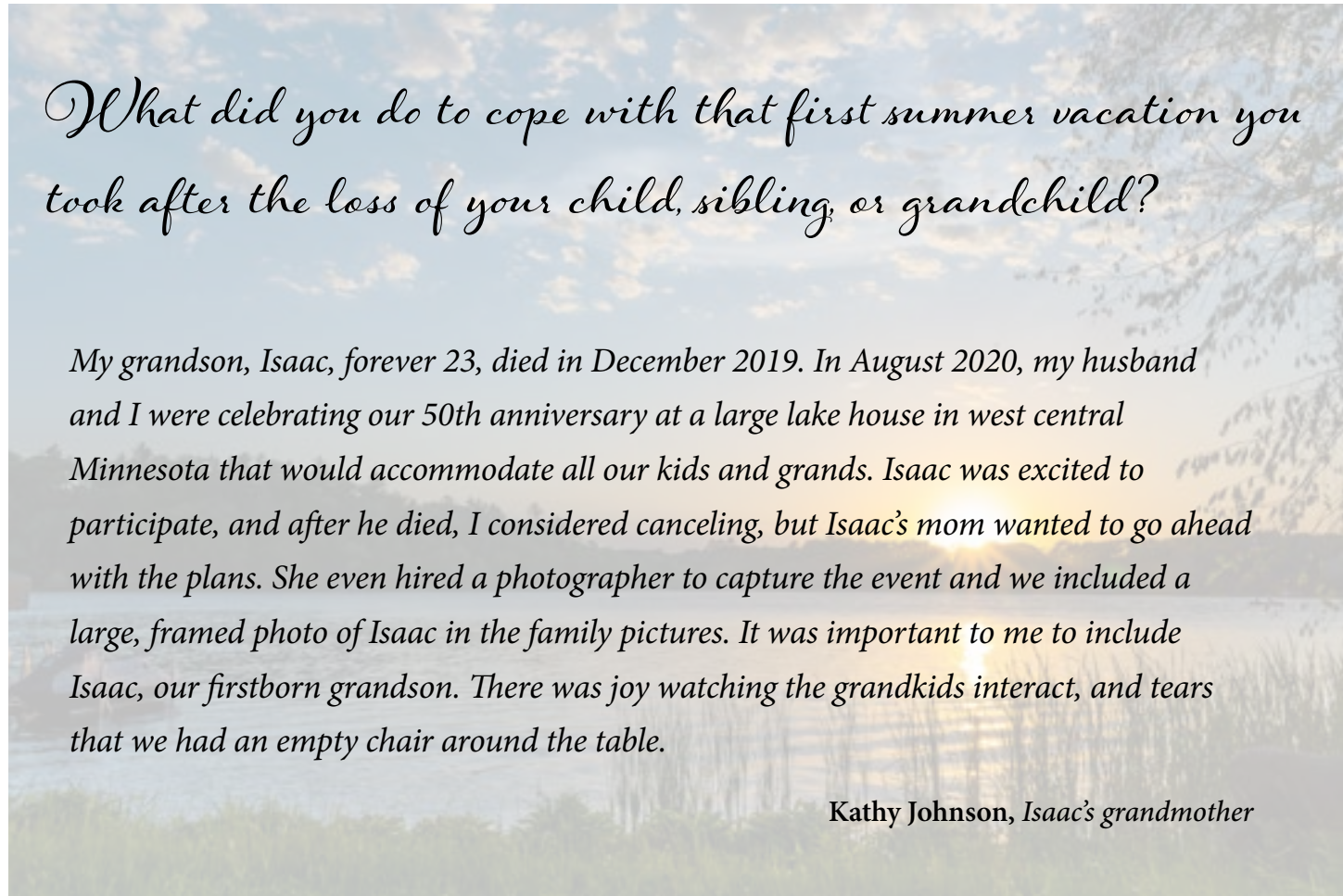
We need to support the whole family, not just the parents or the siblings but everyone. This type of pain needs support to heal and be acknowledged for what it is. Losing a loved one means losing a big piece of yourself forever, one that

they can never get back. I think if more people understood that, people wouldn’t forget siblings when grief happens to a family.

