



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

## **KAMLOOPS CHAPTER *Spring 2014***

"The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again." ~ Simon Stephens Founder /TCF

### **CHAPTER LEADER**

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### **NEWSLETTER**

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### **MEETINGS**

**1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday Every Month @ 7:00 PM  
Kamloops United Church,  
421 St. Paul St. Kamloops**

### **NEXT MEETINGS**

**April 2, 2014  
May 7, 2014  
June 4, 2014**

### **TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE**

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[www.TCFCanada.net](http://www.TCFCanada.net)  
Toll Free: 1-866-823-0141**

## **Welcome**

Especially to those newly bereaved who have joined us for the first time. The Compassionate Friends is a voluntary self help Organization offering support, understanding and hope for the future. All bereaved parents are welcome.

We are sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but we are glad you found us. We would like to do all we can to help you through these times. We cannot hurry you through it or take away the pain, but we can help you understand more about what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing what you are feeling is normal can be helpful.

We are other parents who have experienced the death of a child and offer understanding and support through our monthly meetings a lending library, support material and a listening ear. We have learned the key to survival for bereaved families is communication.

We ask that you give us more than one meeting to decide if The Compassionate Friends is for you. It takes courage to attend your first meeting, but those who do come find an atmosphere of understanding from other parents and siblings who are having or have experienced the feelings of grief that you are now feeling.

### **I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by William Wordsworth**

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.



# FYI.....

*Thank you to everyone who helped with the Annual Candlelighting Service. Without us all working together such a large event would not be the meaningful and successful time of sharing that it always is. This coming December 2014 the Candlelighting Service will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in December due to booking difficulties. The date will be December 7, 2014 – 2:00 pm @ Kamloops United Church.*

**BC Bereavement Helpline** Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information.

Contact: (604) 738-9950 **Email:** [bcbh@telus.net](mailto:bcbh@telus.net)

Website: [www.bcbereavementhelpline.com](http://www.bcbereavementhelpline.com)

**Suicide Support** [SurvivorAdvocates@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SurvivorAdvocates@yahoogroups.com)

**Sibling Websites** [www.tcfatlanta.org/sibling.html](http://www.tcfatlanta.org/sibling.html)

**Grief Works BC Service(s)**: Provides comprehensive support for the bereaved.

Contact: Kay Johnson at (604) 875-2741 **Email:** [kjohnsoncw.bc.ca](mailto:kjohnsoncw.bc.ca)

**Alive Alone** Support for parents who have no surviving children. <http://www.alivealone.org>

**Grief Watch:** [www.griefwatch.com](http://www.griefwatch.com)

**Canadian Parents Of Murdered Children** <http://www.cpomc.ca/>

**Parents of Murdered Children** [pomc.com](http://pomc.com)

**Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support** [www.nationalshare.org](http://www.nationalshare.org)

**This newsletter is also available in an electronic version. With the increasing postal rates soon to be in effect we are asking if you would give consideration to receiving the newsletter via email. We will always make newsletters available by post for those without computers. Please email us at [waskamloops.ca](mailto:waskamloops.ca) if you are able to change to the electronic version. Thank you.**

## **CONTRIBUTIONS:**

THE UNITED WAY Contributions to The Compassionate Friends/Kamloops may be made through the United Way. This can be done directly or through payroll deduction. The Compassionate Friends Kamloops Chapter must be specified as the designated recipient. The United Way will issue receipts to individuals for these donations. We are given a total only, no names of donors, and so we thank everyone who donates in this way. Other means of donations can be made directly to The Compassionate Friends of Kamloops or through other employee charity campaigns. We thank all those who support us with their donations, helping to carry out the important outreach done in the memory of our children. *We Are A Registered Charitable Non Profit Organization. Receipts Will Be Issued For Income Tax copyright 2014*

## Thinking

I'm sometimes told that I think too much. That's not wholly true, but I do set off on some strange thought journeys. I read a statement once that said something like this, 'The older we get, we just become more and more of what we already are.' That was the scariest thing I'd ever read. I thought a lot about those character traits that have hung on over the years. What was once deemed to be odd little quirks, now had the potential to grow to huge proportions and ensure me of a lonely old age, avoided by all my relations! It's good I think, once in awhile, to get on the road to self examination. To paraphrase someone else, 'the unexamined life isn't really worth much.'

