

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

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

Spring 2024



*The
Compassionate
Friends*

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

The Loss of a Child

*The loss of a child
No matter the way,
Will never change the fact
That we wanted you to stay.*

*Stay in our arms forever
Not just in our heart,
They left a huge hole
When their soul did depart.*

*Depart this life and earth
Their wings widely spread,
Onto a happier plane we hope
Yet left behind only dread.*

*Dread of a life without them
No graduation or kids of their own.
All I have are the ashes
While others have a stone.*

*Stone cold outward expressions
While tears stream deep inside.
Most people have no knowledge
Without knowing they can't realize.*

*Realize the constant aching
The pain we all feel daily,
As we are left to carry on
When they left us so unfairly.*

- Julia West, Sophia's Mom



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Moving Through Grief

After the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild, our lives change forever. While this is true for all losses of someone we love, it is especially true for this unique type of loss. For parents, our child was an extension of us. We lose a significant part of ourselves along with losing our child. For siblings, a relationship that is usually one of the longest of our lives is severed. An interwoven web of lifelong connection is gone. Grandparents grieve the loss of an extension of themselves as well, while also supporting their adult child who is grieving. Some people fall into more than one of these groups after multiple heart-breaking losses in their lives.

When we speak of the unique loss that the death of a child brings, we tend to use words that describe a lengthy amount of time and a consuming process. People have described this experience as “journeying through grief” or being on “the road of grief.” This is because the new life we suddenly find ourselves living requires significant work, time, and endurance to navigate. Typically, a journey contains a distinct beginning, middle, and end. With profound grief, however, these points are not finite or distinguishable in the same way. While there is an identifiable beginning, there isn’t an end as much as there are various marking junctures at different points in time along the way.

Our spring edition of *We Need Not Walk Alone* contains stories and perspectives from bereaved individuals at various points in their grief journeys. Springtime can feel very challenging for bereaved people, especially for those whose loss was recent. The emergence of a new season, budding growth all around, and the reminders of what painfully ended can feel very difficult. Stories from our writers in this issue offer a glimpse of how each is navigating their grief over time and in this season. May the perspectives and wisdom they share offer you a moment of respite, support, understanding, and caring in your grief journey.

Warmly,

Shari O'Loughlin, MBA, CPC

CEO

The Compassionate Friends

Grief is Personal

All grief is different!
But, somehow just the same.
Filled with doubt and sorrow
excruciating pain.

Trying to remember,
never want to forget.
There was something special,
That first time, we met.

Through the pain and anguish,
try to think of me near.
You don't have to worry,
'cause I'll always be here.

- Ian T. Rowan, Sophia's Grandpa



How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

Losing a child, your world stops and becomes a dark place. Though in darkness, TCF provided a wealth of resources. For myself, however, attending the yearly conference has been the best resource of all. It offers a variety of workshops that are just right for me, tons of listening ears, lifelong connections to other bereaved parents to share stories in one place together for a weekend without judgment and continue to understand our journey and the purpose that life still has.

Nel Sweet-Davis, Alexandria's Mom

Preserving Your Memories

by Tim Meadows, Chris' Dad



*Time it was, and what a time it was
It was a time of innocence, a time of confidences
Long ago, it must be, I have a photograph
Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you.*

When I first heard these Simon and Garfunkel lyrics in 1968, I was only 14 and could never have imagined how loudly they would resonate more than 40 years later. Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you... Really? How important could memories and photographs be when you're young, so full of life and in search of the next great adventure?

Sure, when I grew up, married my wonderful wife and started our family, we did take lots of photographs because they were a good way to catalog milestones in our children's early lives. First breaths, first steps, birthdays, and graduations. The photo albums and shoeboxes full of negatives were always there as a kind of backstop, while we moved forward, focused on our daily life and planning for the future.

That reality came crashing down around us on May 24, 2009, when our son, our daughters' brother, our parents' grandson was killed while volunteering as an EMT and responding to a medical call on the dunes at Pismo Beach. It was our worst nightmare. As if those words could ever begin to describe it. Chris was only 24. Just two years prior he had graduated from college with a business degree, but had chosen a career in emergency medicine because helping others was his true passion.

Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you... When Chris died, we couldn't come to grips with how anything positive could come from reflecting on a life that had ended so tragically. It made us sick to think of what we had lost, what he had lost. Memories of Chris weren't comforting. Far from it. Remembering was so painful we tried to avoid it. How could we possibly find solace in any memory while we were reeling from grief?

In the months and years that followed Chris' death, we began to seek out his co-workers and friends in an effort to

get closer to him. They showered us with positive memories of living and working with Chris. They reminded us what a beautiful smile he had. How his positive energy impacted everyone around him. Some of the stories almost conjured up smiles, and one of his patients even wrote us a letter saying that he saved her life, and that she was so grateful she herself was going to pursue a career in emergency medicine.

As parents and siblings, we tend to see our loved one through a particular lens. Hearing others' accounts of their interactions with Chris started to bring us out of the fog of grief that hung over us. That other people continued to think about Chris and what he meant to them helped to allay our worst fears that he might be forgotten.

When we picked up Chris' car after his accident we found in it unmailed applications to paramedic schools. Chris had decided to take his career helping others to the next level. So, each year, we put on a fundraiser for paramedic scholarships that are awarded in Chris' memory. It's our way of helping others pursue their dreams of becoming paramedics. A dream Chris can no longer realize. One of the things we have done to honor Chris' memory is to award scholarships to EMT and paramedic students. This gives us the opportunity to talk about our son, and also have others get to know who he was. Through keeping his memory alive, in a sense, we keep Chris alive too, as best we can. As Sascha Wagner wrote, *"Memories will bring you love from the past, courage in the present, and hope for the future."* Through Chris' memorial scholarship, we can keep his memory alive. It also helps us imagine what might have been by watching others pursue his dream and share in his passion.

Chris' mantra was simple. "Never say, why didn't I." It captures the notion that life is fleeting, and we should try our best to live in the present. It means having no regrets. Try something new. Push yourself out of your comfort zone. Choose a career you're passionate about. Chris scuba dived, skydived, traveled, and danced his way through life, challenging himself; unencumbered by norms and what-

ifs. Each of us now embraces the concept of "Never say 'Why didn't I.'" We integrate it into our own lives and make choices based upon it. We're now all scuba-certified and dive together when we travel. We have skydived and we continually challenge ourselves to try new things. In these ways, we are creating new memories that remind us of him and live up to his credo.

Remembering was so painful we tried to avoid it. How could we possibly find solace in any memory while we were reeling from grief?

Chris was also an avid photographer, and had the enviable opportunity to travel the world a bit in his short life, capturing the local color of his journeys in thousands of amazing photographs. His photos live on. On

the walls of the ambulance company he worked for. In his friends' homes. And in ours. Now, they serve as pleasant reminders of a kind and gentle soul who lived life to the fullest, and found beauty everywhere he ventured.

We are so blessed to have had Chris in our lives if even for a short time. As writer Maud Berben reminds us, *"In the end all we are left with are memories. Bits and pieces of the time we've spent together. No matter how long the time was, it will never seem like enough."* We can now cherish our memories of Chris, and can't live without continually thinking of him. Gone are the days when the memories only elicited sadness and dread. Chris, we miss you dearly, but now we can find some joy in hearing your name and sharing a happy memory.

Our Chris, and your own loved ones may be gone, but your memories will keep them alive in your hearts.

Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you...

Tim Meadows served on the Board of Directors of The Compassionate Friends (TCF). He is also a trustee and vice president for TCF Foundation. Prior to his board positions at TCF, Tim was an active board member at Charity Smith, an administrative support service for memorial funds. Tim is also the Executive Director of the Christopher Meadows Memorial EMS Education Fund, a scholarship fund created after his son, Chris, was killed in the line of duty as an EMT. The fund has awarded over 120 paramedic, EMT, and nursing scholarships since 2010.