*When someone we care about loses a loved one, we need to focus on them and their entire family.*

*Larissa is an independent self-published author. She came out with her first book, **Dear Anxiety: Letters from a Girl Who Cares, and Stories from People Who Suffer with Anxiety**, in the summer of 2016. In 2017, she had her first writing piece published on **The Mighty**. Her goal is not to have people like her writing, but to learn, have different points of view from it, and*

*to open minds after reading her work. Larissa says that if she did that for one person, then she set out what she wanted to do as a writer. She has been published in **The Mighty, Unwritten Magazine, Thought Catalog, Project Wednesday, Thrive Global, The Minds Journal, and The Kindness Project**. Larissa wrote this piece about losing her brother David and grieving with her parents, not to take anything away from them especially, but feels the need to speak up for bereaved siblings and acknowledge that they are here and that they grieve also.*



*What did you do to cope with that first summer vacation you took after the loss of your child, sibling, or grandchild?*

*My grandson, Isaac, forever 23, died in December 2019. In August 2020, my husband and I were celebrating our 50th anniversary at a large lake house in west central Minnesota that would accommodate all our kids and grands. Isaac was excited to participate, and after he died, I considered canceling, but Isaac’s mom wanted to go ahead with the plans. She even hired a photographer to capture the event and we included a large, framed photo of Isaac in the family pictures. It was important to me to include Isaac, our firstborn grandson. There was joy watching the grandkids interact, and tears that we had an empty chair around the table.*

**Kathy Johnson, Isaac’s grandmother**

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# My Grief Journey

## *How I Wound Up Writing a Musical Without Planning To Do So*

by Larry Hirschhorn

There is a story of a teenager who was fixing his Chevy Impala when it fell on top of him. His middle-aged mom, preparing dinner, heard the crash and found the strength of ten men to lift the car and drag her son to safety. Ione Kuhner, a dental assistant, was diagnosed with early onset dementia. She was 57. As she lost her grip on daily life her husband was shocked to see that she had begun to produce the most beautiful paintings. The neurologist, Bruce Miller, notes that “Some of the most beautiful art I’ve ever seen has come out of my patients with degenerative diseases.” His conclusion: “In these rare dementia patients -- so called ‘acquired savants’ -- the disease that destroys some brain areas activates others, unlocking hidden talents.” Eadweard Muybridge, a book seller suffered a traumatic head injury when his horse drawn stagecoach hit a tree. While before the accident he hadn’t filed a single patent, after it he filed ten. Abandoning bookselling and becoming a photographer, he invented the zoopraxiscope, which proved decisively

that horses, when galloping, were suspended mid-air for milliseconds. They could fly. And he did too.

I am a management consultant and economist who thrives on analytic thinking. My son, Aaron Hirschhorn, died in a boating accident in Miami Bay on March 28, 2022. He was a month shy of 43 years old. He left behind his wife Karine and three children, August, Joel and Elle. He was a wonderful man; energetic, lively, intelligent, an entrepreneur who had started two companies and was rising to the top of his game. He was a loving and loyal son. His death shook my world to its core. Yet in response to Aaron’s death, I too found untapped sources of creativity within me. On April 29, 2022, the day before Aaron’s 44th birthday, my community of family and friends attended a performance of a musical I wrote, titled *Grieving Aaron* (*Grieving Aaron: The Musical*) at the Venice Island Theater in Philadelphia.

I had never written music before and wrote only ditties for people’s birthdays. Yet shortly after he died, I wrote poems about his dying and its impact on me and self-published them in a small book titled *Grieving Aaron*. That summer, without apparent prompting, I started writing music in the spirit of the showtunes and ballads I grew up with in the 1950s. The lyrics drew on memories of happy moments, my hopes for my other son, and the prospect that I could live with the pain as well as the pleasure of my remaining years. I had the good fortune of having a brother, a physician, who is also a published poet and a sister who is a singer-songwriter. They and a close friend gave me feedback on my poems and songs. I was also blessed with a loving daughter-in-law, the wife of my other son, Daniel, who was wise in all things theatrical. My unprompted writing and these connections gave rise to the idea that I could write a musical to dramatize and further develop the poems and music I had composed.