Where was I going with all of this? Oh yes, in terms of bereavement, I think we come to it and through it as we already are. Bereavement doesn't confer sainthood on us even though some observing from the outside might think we must automatically have some marvelous insights hidden from the rest of society. Losing a child or sibling does give us an opportunity though to examine what it is we are really about and how we would like to conduct ourselves from here forward.

So, if there is a gift in bereavement I think it has to be the gift of self examination. A pause to reflect. We can learn profoundly from the lessons of compassion, tolerance, patience and honesty. We can learn to examine our motives and not waste our precious time indulging in behaviors or actions that make us less than we can be. If we miss the opportunity to grow through adversity and grief, we miss out on the last gift we can give our loved ones, living or dead; the chance to leave the world a little better than we found it.

## Getting Through

We bereaved parents seem to use that phrase a lot. . . . . getting through. Getting through Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, anniversaries. At some point we stop just getting through and begin again to enjoy the special days and all those who share them with us. That doesn't mean we have forgotten our absent children or put aside precious memories. We carry those loved ones together with all our past joys into the present; telling our stories of good times and shared joy and let them sweeten today's special times. Tears and laughter will revive us, when we are ready, in all the special days to come.

*"If we can say that grace is a sense of connectedness, that it is the experience of our underlying nature, then we may see how what is often called tragedy holds the seed of grace. We see what brings us to grace is not always pleasant, though it seems always to take us to something essential in ourselves."*

~ Stephen Levine

*We were very sorry to hear of the passing of Darcie Sims. Darcie was a bereaved parent and a well known grief educator, keynote speaker and writer. Many of us were privileged to be present at TCF conferences where we saw Darcie in action with her dynamic and many times humorous presentations. She had us laughing through our tears and told us it is ok to grieve in our own way. We have shared Darcie's writings many times over the years and she will continue to be a source of inspiration. As she was fond of saying, "may love be what you remember the most." Our condolences to Darcie's family.*



# *Lamps For The Journey...*

We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us to see their own images and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our silence.

~ *William Butler Yeats*

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter." ~ *Rachel Carson*

When you want to expand you must first contract; when you want to be strong, you must first be weak; when you want to take, you must first give. This is called the subtle wisdom of life. ~ *Lao Tse*

As long as I can I will look at this world for both of us. As long as I can I will laugh with the birds, I will sing with the flowers, I will pray to the stars, for both of us. ~ *Sascha*,

The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now. ~ *Thich Nhat Hanh*

"We need to be angels for each other, to give each other strength and consolation. Because only when we fully realize that the cup of life is not only a cup of sorrow but also a cup of joy will we be able to drink it."

~ *Henri J.M. Nouwen*

Each of us will, one day, rediscover whatever we cherish about life. Each of us will find the laughter that echoed throughout our life with our loved one ... If we will look for it. ~ *Darcie D. Sims*

The real enemies of our life are the 'oughts' and the 'ifs.' They pull us backward into the unalterable past and forward into the unpredictable future. But real life takes place in the here and now. ~ *Henri J.M. Nouwen*

"All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost; the old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost. From the ashes a fire shall be woken, a light from the shadows shall spring; renewed shall be blade that was broken, the crownless again shall be king" ~ *J.R.R. Tolkien*

"For in grief nothing 'stays put.' One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral?" ~ *C.S. Lewis*

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy  
~ *Rabindranath Tagore*

I am going to try to pay attention to the spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen. ~ *Anne Lamott*

Once I knew only darkness and stillness... my life was without past or future... but a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness, and my heart leaped to the rapture of living.