How Ought a Man to Grieve the Loss of His Child?

by Kelly McCoy, Cooper's Dad

Firefighting is inherently dangerous, and it remains, primarily, a man's work. Yes, women are increasingly joining the US Fire Service, but to this day the profession of firefighting is represented by an overwhelmingly male demographic.

I am a man and I have spent my adult life in the fire service. I lived and moved and found my being with men. Grown men. Aggressive men who channeled their behavior in a positive manner toward protecting life and property in local communities. Compassionate men, who rarely worked alone.

There is biological predisposition and learned behavior firefighters have that expresses itself in what I like to describe as 'John Wayne-ing' it. This looks like fierce determination, grit, problem-solving, and not asking for help. These are behaviors many men learn, certainly, and if we are being fair, are also naturally predisposed to.

What then when we, men, experience the loss of our child?

On October 8th, 2023, we lost our 23-year-old son, Cooper, to suicide. I do not like writing this word, suicide. It pains me deeply, yet it remains ground truth. I cannot undo it.

A micro-atomic bomb was dropped on our house, on our lives. I dropped to my knees and the air was sucked out of me. I could not stand, and I could not breathe. Yes, I cried. I wailed. I still cry.

I remember many of the fires I fought. I was never alone; I was with a crew of firefighters. We always practiced the buddy system. We worked in pairs of at least two. If we went into a fire together, we came out together. It was that simple. As the firefighters say in "Backdraft," the movie, "If you go, we go." Meaning, your brother or sister firefighter is not going to leave you in the fire if something happens.

In a fire, in a fire station, in the fire department, firefighters practice a lot of togetherness. Tough times, responding to tough calls, requires "tight togetherness." In a small fire, for example, firefighters can work off the hose line away from each other but within verbal communication range. In a complex, difficult fire, firefighters have a hand on each other's back and do not leave each other. The proximity is dialed to the level of physical touch.

Immediately after my son died, my brother flew into town to be with me. He slept on the floor next to the couch where I slept for four nights. We got up at night a few times, cried and hugged each other. He chose to enter the fire with me, and we practiced a lot of tight togetherness. He had a hand on my shoulder. The immediacy of Cooper's death required this level of proximity.

I know of a man who has lost a son. He is grieving deeply. He lives near a lake, and he has chosen to focus on his dogs, fishing, and solitude. He is 'John Wayne-ing' it.

I respect this. I respect this man. I honor him.

Who am I to suggest how a man ought to grieve? If we are truth telling, I could very, very easily be this man. I could check out, thumb my nose at all the things, and live in solitude. I do not think I would be wrong. Perhaps I should do this.

Despite this impression, my history and behavioral conditioning in the fire service runs deep within me, and I want to be with my brother. I do not want to be alone in my grief. I do not want to walk alone. I know that this is a complex, difficult fire and I need to be working with a crew.

I talk to my wife, my mom, my children, my brother, and my Compassionate Friends frequently. I want to talk about my son, what happened, and how I am feeling. I write. I walk. I breathe. I ground. I lean into tight togetherness and work as a team to help me make sense of this gaping, painful hole in my chest.

To be fair, I think a man needs time alone, processing time, time in the woods with his dogs fishing the lake. We lived in Montana for several years and this resonates with me. As I like to say it, we may need to hole up in a Nepalese cave and drink yak's milk with the shamans to begin to make sense of this tragedy.

A man needs this for a season. Maybe a few seasons. There is no shame in this.

*Lace your solitude with
compassionate family and friends
'who know' and will put a hand
on your shoulder and not leave
you during the darkest night of
your soul.*

Still, I want to call men to tight togetherness following the loss of their child. When the fire is complex, hot, dynamic, and dangerous, I know it is the time and place to practice tight togetherness. Hands on shoulders.

Knowing men the way I know them, especially working in high-risk operational environments for most of my life, it could be that only other men 'who know' are able to talk with a grieving man who has lost a child. This may be the signal that gets through the noise.

I remember a counselor coming to the fire station after a tragic call that our crew

had responded to. The counselor had never worked with firefighters and did not know a thing about fire service culture. We ran the counselor off, as they had no credibility.

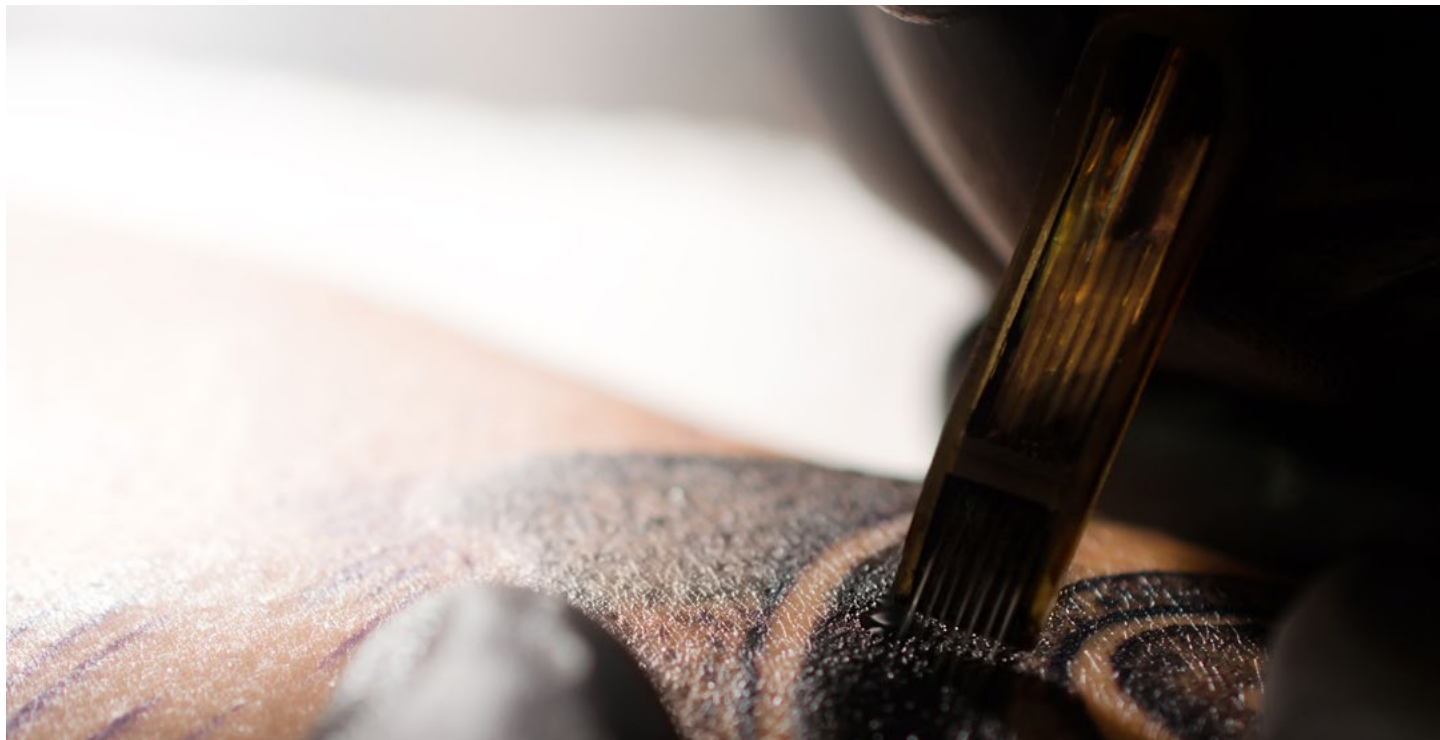
If a man has not lost a child and offers to help me, despite his best intentions, it would land flat. I would run him off. To talk to me about the loss of a child, you need to show up with credibility. You need to have lost a child.