I have no special insight into how my brain rewired itself, even if only temporarily, to give me these talents. Surely, my experience approximates the trauma that gave Muybridge and Kuhner access to heretofore untapped abilities. This is a puzzle for neurologists. But I can speculate on the psychological factors that drove me, much like the way in which Angela Cavello, the teenager’s mother, found what physicians call “hysterical strength,” to save her son.

Death is ineffable. I don’t have the religious conviction that our souls continue. I wish I did. This means that death feels like an injustice to me. I was born through the most improbable of accidents, placed on this good earth to do my best to meet my needs and the needs of those I love, to experience the extremes of joy and terror, only to disappear. What gives me hope, purpose and meaning, and always did, is the experience of continuity through the work I’ve accomplished, the hopefully good effects of my efforts on others, and most importantly raising children who in turn will bring their children into the world. This made my world feel orderly. It offered me a sense of continuity despite life’s fragility. My son’s death, any child’s death, overturned this natural order of the universe. As I said, it shook me to the core.

Creative work of the kind I undertook had three effects on me. First, it helped me master the trauma of my son’s death. It is as if I was saying to the fates and the furies, “You might try to destroy me, but I can respond with agency and create something that restores order in my world.” In fact, as I wrestled to bring order out of an unfinished melody, poem,

or dramatic scene and infused this order with some measure of delight, I countered my sense of helplessness. Second, this creative work was my gambit to sustain my personal continuity even after I passed. I am not a Shakespeare who secured his presence long after his death, “as far as the eye can see.” But writing a musical and offering it here through this website is a way in which I separate myself from my work so that at least potentially, it has a life of its own, beyond mine, and is valued by people that I will never know, now and into the future. Of course, this result is not guaranteed. But the effort itself gives me hope. Third, writing a play and mounting its performance, connected me with wonderful and talented people, my director, the cast, my daughter-in-law who produced the play, my siblings and song-writing friend, and most importantly the family and friends who attended the performance. Religions have always created communal ceremonies for marking out someone’s death. In my Jewish tradition it is called a “Shiva,” among the Irish it is the “Wake.” The performance was my personal ceremony. It connected me to the people I knew and loved. By attending they told me, “You’re not alone and we mourn with you.”

The musical enacts my arc of grief from the moment my wife Marla and I learn of Aaron’s death to a moment of reconciliation when memories are enough to remind us of the miracle of his existence. Each of the characters in the musical, Karine, Aaron’s widow, Marla, Daniel, our other son, Jennie, my daughter-in-law, and all my grandchildren played an essential role in the journey of my *Grieving Aaron*. I hope the musical will help parents who have lost their children make sense of, and metabolize, both their grief and their yearning. It is my fondest wish that it will connect them to the widest community of parents who have learned that the price of a great love is sometimes a great loss. Through this learning, I, they, we, can recognize that we are not alone.

*Grieving Aaron, the Musical*: <https://bit.ly/3QOtKz1>

*Larry Hirschhorn lives in Philadelphia with his wife Marla Isaacs. He has one remaining son, Daniel, and five grandchildren. He is a principal emeritus with CFAR, a management consulting firm. He recently produced a one-time performance of a musical play, Grieving Aaron, for family and friends. He hopes to make the video of the performance available to other grieving parents. He published a book of poetry last year with the same title, Grieving Aaron.*

# I Saw You at the Fair Today

by Sylvia Bosma



I saw you at the Fair today. I glanced over my shoulder, noticing a flash of color. A girl with streaks of pink and purple in her hair, just like you used to have, melted into the crowd.

I saw you at the Fair today. Your brother and I took a selfie on the Ferris wheel, way up high. He tucked his head into my side, the way he did when it was the three of us, years ago. I imagine you and I looking out like we did then, in awe of the world stretching out in front of us.