~ *Helen Keller*

**MY AVALEEN** by Brad Caldwell TCF/Kamloops, B.C.

I used my last chance for another child the night before my operation.  
7 months later  
Ultrasound  
The doctor called us to his office.  
Heart defect.  
Extra chromosome.  
From the beginning we were told the chances of survival were slim.  
I would not listen.  
I should have grieved with my wife.  
I believed everything would be fine.  
The prognosis of the professionals did not match with what my heart felt.  
Second opinion was my own.  
I suffered for that.  
December 24, 2010  
Not the day it was supposed to be.  
When I woke I went to work.  
At 4:04 in the afternoon she was born to us 6 weeks too soon.  
I lived a lifetime in 16 minutes.  
That eternity will never be forgotten.  
I was useless and will never forgive myself for that, even though I've been told  
there was nothing I could have done to save her.  
I believed our love could heal anything.  
My touch and tears and kisses and love did not have the affect I hoped.  
Do not let my sons see me like this.  
My heart screamed.  
Take my life for hers.  
I will give my soul so she can live.  
To the doctors I growled, take what you need for my body to heal hers.  
Don't make me bury a child.  
A large part of me died that day never to be seen again,  
I did not have the power to save one of my children.  
Our first hello was our last goodbye.  
Or so I thought.  
Her soundless cries wake me every night.  
Cries never heard.  
Exclusive to my mind.  
Anticipating sleep.  
I imagine her hand in mine as I watch her grow through every stage of her life.  
My hopes and dreams of a beautiful life for her.  
Pointless in reality.  
She will live on in my heart and thoughts.  
My only daughter.  
My Avaleen.



# Easter

If you are early in your grief journey this Easter, I'm sure the furthest thing from your mind are Easter bonnets, Easter parades and Peter Cottontail and all that aspect of this festival of life.

Peeking out of the cocoon of grief, the light of spring, and the colours of nature's renewal are almost blinding, the glare too sharp for eyes that are dimmed by tears. The promise is still there, though, no matter how we try to hide from it, the message of the resurrection won't go away; it relentlessly pursues us with every crocus and daffodil, every robin and hummingbird, every sunny day and soft shower.

Somehow we do rise again, bearing our wounds, yes, but also giving rebirth to all the memories we treasure, the connections that have sustained us and our new understanding of our renewed place in the world. Little by little, day by day, we slowly awaken to the life that is still going on around us.

Perhaps in our recovery we might become what Jean Vanier calls 'wounded healers,' what better gift could we make in our children's memory; giving the hope of renewal to those who join us on this path and enlightening those who need to understand. I hope you'll soak up some warmth from the season and from all those who care for and love you. Especially know that your Compassionate Friends are here for you whatever the season, whatever your stage on this journey we share.

*~Arleen Simmonds, TCF/Kamloops, In Memory of Kenneth*



## **Alchemy**

I lift my heart as spring lifts up  
A yellow daisy to the rain;  
My heart will be a lovely cup  
Altho' it holds but pain.

For I shall learn from flower and leaf  
That color every drop they hold,  
To change the lifeless wine of grief  
To living gold.

**~Sara Teasdale**

# What To Tell The Children

## What children might feel after losing someone they love to suicide:

- Abandoned - that the person who died didn't love them.
- Feel the death is their fault - if they would have loved the person more or behaved differently.
- Afraid that they will die too.
- Worried that someone else they love will die or worry about who will take care of them.
- Guilt - because they wished or thought of the person's death.
- Sad.
- Embarrassed - to see other people or to go back to school.
- Confused.
- Angry - with the person who died, at God, at everyone.
- Lonely.
- Denial - pretend like nothing happened.
- Numb - can't feel anything.
- Wish it would all just go away.

A child or adolescent may have a many mixed feelings or may feel "numb." Whatever they are feeling, remember your role as an adult is to help them and be supportive. Reassure the child whatever feelings they might experience, they have permission to let them out. If they want to keep to themselves for a while, let them. Don't tell a child how they should or should not feel. Also, don't discourage them from expressing negative emotions like anger.