The mantra of The Compassionate Friends is, "*We need not walk alone.*" In the fire service, this is a lived reality. Firefighters do not work alone. As the saying goes, "*If you go, we go.*"

Men, how ought we to grieve the loss of our child? With rugged determination and grit, certainly, but also, not alone. My humble admonition is this: do not do it alone. Go in together, come out together. Lace your solitude with compassionate family and friends 'who know' and will put a hand on your shoulder and not leave you during the darkest night of your soul.

Especially in the loss of a child, practice tight togetherness. You need not walk alone.

Kelly McCoy is a retired chief fire officer and educator. He lives in Lawrence, Kansas with his wife, daughter, and three dogs. He has two sons who live in Phoenix, AZ, and Pittsburgh, PA. Kelly lost his 23-year-old son Cooper in October of 2023.



A Tattoo for My Adelaideybug

by Kelly Cervantes, Adelaide's Mom

It is October 17, 2019. Today my baby girl should be turning four, she should be enrolled in preschool and taking beginner ballet classes. She should be debating whether she wants to be a dinosaur or a fairy princess for Halloween, changing her mind each morning with her mood.

Today, my baby girl should be alive.

But the universe doesn't care about my shoulds. So, instead, I am walking to Metamorph Tattoo Studios with my mom.

Now, if you knew my mom you would understand just how ridiculous this statement is. She shops at Talbots, wears matching jewelry sets and when I asked if I could get a tattoo in high school she said, "Sure, but then you'll need to figure out how to pay for college on your own."

A lot has changed since then. Not least of which being the birth of my daughter four years ago, my Adelaide.

Some people have prophetic dreams. Dreams that give them direction in life or premonitions about what is to come. I have had two prophetic dreams that I can remember. One was that I was going to own a pair of yellow galoshes. Actually, that one may count more as manifesting.

Regardless, I still own, adore, and wear them whenever the sky is sad. The other was that the baby I was carrying inside me was a ladybug and in the dream, I whispered her name, my Adelaideybug. Upon waking, I immediately called my mother and told her we were scrapping the jungle-themed nursery, and to begin the Pinterest board for the perfect red and black-spotted decor.

Years later, I would learn that ladybugs, in addition to their endearing appearance and penchant for luck, have secret wings that remain hidden until it is time for them to take flight. These fierce predators also defend our plant world by eating pests and have survived for millions of years always adapting to their new environments. Ladybugs are nature's resilient warriors and defenders, just as my Adelaide would be for me and so many others until she unfurled her own secret wings and flew away on October 12, 2019, due to complications from epilepsy and a neurodegenerative disorder.

After nearly four years of being inseparable, I was on day five of living without her. The world dragging me along in its relentless rotations. I had lost all sense of direction and purpose. It would take me years to find it again.

"So, what can I do for you today?" The tattoo artist asked when I was comfortably seated in his black leather chair.

I pulled up a picture on my phone of a drawing I had found of a ladybug in flight. It was saved in a Pinterest board titled "Ladybug tattoos," right next to the one I still had titled "Ladybug nursery." The alpha and omega of it all was lost on me. Or maybe it was just too painful to acknowledge.

"I'd like her on my wrist please, where I can always see her."

"Let me know if you need to take a break if the pain is too much." The artist told me. Any physical pain I felt that afternoon came as a relief.

It has now been four and a half years since I sat in the black leather chair at Metamorph Tattoos (yes, half-years matter) and some of the lines on my ladybug are showing the first signs of fading. A lot of thought didn't go into getting the tattoo. My mother suggested it, made the appointment, and then I spent a couple of hours scrolling through images. Today, there is no accessory (permanent or otherwise) that means more to me.

Not long after Adelaide died, we moved to a different city for my husband's job. I have met entire communities of friends that will never know my daughter. When they look at my family, I know most of them only see the physical four of us. But when I look at my family, I will always see five. Adelaide exists in all the space around us, in the places our

skin or clothes are pushed together in embrace. She exists in our smiles and laughter, our heartbeats and breath. How can they not see her? How can they possibly not know she was here?

How is it possible that they can know us but will never know her?

My Adelaideybug exists in my tattoo, a physical representation that I so desperately crave. An invitation to remind the world that she existed, mattered and was so very loved. After all, what parent doesn't love talking about their children.

"I love your tattoo." I turned to see a fellow baseball mom sit down next to me on the bleachers at my son's baseball game. I had seen her around, but we hadn't spoken beyond polite hellos and good games.

"Thank you," I said, seeing an opening and running with it. "It's in honor of my daughter, Adelaide, my Adelaideybug, she passed away several years ago. You see, I had a dream when I was pregnant with her about ladybugs..."

Kelly Cervantes, author of Normal Broken: The Grief Companion for When It's Time to Heal but You're Not Sure You Want To, is a writer, speaker, and advocate best known for her blog "Inchstones" and her work with the non-profit CURE Epilepsy including as the host of their podcast Seizing Life. Kelly will be a keynote presenter at TCF's 2024 National Conference in New Orleans. Born and raised in the Midwest, Kelly currently resides in Maplewood, NJ, with her family and two dogs, Tabasco and Sriracha.

How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

The National Conference has been such a great resource for my grief. Because of the conference, I have been able to attend workshops which have helped me navigate my grief. Attending the conferences has allowed me to meet others who are also going through the grieving process and understand this lifelong journey. Each year, the conference has allowed me to spend time with friends and share my daughter's memories with those who understand our loss.

Robin's Landry, Emily's Mom

Losing My Roadmap

by Katy Leach, Kristin's Sister



C.S. Lewis wrote “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.” When my sister Kristin died, I had so many emotions flooding over me. First, I was wondering what would happen next. From that first night, it felt like I was falling into some strange assembly line where everyone knew what was happening as I scrambled to make sense of how I got there. Writing the obituary, picking out a plot, picking a day for a viewing and a funeral, picking out what she would wear and what I would wear. I did her makeup and nails for her funeral. She would’ve done the same for me. It was all a daze. I knew the first night when I was walking out of the hospital that the world just seemed a little scarier.

When I left the funeral, I didn’t know what was next. She would have been the first person I would call. This time, I couldn’t call her. She would’ve had the perfect advice.

The fear never really went away. It’s gotten smaller in some ways. More manageable. Since I’m the younger sibling, Kristin was my roadmap. I went to her for advice, and she always had it. She was leading the way, but always there to help me. It gave me a sense of calm, knowing that she could tell me what to expect. She dealt with our parents longer and could give me extra insight on how to ask if I

could have that sleepover or go out with friends later than normal. She had been to more family events during the holidays and could help me navigate the family dynamics that happened before I was born. She knew the cool music. (If you’re wondering, it was Rick Springfield when I was born, and it never changed.) In my teens, she showed me skincare routines and gave me dating advice. She was ten times more skeptical of everyone than anyone else. She had a protective nature that I thought only an older sibling could have. In 1989, we had matching graduation cakes- me in preschool and her in high school. We cheered for each other that year, and she cheered me on at high school and college graduation.

As time has passed, I’ve had a lot of time to reflect. It’s been twelve years since she died, and we were born twelve years apart. She had just turned 40 when she died, and now I am 40. There were times I gave advice, and I definitely had the same protective nature towards her. She may have been older, but we were both growing up together.

Now I’m entering a new chapter in life, and I wonder what advice she would have. The future seems even more unknown without my roadmap. But maybe it’s not about

specific advice. Maybe it was always about sharing a life. The feeling of safety that comes with knowing someone is in my corner all day, every day and I was always in her corner all day, every day. Having someone where I knew we always supported each other and always had each other’s best interest at heart. Knowing we could call each other at three o’clock in the morning and we would be there for each other. It was about the simple Sundays where she made my favorite dinner. She knew that I’d drop everything to drive down and sit at that family table to know that after dinner, the kids would be playing, her husband would be doing something around the house, and I’d have that extra sister time to sit and talk. It was about all the simple times of catching up, running errands, and laughing until our stomachs would hurt. It was about living life together. We were always supposed to be able to laugh about the past

with our own inside jokes, create more memories in the present, and dream about who we would be in the future.