I saw you at the Fair today. Students have the day off, and teenagers are strolling in small groups. I imagine you among them, forever 14 years old, giggling, trying to decide whether to ride the bumper cars again or go for the Ferris wheel once more.

I saw you at the Fair today. The sweet scent of cotton candy - your favorite - wafted through the air. I saw you standing there, handing over money, your eyes lighting up as you reached out to receive your delicious prize.

I saw you at the Fair today. You were cradling a baby duck, ever so gently stroking its downy head. You held it out

to your little brother so he could pet it, feel its incredible softness too.

I saw you at the Fair today. Your eyes glued to the giant dolphin, inwardly formulating your words, a request - no, a plea - for this precious stuffed animal. How this soft creature just had to come home with you, because you don't have one like that yet. This was the absolute must-have, the one that you couldn't possibly live without.

I saw you at the Fair today, my longing for you taking my breath away, tears threatening as I smiled, remembering. You are no longer here, yet you are everywhere.

It is these new memories that bring old ones back to life. They bring you back to life, my precious child. And so, I will continue to make new memories, all the while carrying you along with me.

*Sylvia's life forever changed on September 15, 2017, when her daughter, Kaitlyn - KK - Cook, died by suicide. She gives credit to The Compassionate Friends (TCF) for getting her through the initial months of crushing grief. TCF continues to provide support over the years. Sylvia says that she is now at the point that she can give back and offer hope for those early in their grief. Sylvia lives in Tampa, Florida with her husband and youngest son.*

# Charlie's Wave

I see you surfing the stardust  
A million light years away,  
Wisps of hair curled around meteorites,  
Adrenaline-filled eyes  
That don't see me watching.  
I see you swimming in the ocean abyss  
Conversing with rays and starfish  
A subterranean dialogue I can't  
understand.  
Your voice disappears in the black waters.  
And I see that you have superpowers now.  
You can shoot fire from your fingers  
and turn invisible  
And take on the bad guys  
With Ironman at your side.  
But I don't see you  
In your room  
With scattered Legos, video games.

Dirty t-shirts crumpled in the corner.  
A goldfish,  
A hamster,  
Items of an earthly American boyhood.  
No more birthday candles.  
No more bike rides to the bookshop.  
No more sandcastles.  
No more.  
Boy, I loved you hard.  
I thought you were mine,  
But you slipped into the multiverse.  
And, boy, you don't ever visit my  
dimension  
Not in my dreams,  
Not even to sail away with the gypsies.  
I never got to teach you to fly.

- Danielle Kubasko Sullivan



# Forever Friends

by Carol Schultz

I was in a cheerful mood as I walked into the card store that bright April morning. My sister Rosemary's twenty-second birthday was the next day and I wanted to give her the perfect greeting. One beckoned from among the myriad of cards. It had a bright red rose in the center and large gold lettering with the inscription "My Sister – My Forever Friend." The sentiment was appropriate. We were the best of buddies despite our differences. I was brunette, she was blonde; I was shy and studious, and she was outgoing and creative. We had supported each other during the difficult years following our parents' divorce. When our family shattered, we were children; I was eleven and she was seven. The split was contentious, and we often felt like we were each other's port in the storm. No one else could share the tumult of those years. As we grew up, Rosemary shadowed me. During my teen years her mischievous streak surfaced, and she would constantly tease and torment me about my boyfriends, until she grew into a lovely young woman and attracted plenty of her own. We became especially close in

our twenties and the four-year age gap seemed to evaporate as we both struggled with the demands of young adulthood.

Her birthday on April 10th was a time of celebration and she hugged me tightly after she read my card. 1973 was a happy time for both of us. I was already married, and she was planning to be married within the year. The future seemed bright. Little did I know that her twenty-second birthday was to be her last.

The next time I laid eyes on that card, I was in a despondent mood. Seven months had passed, and I was sorting through Rosemary's personal mementos after her funeral. My beautiful little sister, who was so exuberant and full of life, had been tragically killed in an accident caused by a drunk driver on November 22, 1973 – Thanksgiving night.