## How do we explain suicide to children or young people?

Age is a factor in understanding the type and amount of information to provide. Some children you can talk to about suicide with a 1- or 2-sentence answer; others might have continuous questions which they should be allowed to ask and to have answered. The most important thing to remember is to be honest. Children will always find out about what happened at some point, so be honest.

When a child hears that someone "committed suicide" or died of suicide, one of their first questions might be, "What is suicide?" One way to explain is that people die in different ways - from cancer, heart attacks, car accidents, or old age for example. Suicide simply means that a person caused his or her own death intentionally, it doesn't have to mean more than that. However, also explaining that the person they loved caused their own death because they had an illness in their brain can also be helpful. If they press for more detail, use your discretion to help the child understand as much as is age appropriate.

## Some examples of explaining why suicide happens might be:

- "He had an illness in his brain (or mind) and he died."
- "Her brain got very sick and she died."
- "The brain is an organ of the body just like the heart, liver and kidneys. Sometimes it can get sick, just like other organs."
- "She had an illness called depression and it caused her to die."

continued from page 7.....

If someone the child knows, or the child herself, is being treated for depression, it's critical to stress that only some people die from depression, not everyone. Remind her there are many options for getting help, like medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both.

## **A more detailed explanation might be:**

"Our thoughts and feelings come from our brain, and sometimes a person's brain can get very sick - the sickness can cause a person to feel very badly inside. It also makes a person's thoughts get all jumbled and mixed up, so sometimes they can't think clearly. Some people can't think of any other way of stopping the hurt they feel inside. They don't understand that they don't have to feel that way, that they can get help."

It's important to note that there are people who were getting help for their depression and died anyway. Just as in other illnesses, a person can receive the best medical treatment available and still not survive. This can also be the case with depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia.

A child needs to understand that the person who died loved them, but that because of the illness he or she may have been unable to convey that or to think about how the child would feel after the death. The child needs to know that the suicide was not their fault, and that nothing they said or did, or didn't say or do, caused the death.

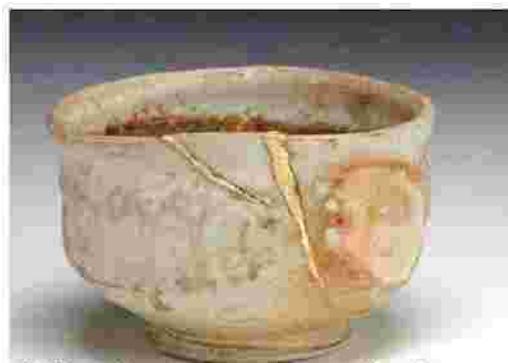
Some children might ask questions related to the morals of suicide - good/bad, right/wrong. It is best to steer clear of this, if possible. Suicide is none of these - it is something that happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with that pain.

Whatever approach is taken when explaining suicide to children, they need to know they can talk about it and ask questions whenever they feel the need. They need to understand they won't always feel the way they do now, that things will get better, and that they'll be loved and taken care of no matter what.

### **Suggested Reading for Kids**

- [\*Bart Speaks Out: Breaking the Silence on Suicide\*](#) by Linda Goldman, M.S.
- [\*When Dinosaurs Die - A Guide to Understanding Death\*](#) by Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown
- [\*The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide\*](#) by Helen Fitzgerald
- *Talking About Death: A Dialogue between Parent & Child* by Earl A. Grollman

Taken from Suicide Awareness Voices of Education [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)



**"When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold. They believe that when something's suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful."**

**Billie Mobyed**



***My Dear One***, I feel you so strongly, in the music I listen to, and yes, you are in my almost every thought though I try not to make others feel uncomfortable. Everyday, it is necessary that in some way, I see you or hear you or feel you. For how could I go on otherwise? Knowing you were in my life, that you came to be with me, I am blessed. You have given me gifts that continue to unfold and I can only say that without you, I would not stand where I am now.

I live in two worlds and sometimes, I feel closer to pain and grief than to joy. It is indeed a strange thing to say, though those who have experienced it understand.