When I dream about the future now, I also dream of another future - the one where she’s here. In that one, we’re sitting on a front porch swing, watching the dogs play in the yard while the sun sets. We’re laughing at the most recent ridiculous thing someone in the family did. She’s still giving me advice, and our husbands are on the back porch having a drink and their own conversation - probably laughing about us. It’s still a little scarier when I’m out in the world without a roadmap. It makes life bittersweet.

Katy Leach is Kristin's sister. She died October 28, 2011, after complications from outpatient surgery. Katy's been on her local TCF steering committee since 2017, and the National sibling steering committee since 2023. In 2022, Katy started presenting workshops at National conferences. She became a chapter co-leader in 2024.

TCF Sibling Zoom Meetings

SIB Suicide Support - Meets 4th Monday of the month at 9:00 pm ET

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

Grief Book Club - Meets 1st Tuesday of the month at 7:30 pm ET

Write Your Soul - Meets 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm ET

Meeting with Jason - Meets Thursdays at 7:00 pm ET

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

Canada Sibling Sharing Circle - Meets 2nd Saturday of the month at 1:00 pm ET

SIBS in Relationships and Partners - Meets 2nd Sunday of the month at 7:00 pm ET



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



The Winds Blow ... But the Sun Still Shines

by Janine Salevsky, Natalia's Mom

An excerpt from the book, *Natalia's Endless Love...A Love to Live For*:

The winds forever blow. Sometimes they catch us off guard, and other times serve as a gentle reminder. For there are forces that exist, far greater than our own being. It's evident when a stiff winter wind can bring on heightened preparedness and yet a gentle summer breeze, simply a warming reassurance. Our lives are filled with these day-to-day shifts, ebbs and flows, push and pulls. Through these, we experience times where we tend to brace ourselves and rely on our instincts to guide us, and others where we wait and watch, letting things pass. And when the wind finally seems to settle, and the coolness fades, the sun is always there, sometimes in plain sight or sometimes hidden amongst the backdrop of a cloud-filled sky.

That's the reality of life. We never know what is to come. And thus, we don't know what is to follow. So, we tend to hold our breaths, with some of us emerging unscathed, while others struggle with another day's fight. Our

intentions are to be self-sufficient and resilient, but there are life circumstances that occur in which we are not inclined to be – particularly with the loss of a loved one.

Oftentimes, there are no prevailing winds to alert us, and even if so, knowing would not make us any more resilient. Still, we are brought wearily to our knees and chilled to our core. Goosebumps appear as we wait. And we wait. We wait for comfort – the comfort of a warm, familiar sun. We long for that gleaming smile and the softness of a touch. But the return of a familiar sun doesn't always occur, leading to disappointment and despair. Time passes, and when we finally realize the sun, we're inclined to turn away in disappointment and not accept its' glory. Meanwhile, we try to assemble the broken pieces of our hearts, for a crucial piece is missing. Nothing fits right or even feels right. We come to realize, struggle after struggle and tear after tear, it will never happen again.

We become hardened and critical of ourselves, playing the game of "what ifs," placing blame. We choose not to face

anyone or anything. We tune out all the color and sound. Things that once brought comfort are now bitter reminders, and all we want is to be left alone with our sorrow in darkness. And with the passing of time, if a glimmer of a happy thought occurs, we feel guilty, and prefer not to let anyone witness us in those moments.

Meanwhile, the world continues to spin, a merry-go-round of sorts, as we try to find our seat back on that horse we used to ride. But nothing looks familiar. We search for answers outside ourselves but never discover the answers we are looking for. We continue to search, but they never come. They never come because they're not where we left them, and especially, not the answers we desire.

Rather cruel it is, but time is truly the culprit. Time forces us to move, even though we resist. Time makes us forget, starting with trivial things. Time is a thief. Little by little, those things you thought you'd never forget – visions, sounds, begin to turn foggy, much like losing the grip of an outstretched hand. You try to readjust your grip, but there's no way to hold on. And in the end, you hit rock bottom and you're at the bottom of that waterless, dark well with nowhere to go. You search in the direction of the light, and when you finally make the choice to climb, there are no directions nor stairs. It's all on you to find the way, "your" way, and all on you to decide your path.

And when you finally decide to make your move, a makeshift ladder of sorts appears out of the darkness. You ascend toward the light and simply hold onto the two things that you still have, your memories and that breathing moment that you are in. And when you climb and finally reach the top, there is the sun shining brightly, awaiting you.

Choosing to receive the sun is paramount. For every living being originates and grows from the consistency and warmth it provides. The sun spotlights life's darkest corners and flows back to our origins. Yet, as deciders of our own destiny, we have the choice. We have the choice to receive that light and accept its' immediate warmth and comfort. We have the choice to maintain that light within us as a continual burning ember. We have the choice to illuminate that glow, radiating much like a lighthouse, illuminating those around us. By being a light source, we convert all the sufferings, joys, victories, back into that force, that funnel-shaped whirlwind we call "love".

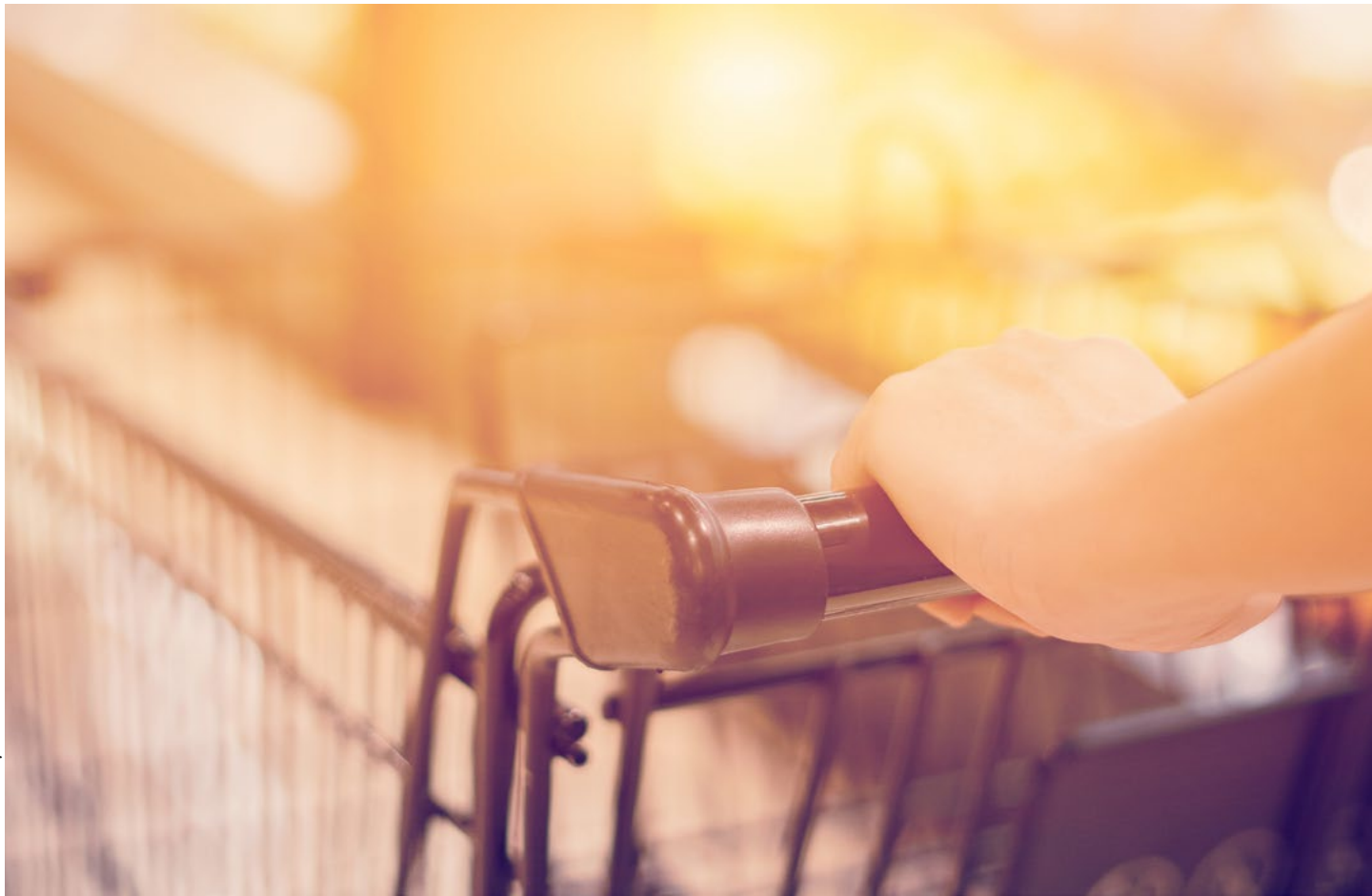
Although grief continues, it takes on a new form. For grief is the price we pay for love. It's the continuation of love