All I had left of my sister were memories and the small collection of artwork and writings she had created during her short but vibrant life. As I gazed sadly at the birthday

card, an image of a collage came before my eyes – a collage of her life which I needed to create in remembrance of her. I collected photos of Rosemary from infancy to twenty-two with an emphasis on pictures of the two of us. My centerpiece was the April birthday card with the single red rose and the words "Forever Friends." In my grief state, that phrase seemed cruelly ironic. Our relationship would be forever immortalized in those still photographs of ourselves frozen in time as children, teenagers, young women and then – nothing. My anger grew as I envisioned the future without her. Our relationship was not supposed to end like this. We should have grown old together.

However, as I slowly sifted through the remainder of her belongings, it seemed as if she were sending me a message. The last greeting card which she drew, decorated and gave to me on my birthday in October 1973 said "Much love and many warm sunny days to a beautiful person – my sister and my friend." I felt as if she were sending me her love throughout my life. An essay she wrote when she was thirteen, after the assassination in 1963 of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, struck a responsive chord. In that piece, Rosemary poignantly said that although our memories of JFK would be dimmed, we would never forget him. She continued, "For in remembering him, do not remember him silent and still, but full of life. For as you do, although there be tears in your eyes, your soul will be filled with joy in memory of John F. Kennedy." These words had a strong impact on me especially since her death, coincidentally, was on the tenth anniversary of the slain President's assassination.

One of her paintings in particular touched me. A premonition of her own death seemed to be expressed in it. The canvas portrayed a blonde girl wearing a black dress and kneeling before a bouquet of fallen roses in an underground room. These mementos were a message from my sister. She was guiding me to deal with the loss of her

physical presence by the things she left behind. These tangible reminders of Rosemary were important. Most of all, however, when I thought of her, I remembered the intangibles, her spirit, and her zest for life. She lived each day to the fullest. I vowed to do the same.

Years, then decades, passed and my grief slowly transformed into a bittersweet acceptance. The loss had changed me forever, making each day precious. Understanding that death is part of the cycle of life, I have attempted to make the quality of my life an asset so I can enrich other's lives

*I have attempted to make the quality of my life an asset so I can enrich other's lives during my short time on earth in the same way my sister's life enriched mine.*

during my short time on earth in the same way my sister's life enriched mine. When I look into the bright blue eyes of my daughter, Rosemary, so like her aunt's;

when I stand in awe before the beauty of a sunset over the ocean; when in my legal career I attempt to understand the tribulations of another person; when I assist my husband in dealing with the loss of his eyesight from a degenerative eye disease; I know my own grief and pain has aided in my personal growth. My life has been more fulfilling because of the short time that I had my sister's presence on this earth. As Emily Dickinson wrote in her poem, "Life": "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." My sister's legacy to me is my hope in the resiliency and strength of the human spirit.

*Carol Schultz Vento is a former Political Science professor and attorney. She received her undergraduate degree and her doctorate from Temple University and her law degree from Rutgers University School of Law. She is the daughter of World War II veteran Arthur 'Dutch' Schultz, the 82nd Airborne paratrooper who was portrayed in the D-Day movie "The Longest Day" and whose war experiences have been written about in books about the European Theater in World War II. Her book *The Hidden Legacy of World War II: A Daughter's Journey of Recovery* was published by Sunbury Press. She has also published World War II history articles and legal articles. Carol is a native of Philadelphia and lives in Palmyra, New Jersey with her husband Frank. They have an adult daughter. Her sister Rosemary was Carol's best friend. Rosemary's death on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1973 left her to navigate most of her adult life without her sister. A lonely journey sometimes but taught Carol the fragility of life and the importance of kindness.*

# The Wisdom of Darcie Sims

## *A Breath of Summer - Anytime*

It's summer and the air is warm upon my face. The sunlight dances across the grass, casting tiny shadows of the dandelions that wave in the afternoon breeze. It's nice here, sitting on the step, letting my mind wander, not really thinking of anything much. It's been a long time since I was able to just sit and enjoy the gentle rhythms of a summer's day.