I find you my darling, in every living thing and you must certainly hear me say “I love you” many times during the day. I want to do something everyday that honors you and the life you lived and how you touched so many people, today as well as then.

You are there in the vastness of the night sky. Your spirit has been released into all that is, so I must learn to recognize you, not by how you looked, but by your presence. I look at your pictures and it is as if no time has gone by and we are together. I can hear your voice and smell your skin. You will always be my baby, the one I nurtured and loved, forever a part of my bones and blood, we were woven together by love. I will plant seeds in your name and watch them grow. I will write a song for you and a poem too. Those who live beyond you already know stories of you and have a sense of who you were when you were here. When I go walking in the woods, I will find you there. How could I not? You are one with nature. I hear you when the wind blows through the trees and, when the hoot owl calls, you come to me.

In the bustle of the city, where everything seems to go at once, yes, I have felt you at my side. Or sometimes, I have to do a double take, so sure it was you standing there, talking to a friend.

There are days when I am doing okay and the pain of losing you is at bay, but at any moment, my whole being can be thrown to the ground with the realization you are not here with me.

There are times that bring me to my knees, when one of your friends has had a baby or gotten married. It should have been you as well.

It should be you who falls in love and finds such joy in their life. It should be you whose passion for living brings you on paths of incredible discoveries. I shout your name in love and honor. I am forever indebted to you for giving me life. Thank you.

I've watched the birds flying under and over each other in the sky, grey clouds and wild green pastures and you were there!

The sprouting leaves of new, shiny growth, about to open to the new day. It is you, I am sure. How can it be any other way but that you are the molecules that I breathe, that you are the rays in the sun that touch my eyes and filter into every cell of my body?

The glow that casts its light on me in the orange of a sunset, I see you, and though I can distinguish many colors, the colors that make up you are beyond my scope here on this earthly plane but I know you are indeed....everywhere. Thank you.

~Karen Hazelwood-Dantone/TCF Eugene Oregon

“March bustles in on windy feet  
And sweeps my door step and my street  
She washes and cleans with pounding rains,  
Scrubbing the earth of winter stains.  
She shakes the grime from carpet green  
Till naught but fresh new blades are seen.  
Then, house in order, all neat as a pin,  
She ushers gentle spring time in.”

~ Susan Reiner / *Spring Cleaning*



“Hark, I hear a robin calling!  
List, the wind is from the south!  
And the orchard-bloom is falling  
Sweet as kisses on the mouth.

In the dreamy vale of beeches  
Fair and faint as woven mist.  
And the river’s orient reaches  
Are the palest amethyst.

Every limpid brook is singing  
Of the lure of April days;  
Every piney glen is ringing  
With the maddest roundelays.  
Come and let us seek together  
Springtime lore of daffodils  
Giving to the golden weather  
Greetings on the sun-warm hills.  
~ Lucy Maude Montgomery/ *Spring Song*

## May

May is kind ~  
None of March’s bluster,  
Or April’s fickle pranks.

May is gentle sun,  
And scented blossom,  
Set apart, for spirit’s ease.

May cancels winter  
And the storms of spring.  
She gives birth to warmer days.

May is Mother’s month,  
Expression of her best ~  
Expectant, warm and nurturing.

May is a state of mind,  
Perhaps a place of grace,  
On the landscapes of the heart.

~ Arleen Simmonds / *TCF Kamloops*



They were young and innocent. That was then. This is now. In a blink of an eye, a solitary moment, their lives were changed. Their baby died. Their baby was wanted, loved, and now missed. From a young age they had been told life is unfair. Talking about it is an intellectual experience. Now they have to live it.

Back in the 70's when we medical professionals were being urged by bereaved parents to reconsider our well intentioned view of stillbirth, much of our care was driven by our own discomfort with death, our own sense of failure, and not trusting that these young parents could handle the disappointment of this tragedy. Our advice was to go home and make another baby, and better luck next time. We didn't encourage parents to see, name, hold, or memorialize their baby. We meant well, but we didn't ask the parents what *they* needed. We assumed they didn't want to talk, when in fact, it was we who were uncomfortable with talking about death and grief.