we no longer can express. Grief never ends because love never ends. Mathematically speaking, one might say, the magnitude of grief is directly proportional to the depth of our love. For that reason, no one other than our own selves can comprehend the depths of our unique, unbounded love, nor our grief.

It's been years, yet it feels like yesterday. Some days are pleasant with gentle breezes, reminders of wonderful memories. Other times, stiff winds prevail with no warning. I've learned to brace myself somewhat, for those unexpected gusts, those remnants of a life that were once part of everyday – a song, a smell, or a glance. Quirky little things that bring laughter or stop you in your tracks, those truly "special things" that make us all human, yet vulnerable. Even though the anniversaries and holidays are engrained deep in our core, it's those "little" things that illuminate our hearts. It's those little things that brighten up all the empty soulful spaces and sniff out all the whispering quietness. And like a swoosh of cool steel-filled wind, return in a flash. Longing wishfully for those moment hurt the most. For it is that breathless ache, that imprint on your soul, that becomes your "own" distinct fingerprint of love.

I had that immeasurable love for Natalia. Her presence exuded an essence of an inherent inner light which radiated pure love. As I continue to open my heart and receive the sun, I am bequeathed with that purposeful love from her in my every day. By choosing to maintain and reflect the sun's canopy of golden light within me, despite the deterring winds, it has led me to a continuum of endless love, Natalia's love. Although some of us find ourselves in the midst of such windstorms, know that the winds do become less daunting. We learn with time and faith how to hold on. And beyond those clouds, the sun is always there. When we embrace it and accept it as part of ourselves, that prism makes the world a shimmering array of color and love for all to see. And with that radiating, far-reaching light, we can shine on others in all corners of the world. For there is calm, there is warmth, and there is hope.

Janine devotes her energies to her nonprofit foundation Natalia's Endless Love, sharing Natalia's love and gifts. Natalia's Endless Love...A Love to Live For, Janine's first book, embodies a family's steadfastness, a love story that navigates the path to ensuring a love so great never to be forgotten. Janine has since written children's books, A Princess Heart and, A Princess Heart Reflects the Beauty of the Human Spirit, showcasing Natalia's radiance as illustrator. Visit www.nataliasendlesslove.org.



Grief as an Invisible Cloak

by Dr. Bob Baugher

If you've ever seen Harry Potter, you've seen times where Harry and his friends wore the invisible cloak. Since your loved one died, you've had to put on your own cloak as you ventured out into a world that didn't understand what you were going through. Here you are in the grocery store pushing a cart down the produce aisle past the grapes and apples, and as you pass the bananas, you are hit with the memory of your loved laughing as he takes a bite of his banana. Quickly, you don your cloak. However, what you'd really like to do is stop the nearest customer and say something like, "You know, just now looking at those bananas gave me a memory of when my son would grab a banana from the kitchen counter, peel it in a flash, and shove it in his mouth. Isn't that a sweet memory? Don't you agree?"

A minute later you are walking down the cereal aisle and see your daughter's favorite cereal. You want to say to the man who is grabbing that same cereal something like,

"My daughter used to eat that cereal seven days a week. We always kept three or four extra boxes." As that thought emerges, you realize that the man would likely ask why you're not taking the cereal. You head toward the bread aisle, cloak firmly wrapped around your grieving body.

Suddenly, there is your neighbor standing there, saying, "Well, hello there, how's it going?" From inside your cloak, you lie saying, "Oh, OK. How about you?" You stand there chatting for the next five minutes. You know the game: Your neighbor doesn't really want to know how you're doing. There will be no mention of your daughter. Instead, you might get a brief summary of her child's latest accomplishments. You smile and nod.

As you head to your car, you hear a voice calling your name. You turn and see an old friend walking briskly towards you, saying, "I cannot believe it's you!" You've not seen this friend since your child's death and you stiffen knowing that it's going to come up. As the conversation begins and

pleasantries are exchanged, the inevitable question emerges, "So, what's new?" No chance now to don the cloak now—here comes the raw truth. "Well, we've been going through some very difficult times..." and for the next several painful minutes you are immersed in telling the horrible story yet again. As the conversation ends, you put on your cloak which enables you to put on a brave front—no tears or sad face—your friend is already too devastated for that. Finally, your friend walks away, you climb into your car, wriggle out of your cloak and let the real emotions pour out.

So, this is how it goes in the life of a person coping with grief. You wear that cloak because people don't want to see

the real you—they couldn't handle it. You start your car, drive out of the parking lot, and head home thinking, "This grief stuff is hard trying to live through yet another day without my loved one. Maybe someday I can get rid of my invisible cloak. In the meantime, I'll keep it handy."

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.

How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

I attend national conferences to support those running the conference, reunite with TCF family, and let the newly bereaved know that they need not walk alone. I look forward to my chapter newsletter. It reminds me of how far I have come since the loss of my twin brother.

Daniel Yoffee, Alan's Twin Brother

Hope comes from seeing others who have found ways to find meaning and ways to continue the legacy of their children.

- Nate McClendon, Naomi's Dad
2024 TCF National Conference Keynote



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A Complicated Journey

by Marlene Enderlein

It is generally acknowledged that the loss of a child is one of the most, if not the most difficult and devastating losses that one can experience. The loss of a child defies the laws of nature. Despite the child's age, this loss can leave an indelible mark on the hearts and souls of the parents and family members, create great emotional and physical distress, and even fracture relationships within the family structure. Some may question why this loss is given this distinction among the hierarchy of losses, as each individual senses that their loss is equally important and as devastating, however, there are several elements unique to the loss of a child that contribute to making this loss difficult to grieve, creating a complicated journey to healing.

At one end of the spectrum, a pregnancy that ends with a stillborn infant or by miscarriage is a major loss for parents who had hopes, dreams, and an entire future planned for this new addition to their family. Unfortunately, our society has unspoken rules as to what losses are to be grieved and frequently, these losses are not recognized, leaving parents

to grieve their loss alone with no support. Disenfranchised grief results as their loss is neither recognized nor seen as valued by society. As the loss is not recognized, expressing grief becomes difficult, causing additional emotional distress and inability to process the loss.

For those parents who experience the loss of young children and teens, most of these losses have been found to result in loss by accidents. The suddenness of the loss is very traumatic, reducing one's ability to cope with the loss and may produce post-traumatic stress response. Not only will there be shock, denial, and sadness over the loss of their child, but anger towards those who were responsible for the accident. Accidental deaths deny the family an opportunity to prepare for the loss, say their goodbyes, making these losses difficult to comprehend and grieve.