Do you remember summer? Summer, that wonderful reprieve from winter's despair, was the season of innocence. We ran through the meadows, without caring about tomorrow. We chased rainbows after storms and sang in the rain; chasing away whatever clouds appeared on our horizon. We picked berries and made lemonade and sugar cookies. Life was good and simple and gentle in the summertime.

Why isn't it now? Why now, does light hurt my eyes and the sun sear my soul? Why now, do I see the crabgrass and the weeds instead of making fairy wreaths of the dandelions? Why does the storm cloud come and stay and where did the rainbows go? Has my vision grown cloudy? Has grief permeated even the summertime place in my memory? Why can't I remember the joy, the laughter, the games of early evening and the recipe for popsicles? What happened to me? Did I forget the light because all I can remember is

the darkness? Has grief stolen even the sunlight, leaving only shadows of sorrow? I didn't know it would hurt this much in summer.

I used to be able to imagine fairy castles and ice cream mountains, guarded by purple dragons and yellow birds. All I can envision now is the emptiness. Even when I close my eyes, all I can see is blackness. Will I forever be running away from pain and emptiness?

A storm gathers across the sky. The smell of rain comes on the wind and I know I must seek shelter, both from the rain and from the grief that washes across me, day after day.

It cannot hurt this much forever! I cannot hide forever. I cannot keep running away. I want to find summer again!



And so, I must find a way back to the joy. As I dash to the porch to seek safety from the rain, I know I must also find some way to embrace the pain of this grief in order to release it whenever I am ready. Perhaps I can start by learning to breathe. When we are hurting or in a hurry or under great stress, we grab at the air, pulling it in as fast as we can. We swallow great gulps of air, inhaling and exhaling as quickly as possible.

We never really quite fill our lungs because we are gasping at the air. We are almost desperate in our attempt to breathe.

But here in the slowness of a summer's rain, perhaps we can learn to grow gentle in our breathing and in our despair, as well. Breathing isn't a big step in the grief process, but it is the most important one! Without breathing, nothing else works. And since we are breathing, we might as well enjoy its healing capabilities.

So, as you sit on the step, or lie down in the grass, begin to become aware of your breathing. Notice how and when you take in air and how and when you release it. Do you grasp at the air, grabbing at the air, trying to fill your lungs to capacity? Or do you merely "sip" at the air, allowing small amounts to slip past your lips? Perhaps breathing deeply hurts in some way, causing muscle spasms or memories to flood across your mind...

Become aware of your breathing and try to orchestrate your breath. Bring air in through your nose, holding it for a count of 1-2-3 and then let it escape past your lips. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Feel your breath and follow it as it flows through your body. Breathe in through your nose, imagining the oxygen going through every cell in your body, bringing its healing energy to every corner of yourself. Exhale through your lips, letting the used-up air rise all the way up from your toes; and send it out of your body, letting it escape through your mouth.

You can even add sounds to the breathing out, if you wish. Listen to your body and find the sounds that may be hiding somewhere within you. You can find those sounds and let them go as you release your breath. Perhaps you find a groan or some anger that needs expressing. Perhaps it is a song or laughter that bubbles up and out. Whatever the sounds, let them come, as you allow your breath to be released.

You may find tears coming as you practice this breathing technique. Let them come as well as any feelings that rise to your awareness. Healing begins when feelings are recognized, acknowledged, and released. As you continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, you might wish to close your eyes and let your mind begin to drift. Grow quiet and find the rhythm of your body,

breathing in a way that feels comfortable to you.

Perhaps you can imagine a warm light shining down on the top of your head. It is just like sunlight dancing across your forehead, warming your whole being. As you continue breathing,

imagine that sunlight moving down your body, drifting slowly across each part of your body. Imagine the sunlight caressing the back of your neck and your shoulders, easing away the tension that we often carry there.