We thought we were sparing them grief when we discouraged them from seeing their dead baby, and that this would help them get on with their lives more easily. What we didn't take into consideration was that these parents had already bonded with their babies. They already knew them intimately. They had felt every twist and turn, bump and hiccup. They knew the foods their baby liked and the music that soothed them. These babies were already being talked about and counted as part of the family, even if the baby hadn't been seen yet. But now, with our highly sophisticated ultrasound equipment, many parents have already seen their babies before birth.

Even though there are 50,000 pregnancy losses and infant deaths a year in this country, not to mention close to a million miscarriages, the death of an infant is still not a conversation topic that most people want to be part of. When infant death is mentioned, most people quickly change the subject. Parents themselves are hesitant to bring it up because they don't want to make others feel uncomfortable, or they don't want to be judged. Others think if you don't talk about the death of an infant the parents will find it easier to forget their loss.. But this inadvertent conspiracy of silence doesn't help or heal anyone.

I have been sitting in support groups since the mid 70's. Bereaved parents come seeking support, understanding and comfort. I see firsthand what the death of their baby does to them. I hear how they question themselves and wonder if they could have prevented this from happening. I see how this experience shakes their self confidence and causes tension in their marriage. I see how disappointed they are in family and friends who want to hurry them through this grief so they can get back to their "old selves". I watch them rebuild their lives learning how to remember, not relive. One woman, when asked about her grief replied, "I don't think the pain has gotten less. I have just gotten stronger."

These meetings are not filled with light superficial chatter. Rather they are filled with a deep sense of gratitude that others really want to hear about their baby and what it's like for them on this unfamiliar journey of grief. They are grateful to not be alone.

They let me see their pain. They trust me to not dismiss, minimize, or intellectualize their experience. They see that I can be a container for their pain and that I am not afraid of their tears. I am in awe of how these little ones that nobody else knew are able to bring new life to their parents.

If you haven't had a pregnancy loss or sat by your newborn in the NICU watching their breath fade away, trust that these parents' grief is real--just as real as the grief of anyone who has sat beside their 4 year old or 40 year old as their life was ending. They may not get to hold their baby in their arms, but they will hold them in their hearts forever. We can do a lot for them by helping them see we want to hear their story.

As we celebrate Mother's Day this coming Sunday remember these women, too, are mothers and deserve to be acknowledged as such. This is a particularly hard day for them.

## Anticipating Mother's Day

Before we lost our children to death, Mother's Day was a happy time. We each reflect back on Mother's Days past.....gifts, cards, special memories and one day set aside to acknowledge the best in our relationship with our treasured children.

With the death of our child, this dynamic was forever transfigured. Now, instead of looking forward to this day, we grasp at anything that will keep our minds away from it. Yet the anxiety still creeps into our minds and hearts; our stomachs churn and tears fill our eyes at the most inopportune moments. The dreadful countdown begins in late April and lasts for nearly three weeks.

This is the eighth Mother's Day I have endured since the death of my son. Each year I have the same, desperate anxiety, yet each year the day is a bit easier to handle. Each year the anticipation is far worse than the day itself.... "borrowing trouble" as my dad would say. Since my son is my only child, I do not have the comfort of other children nor do I have the need to put on a happy face. Instead, I am able to choose what I will do without feeling the burden of guilt.

While my first Mother's Day was filled with tears, subsequent Mother's Days have been more subdued. The choice to embrace or ignore Mother's Day is yours alone. Many bereaved mothers adopt a new perspective which honors their child and still gives normalcy to their family. Mother's Day is bittersweet for us. The pain is part of the love that we will feel for our children for eternity. We wouldn't trade one treasured moment for a cosmic reduction of our pain.

Some of us plan the day carefully. Some of us just "go with the flow." Some of us weep; some of us work. Some of us read, some of us revel in this special moment set aside just for mothers. Each of us makes a choice that is based on our own truth.