The loss of young adults may include those who have died tragically of drug overdoses or suicide. Families suffering such losses often encounter stigmatization and once again

experience disenfranchised grief leaving them alone to suffer a horrible loss. In addition, these losses can also cause feelings of guilt, blame, and unanswered questions that complicate the grieving process.

On the other end of the spectrum is the loss of the adult child. When an adult man or woman dies, the attention and compassion is directed to the spouse and surviving children. Frequently, the surviving parents are neglected, never being acknowledged that they have now lost a cherished son or daughter. They have not only lost a child, but someone they thought was going to care for them in their later years. In some cases, these grandparents are now thrust into assuming the roles and responsibilities of the father or mother now that their child is no longer there to raise their grandchildren. This can have a drastic effect on their lifestyle. Yet for others, concerns for what will happen if the remaining spouse will re-marry in the future, and they will lose access to their grandchildren. Creating major shifts in one's roles and responsibilities in life and adding uncertainty in later life after having set life's goals, can result in anxiety and distress in addition to the loss of a dear child.

As a bereavement counselor, I frequently hear the expression from bereaved loved ones: "I feel as though I have lost a part of myself." It is the loss of a child that this comment truly is fitting as a child is an extension of oneself.

It is particularly important to partner with those who have suffered a similar loss for it is those who understand not only what it feels to experience such a loss but can help navigate the rocky pathway towards healing.

This loss's devastating nature highlights the importance of support for the surviving loved ones: family, friends, grief support groups, and organizations willing to witness the depth and immensity of the loss. It is particularly important to partner with those who have suffered a

similar loss for it is those who understand not only what it feels to experience such a loss but can help navigate the rocky pathway towards healing.

*Marlene's career was in cardiology, working with pediatric cardiologists and adult congenital heart specialists, caring for children born with heart defects. She witnessed how receiving a diagnosis of a fatal or significant heart defect in utero or in a newborn infant had a lifetime effect on the parents and family structure. She retired after 33 years and pursued her Master's degree in Mental Health and Wellness with a specialty in grief and bereavement and is currently a bereavement counselor with hospice. She recently published her book: *Looking Into the Eye of Grief: An Illustrative View of the Essence of Grief*.*

How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

What was and still is the most helpful to me are the chapter meetings. I was at a very low point when my mother and sister found TCF for me and they told me it sounded like something that would really help me. I went to my first meeting with the intention of appeasing them, but not thinking it was something for me. But after going, I have continued to be a part of the Tulsa Chapter.

Bojo Morse, Jeremey's and Kaydian's Dad

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The Grief Train

by Virginia Gorg, Austin's Grandmother

I am writing this article to state my emotions and how I'm dealing with them. This isn't intended to depress you or even anger you. Although your circumstances of loss may not be similar to mine, I write this to offer you hope and encouragement.

October 18, 2023, is the day my life changed horribly and irrevocably. My 19-year-old US Marine grandson was murdered in his barracks. Yes, in his barracks, which should have been an extremely safe place to be. This was an intentional and malicious act of murder.

My grief has me unable to focus and time has slowed to almost a standstill. I have tried working with counselors, who seem intent on telling me I'll feel better in time and that my grief will lessen. I can tell you, neither of those statements is true.

Instead, grief is horrible, ugly, tragic, and cruel. It has gripped me tightly. I've read several books and numerous articles about grief and many of them say the same thing: Time heals. You'll feel better in time. There are allegedly five

or seven stages of grief you will go through. You have a 'new normal.' Let's look at these things.

Time heals and you'll feel better in time. That might be true for cuts and scrapes, but not for grief, which is never-ending and always prominent. Some counselors say you will 'heal' from grief, and it could take a year or more. Grief isn't an illness or disease; you can't suddenly be healed. These statements don't delve into the depth and horrors of grief and how it affects us. However, I can learn to adjust and cope with this tragic loss.

I know what I have to do to adjust my life and my grief. I know I'm not there yet. I am taking steps every day to do the right things to honor my grandson and keep him alive in my heart and memories.

Five or seven stages of grief is a misnomer, to me. Shock, anger, and depression are static. The grief is immeasurable and never-ending. My life, once so colorful, is now black-and-white, with spots of color throughout. The other 'stages,' denial, acceptance, and bargaining have never

factored into my grief stages. Acknowledgment, yes, but acceptance of a murder just doesn't seem possible. Grief is a part of my life now; a part I wish I didn't understand or have to deal with. It is my opinion everyone will experience some of the stages, but not necessarily all. One person may be stuck in one stage for a long time. Someone else might skip a stage or two. All of that is okay. Your grief is different than another person's in the same situation.

New normal is a ridiculous statement. What's 'normal' about murder? What's normal about losing a grandchild in such a horrific way?

There is no 'new normal;' life is just different. I realize that now. I will never use that phrase; I will only say life is different. It hasn't even been four months and my grief is as strong as the day I received the phone call. My grief is physically painful.

Since that horrible October day, I've been a passenger on the 'Grief Train.' The conductor keeps going over the same tracks and same route day after day. He seems to want me to suffer eternally. The conductor has been in control. That needs to change. I've decided to become the conductor of the Grief Train. I will choose when to stop and cry, when to pull over and sit in the quiet and peace of the mountains and reflect and think about Austin. I will choose how to control my grief, how to handle my depression, and how to live my life to the fullest in my remaining years. On some occasions, I will simply sit and let grief overwhelm me. On other occasions, I will use memories to make me realize how blessed I have been to have Austin in my life for nineteen years. Both of these outcomes are acceptable and useful in my grief journey.

Grief hurts, but I'm learning to let it hurt, while adjusting to it at the same time. This does not mean I don't hurt (physically, mentally, emotionally), it merely means I am in control, or rather trying to be in control. Be assured I'm not in control every single day, but I recognize when I'm not and adjust accordingly. Sometimes that means tears, sometimes it means happy memories.

I think about my grandson every day. I wake up thinking of him and fall asleep thinking of him. I grieve for the things

he won't have in life: a wife, family, long military career, a second career, adventures, fast cars, and old age. I think about his smile and his personality; he was well-liked by everyone he knew.

He had a full military funeral and hundreds of people came, ranging from classmates and former teachers to Marine brothers and sisters, local law enforcement, and so many

who didn't know him, but came because he's a local hero.

He will always be my hero, my favorite youngest grandson.

Grief hurts, but I'm learning to let it hurt, while adjusting to it at the same time.

I think of the things we did together. I'm the grandmother who took my grandson skydiving right after he graduated high school, turned eighteen, and just before he left for boot camp. I'm the grandmother who taught him to drive stick shift and let him drive everywhere we went. I loaned him my car on several occasions. He was an integral part of my life.

Now I have only memories and photos. To help alleviate my grief feelings, I have several photos of him set up on a table, both military and at various ages. I see his picture every day, and every day my heart aches with missing him. I have a wonderful family and a favorite oldest grandson. I have some wonderful friends. These people are the color in my life now. I enjoy spending time with them. We can talk about Austin and what he means to us. I'll go skydiving again in Austin's memory.

My oldest grandson is planning a future trip to Okinawa, in memory of where Austin was going to spend a year. My daughter and her husband will take Austin on more cruises and show him the world. Austin will live on in our hearts and memories. He will never be forgotten. Tears will continue and grief will always be present, but even more so, the love I have for Austin will continue to shine throughout the rest of my life.

Semper Fi and RIP, my sweet youngest USMC grandson.

Virginia is a mother to one and grandmother to two. She enjoys writing, mostly fiction, and has a self-published book. Her time is spent walking, skydiving (several times a year), and being with her family and friends. Virginia is a cat mom as well. Grief is, sadly, a permanent fixture in her life since her grandson's murder, but she shall prevail.