Imagine the sunlight flowing down your shoulders, your elbows, across your chest. As the warmth of this summer sun washes across your body, you can feel the tension leaving. The cares of the winter drip down your legs and leave through your toes. You feel lighter, softer, calmer.

As you begin to feel more at peace, let your imagination create a "safe place" for you. Find a summertime memory that brings feelings of warmth, safety, and pleasure to you. You might find yourself on the beach, feeling, seeing, hearing the waves wash across the sand. You might be standing in a mountain meadow, surrounded with wild flowers, the sounds of a gentle mountain stream calling you to rest.

Whatever picture comes to you as you spend a few moments in reflective breathing, enjoy it completely. Smell the smells of your favorite place. Taste the tastes, hear the sounds of this magical moment. It is yours, deep within you, a place of safety and calmness.

You can find this quiet within anytime you need to, just by becoming aware of your breathing, always breathing in through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. As you become more experienced in this breathing technique, you will find you can create any scene you wish, creating any landscape you find comforting. You can create a

*Healing begins when feelings are recognized, acknowledged, and released.*

*Continued on page 28*

summertime place anywhere, anytime. You just have to breathe and imagine.

Breathe in peace. Exhale tension. Let it flow out of you, imagining your summertime sun warming each part of your body.

Breathe in joy. Exhale sadness. Blow out the grief, if only for a single moment. Feel your heart becoming lighter, your pain growing less.

Breathe in love. Exhale grief. Let the light of your loved one's life fill you with memories, not just of summer time, but of every time you laughed and sang and danced and dreamed and loved.

Make the commitment to grow quiet within and listen to the music of yourself. Take one small footstep each day.

Make one small change each day. It only takes a moment to find the magic within. So, here in the warmth of summertime, find the peace that is deep within you and let it bring comfort to yourself and others. Be gentle in your despair and trust the wisdom within.

Find a new wholeness for yourself this summer. Find the balance of heart and mind that allow the memories to heal rather than hurt. Come out of hiding in the summertime and let the breath of summer begin to heal the hurts.

Breathe in love and find the memories and the magic of those who have loved us. Love is the magic that heals us all.

*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."*

## 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

**Twins 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](http://siblingisland.com) or scan the QR code.

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

The Compassionate Friends offers virtual support through an Online Support Community (live typed 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*

### 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*

### WEDNESDAY

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

### 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*

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*

### SATURDAY

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*

Visit [www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/online-support/](http://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/online-support/) for more information and to register.

# 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/tcflossofstepchild

## TCF – Loss of a Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofgrandchild

## 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/tcflossosrc

## TCF - Sibling Loss To Substance Related Causes

facebook.com/groups/tcfsiblinglossosrc

## TCF - Loss to Suicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossosuicide

## TCF - Loss to Homicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossohomicide

## TCF - Loss to Domestic Violence

facebook.com/groups/lossdomesticviolence

## TCF – Loss of a Child With Special Needs

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchildwithspecialneeds

## TCF – Loss to Long-Term Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflosstolongtermillness

## TCF – Loss to Mental Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflosstomentalillness

## TCF – Loss to a Drunk/Impaired Driver

facebook.com/groups/tcfdrunkimpaireddriver

## TCF – Loss of a Medically Complex Child

facebook.com/groups/lossofamedicallycomplexchild

## TCF - Loss to COVID-19 or Other Infectious Diseases

facebook.com/groups/tcflossocovid19

## TCF – Loss to Cancer

facebook.com/groups/tcflossocancer

## TCF – Loss to Miscarriage or Stillbirth

facebook.com/groups/tcflossomiscarriagstillbirth

## TCF – Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Loss of an Infant Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/miscarriagstillbirthinfantgrandchild

## 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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*The Compassionate Friends*

# Worldwide Candle Lighting

Join us on December 10, 2023

*"... that their light may always shine."*

The Compassionate Friends annual Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. The Worldwide Candle Lighting creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.



*We are excited to announce the dates for*  
**Our 47th National Conference**

July 12-14, 2024

in New Orleans, LA