Stowaways

by Sylvia Bosma, KK's Mom



I mentioned to a friend of mine that I wanted to see the Barbie movie. "You?", she wondered. "I did not think it's a movie you would want to see." I said I was curious, wanted to know what the hype was all about. So, the four of us went to see it. And I really liked it. One of my favorite characters was Weird Barbie. I used to have one, hair chopped off, extra makeup drawn on. I probably have a photo of her somewhere. Thinking about this brought my thoughts to KK and her version of Weird Barbie.

I never liked pink. When I was pregnant with KK, I made sure everyone knew not to get anything pink. Kaitlyn was not a girly-girl and grew up not having a real affinity for the color either. If she had on anything pink, it had some kind of animal on it. She did not play with dolls, other than Dora the Explorer. Her vast collection of stuffed animals kept her occupied. And LPS, of course. Short for Littlest Pet Shop, Hasbro had created an entire world of cute little plastic pets. Naturally, as is customary in our world of consumerism, those adorable little creatures needed a place to live, work, play, get a spa treatment, or even fly around the globe.

You name it and Hasbro had it on the market before you could blink. Long wish lists were created for birthdays and Christmas (kids), pocket money spent on the latest pets and accessories (kids), collectibles added to watch lists on eBay (parents).

In 2009, KK scored tons of LPS for Christmas. She played with all of them, all the time. They ignited her creativity. Naturally, this included altering their appearances to suit her ideas, with the aid of nail polish, markers, anything that helped achieve the desired effect.

The other day I found a box with her LPS pets. I donated the larger pieces when we moved in 2018 but kept the little ones to sort through later. I tried sorting through them then, but each time I picked one up, another memory resurfaced, tears threatening. I sighed and put the lid back on. It still wasn't the right time. They needed to stay in the box a little longer. Except for the three that sit by her photo. Unbeknownst to me, Kaitlyn had taken three little kittens on our European trip in 2016. When we returned home, she forgot to take them out of the luggage I had borrowed from friends. I

returned the luggage, and the kitties were not seen again, their existence forgotten.

Until my friend contacted me a few months after KK's death. They were getting ready to go on a trip and found the three little stowaways tucked in the suitcase where KK had left them. They are now in a spot where I see them every day. They remind me of our trip, and it makes me smile. And when I look closely at the one in the back, I can see KK's

handiwork in the small brushstrokes of nail polish on the kitten's nose and ears.

Sylvia Bosma's only daughter, Kaitlyn - KK - Cook, died by suicide in 2017 when she was 14 years old. Sylvia got through the initial months of crushing grief by caring for her youngest son, who has Down syndrome. Finding her community; support groups such as The Compassionate Friends; counseling; time in nature; and words (books, podcasts, journaling, storytelling) are what has helped her get to where she can offer hope to those early in their grief.

The Sounds of Spring

You will no longer hear the sounds of Spring
Like a thousand times before
The bird who just hatched
The morning dew dripping from the leaves

You will no longer hear the sounds of Spring
The sun rising above the trees
Cars driving down the distant road
Birds chirping one...two...three

The shadows on the wall of the gently moving leaves
Can no longer be heard by you
Because you see, you no longer exist
Not in the world. So, I will hear the
Sounds of Spring for you, my son.

- Donna Dondo, Tim's Mom



How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

After years of teaching ESL, I was happily retired even though I had lost my son 12 years before. One of my friends who was a minister, declared that I needed to join a bereavement group. I had never been to a grief group, and I desired it so much. I discovered The Compassionate Friends of Charlotte. TCF doors were open for me! I fit in perfectly! Friends became abundant and some of my sadness turned to joy.

Kathy Holder, Charlie's Mom



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What is Time?

by Linda Henderson, Andrea's Mom

Our perception of life is often based on time, divided into past, present, and future moments, measured in hours, days, months, and years. On December 20th, 2011, all-time measurements stopped for me, freezing me at that very moment. My beautiful 27-year-old daughter was killed in a car accident. A texting transport truck driver hit the vehicle she was a passenger in. Andrea was removed from my life in seconds, instantly, they said. The destruction of my past, present, and future is indescribable. How the minutes, hours, days, months, and years pushed me to where I am today is something I will never comprehend. The profound impact of child loss leaves a ball of grief that will take a lifetime to unravel.

The changes that happen teach us that we are not the same person. Mentally, our confidence and security of life are entirely demolished. Some days, I feel empty, and some days full. Some days, I scream so loud my throat hurts; some days, I smile and laugh without guilt. Most days, I

experience depression on some level. The sadness goes deep into my soul, and I am learning to live with it. I have lived with triggers, insomnia, anxiety, and much more. Living with the unpredictability of grief is preparing the shattered heart to accommodate life again. Eventually, the love for our child pushes the pain aside, allowing some joy to enter.

The passage of time is necessary for healing but is painful. Time becomes our teacher and our friend as we learn to cope over and over again. It is the only thing that can allow the sharp edges of grief to become dull and with less intensity. Yes, the broken heart with all the sharp edges will piece together, and grief and love will co-exist. I never knew it could happen, but it does. My daughter loved mosaics. She was creative and talked about making a table from broken ceramic pieces. She could look beyond the brokenness and see the possibilities of beauty. As I walk this journey, I have learned to take the crushed pieces of my broken heart and make something unique and beautiful. As

we re-adjust, reconnect, and rebuild our new life piece by piece, smiles, and happiness will happen. The meaning is different and feels different because we are new people. For all parents on this road, our life is divided forever into the before when our child was here, and the now without their physical presence.

We need to embrace the precious gift of time. How do we do this? Today is the only segment of time in our hands that we can control. Living in these moments requires one to make a conscious effort to shift the grief aside momentarily. What we do with the minutes and hours is within our control and determines the essence of that time. By creating a mindset of the present-time, we open ourselves up to let life enter, whether through a connection with nature or the company of family or friends. Smiles or sunshine will move us forward in honor of our child.

Cherishing memories is easier said than done with a broken heart, but it is necessary. Tomorrow is waiting because yesterday existed. Memories are connected with many things. Photographs, sounds, smells, colors, music, or events remind us of our beautiful child. The tears and smiles will take us to that moment when happiness and joy existed. It is difficult to see beyond sorrow, but eventually, memories will ease our lives. Amid the darkness, the memories that feel suffocating will partner with the love, providing courage and energy to continue. We must preserve the memories tightly within our hearts and minds, for they give honor to and keep our children alive.

The eternal love and bond with our child are our beacon of shining hope. Love is the highest energy source, and it is untouched by death. As we step into tomorrow and the unknown, we must embrace the moments, cherish the memories, and cling to hope that tomorrow will be better. We have been blessed with a permanent love and connection with our child. As we reconcile with life, we will move further away from the darkness of grief to hope and see a brighter tomorrow. We will always be their parent and the only vessel for their voice now.

Sometimes, we have to let faith lead us even though the destination is unknown because that is what faith is. I have decided to honor my Andrea the best I can for her. I will tell the world our story of love and honor her every day. I have written a book about my journey of loss and grief.

For today, try to measure the moments of life with love, not pain. Grief sometimes needs space, but I will not let it consume me because love never fails.

Linda is a retired nurse who has spent 37 years caring for others. Experiencing the tragic loss of her daughter, she became passionate about helping others navigate the journey of grief. Together with her career, Linda was determined to increase her knowledge of suffering. She has certificates in Professional Grief and Development, Coping with Child Loss, and Bereavement Counseling. Her journey has shaped her and given Linda the determination to live life to the fullest.

How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

It was sometime after my son Stephen died, I was on Facebook and came across TCF-Loss of a Medically Complex Child and decided to join. I have found that sharing Stephen's story/journey and my own helps me tremendously with my grief. While none of us wanted to join a "club" like this, I am grateful that this TCF group exists. Who better understands what you are feeling than someone who has been through the same thing?

Peggy Hawkins, Stephen's Mom

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Timeless Words: Articles from the Archives

Ten-Year Anniversary: A Life Marker

by Harriet Hodgson, Helen's mom



“The 10th anniversary of Helen's death is coming up,” I told my husband. “I think we should do something significant—write a large check to the food bank or the public library.” John nodded his head in agreement. Helen died from the injuries she received in a car crash. There were audio books in the car, and I was the one who returned them to the library, told the librarian Helen had died, and the books were overdue.

“I owe you money,” I said.

The librarian's reply: “You owe us nothing.”

As soon as I finished this story I began to cry. What was going on? The 10th anniversary of Helen's death was really an anniversary of four deaths. In 2007, four family members—Helen (mother of our twin grandkids), my father-in-law, my brother, and twins' father—all died. No wonder John and I think of this year as the year of death. Thankfully Helen, who was divorced from the twins' father, had a will and it listed us as the twins' guardians. The court followed her wishes.

When the twins moved in with us, they were 15 years old, and we cared for them for seven years. Life was hard for us all. John and I tried to be upbeat for the twins, yet at the same time, we were grieving for multiple losses. Helen died of blunt force trauma, words I hate to say or write. On a snowy night she entered a highway from a rural road and her car was hit broadside. Helen suffered severe external and internal injuries. Her daughter, who was in the car with her, had a mild concussion.

The 10-year marker of Helen's death took us back in time, back to trauma, back to emotional pain.

Bob Deitz, in his book *Life and Loss*, writes about grief anniversaries. Grief can be a time of self-discovery, according to Deitz. As he explains, “Grief is as much about finding as it is about losing.” John and I understand this sentence. We think becoming GRGs, grandparents raising grandchildren, is the greatest blessing of our lives. Over time, the four of us evolved into a “grand family” and our lives meshed. Each of us recovered from grief in our own way.

Sonya Lott, PhD, writes about grief reconciliation/recovery in her article, “Finding New Meaning in Your Living After a Loved One Dies,” posted on the Good Therapy website. The path to integrated grief involves three convergent processes, notes Lott, accepting reality, finding new meaning in life, and staying bonded to the deceased. John and I went through all three processes and life settled down for a while.

But crisis struck in 2013; John's aorta suddenly dissected. He was bleeding to death and surgeons operated on him three times to stop the bleeding. During the last operation John suffered a spinal cord injury that paralyzed his legs. He was hospitalized for eight months and during this time I moved us out of the house we had lived in for 20+ years, put the house on the market, visited him three times a day, and maintained a writing career.

Our love is stronger than ever, yet I grieve for John's disability and its impact on our lives.

John knew he might not survive the last surgery, but was willing to “roll the dice,” as he put it, because he wanted to see the twins graduate from college. Although he wasn't there, he cried when he learned both twins graduated with high honors and Phi Beta Kappa. Because he “rolled the dice” he was able to be at our granddaughter's wedding and escorted her down the aisle in his wheelchair. The minute I saw them I started to cry and noticed many wedding guests were crying too.

Grief anniversaries are times of remembering. Toronto poet Maureen Scott Harris writes about her memories in “The Tenth Anniversary of Your Death.” Thoughts of the past prove “it is not fading,” she writes. Helen and the twins have not faded from our lives, and we are still connected to them. Our granddaughter works at The Salvation Army headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota and is an independent photographer. Our grandson is a student at The Mayo Clinic School of Medicine and will be the third physician in our immediate family.

All these experiences—John's health crisis, raising grandchildren, multiple losses, and Helen's death—were part of the 10th anniversary. Like a highway mile marker, the anniversary of Helen's death was a life marker, and proved my resilience. I had made it this far, created a new life, and learned many things. I know I'm a strong person. I know writing is a source of comfort and knowledge. I know giving to others helped me survive tragedy. I know goal setting is an ongoing task. I know each moment of life is a miracle.

Most importantly, I know I made good things from grief.

Harriet Hodgson has been a freelance writer for 37 years, is the author of thousands of print/internet articles, and 35 books, including seven grief resources. Now in her 19th year of caregiving, Hodgson has written a series of four books for family caregivers. To learn more about her work please visit harriethodgson.com, writelife.com, or amazon.com

How has The Compassionate Friends' resources helped you?

I found a combination of chapter meetings and private Facebook groups has been most helpful to me. In the chapter meetings, I am able to gather with other parents who are also grieving. I am able to speak about my daughter without fear of upsetting anyone. TCF offers a large number of private Facebook groups which are loss specific. This has enabled me to be in contact with parents who have lost an adult child or lost a child to cancer.

Lori McLaren, Erin Elizabeth's Mom



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The Arrival of Spring

by Joan Baker Scott, Danny's Mom

It is early spring here on Cape Cod and the signs of the season are all around. The daffodils are lifting their faces towards the sun and the forsythia bushes are bursting into bloom. Despite the warmer days and the promise of soon walking the beach in something lighter than a winter parka, spring is a bittersweet time for me. My son, Danny, should be turning thirty-three on the 19th of April, but instead, I will be marking thirteen birthdays without him. Danny died by suicide in February 2012, and my life has been changed forever with his passing.

I dreaded the coming of spring in those early years after his death. The cold and desolation of winter better suited my broken heart. I could not rejoice in the awakening of the earth when my son was not here to be a part of it. Instead of a sense of renewal, I felt burdened by memories all around me. Danny loved the outdoors - he loved fishing, all sports, and working in the yard. It seemed that everywhere I looked there were reminders of Danny's absence.

I wrote about my feelings in a poem, "Lamentations of Spring":

*The sun shines,
but you are not here to feel its warmth.
The grass grows tall,
but you are not here to mow it into submission.
Soon butterflies and dragonflies will dart around,
but you are not here to hold them with your gentle hand.
Now they can only land on the flowers at your grave...
Amidst all this life, I see only death.*

Although my "lamentations of spring" have lessened, it is still hard as the seasons change, and I expect that it always will be. Now the memories feel less like a burden and have become more of a comfort. This didn't happen just with the passage of time, but through deliberate efforts to process my grief. Writing poetry and letters to Danny in a journal helped me to work through my feelings of grief and to start to heal.

Doing things to honor his memory at this time of year has helped too. Each year we plant flowers at his grave and leave a small birthday balloon or painted rock. Gardening has also been a source of healing for me. There is something about bringing new life from the ground, that eases the pain of my loss. I am looking forward to planting a vegetable garden where I will be growing basil for making pesto, one of Danny's favorite summer foods.

He is always with me in everything that I do. I tried to capture that reality in this verse from one of my poems:

*My grief has become a beautiful cloth in which I wrap myself.
A reminder that you are always with me.
It is a part of who I am now.*

*The weaver's magic has made the wool so smooth and delicate.
The pain is still there, but it is softer, gentler.*

Whether you are still in the winter chill of early grief or starting to find a new way to live without your child, may the new season bring you hope and healing.

*Joan Baker Scott is a bereaved parent who lost her son, Danny, to suicide in 2012. She has attended several TCF national conferences. Joan has published a book for bereaved parents, **Getting Through the Days: A Journey from Loss to Life**. 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.*

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.

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

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
Bereaved 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

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

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

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

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 to Domestic Violence

facebook.com/groups/lossstodomesticviolence

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 of a Medically Complex Child

facebook.com/groups/lossofamedicallycomplexchild

TCF – Loss Due to Drowning

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstodrowning

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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The Compassionate Friends 47th National Conference

will be held in

New Orleans, July 12-14, 2024!

We invite you to join us for
a weekend of valuable support.
Find strategies and perspectives
for coping with grief, caring and
renewed hope, and a community of
others who truly understand.

compassionatefriends.org



WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

To have material considered for publication, send to: cathy@compassionatefriends.org

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