The day itself is not nearly as overwhelming as the buildup of anxiety and sadness which precedes it. I have found this to be true of all holidays, birthdays, death anniversaries and special occasions. I am trying to live in the moment. When the moment of Mother's Day happens, I will decide what I should do. I refuse to let others pressure me. I refuse to become maudlin over greeting card commercials and heart grabbing point of purchase marketing efforts. I will not be manipulated by the agenda of others.

But on Mother's Day, as on each day of the year, I will think of my son, remembering the child he was and the man he became. I will honor his life by doing the best I can with what is left of my life. I will remain in the moment and treasure my memories. And for this mother, that is enough.

*Annette Mennen Baldwin In memory of my son, Todd Mennen TCF, Katy, TX*

***Motherhood***  
*is a state of both the mind and the heart,  
a sacred place that is yours  
no matter the distance  
between you and your child.  
Not even death  
can take it away.*

Joanne Cacciatore

# Grief of a Step Parent

I thought I knew all there was to know about grief. As a young adult, I'd dealt with the death of my best friend, my high school sweetheart, my mother, several grandparents, and several colleagues. After 15 years as a mental health professional, I was familiar with all the theories of grieving, from Kübler-Ross to Lindemann and Engel. Now, I look back at that part of my life and marvel at my naiveté.

About 10 years ago, I met David, a bright, energetic 11-year-old who then became my stepson. Over the ensuing years, I took on the typical parental roles: chauffeuring him to and from school, soccer practice, guitar lessons, and the mall; attending school choir concerts and Key Club events; accompanying him to the college fair at his high school; and talking with him about the dangers of substance abuse as well as the importance of safe sex.

As David matured into a young adult, we spent many late nights talking about his goals, his interests and his opinions. He also told me about the ever-changing relationships among those in his circle of friends - who was dating whom and who was fighting with whom. I am happy he was comfortable talking with me about his life.

## Gone Forever

I spent seven years watching this spunky, mischievous boy - who loved to play practical jokes - grow into a respectful, intelligent young man with a bright future. I wouldn't trade that time for the world.

Then one sunny summer morning, David left for work, just as he always did. Ten minutes later, there was a car accident - and then he was gone forever.

After David died, I felt as though someone had ripped out my heart and trod on it. I couldn't imagine ever feeling OK again. I felt sick to my stomach all the time, and there were days I felt as though I couldn't get out of bed at all. I am lucky to have my other children as well as several friends and relatives who I could talk to, cry with, yell at - whatever I needed to get through his death.

## Stepparents Grieve, Too

But not everyone understood that I - David's stepmother - would grieve as deeply as I did. People had no problem recognizing the pain my husband was experiencing, yet they would ignore my feelings of loss. One person even asked if I had known David.

Stepparents grieve, too. And before a family can begin to heal, everyone's grief needs to be honored and supported. Nurses must remember to consider all family connections - even the nonbiological ones. It is important to acknowledge the relationships among stepfamilies in particular, to avoid invalidating their feelings and preventing them from getting the support they need. If in doubt, just listen.

## What I've Learned

So, now I know that I still had a lot to learn about grief before David died. What did I discover? I've learned that the loss of a child is among the most difficult there is, but that no loss should be minimized. I've learned that people say insensitive things - not out of spite but out of ignorance. I've learned that some people are uncomfortable hearing about the grief of another.

I've learned that no two people grieve exactly the same way. Some mourn privately, while others need to express themselves. Some can't bring themselves to talk about their loved one at all or even hear the person's name; others feel the need to talk about their loss regularly to keep the memory fresh.

I've learned that acceptance takes time - sometimes a lot of time. I've learned that seeking comfort can come from several sources -religion, spirituality, or even a psychic - and that reliance on an outside source is OK.

## Going Forward

As a mental health professional, I hope someday to educate others on the importance of learning about the relationships that exist within the family of a deceased person. I now understand the complexities of grief and the need to be sensitive to all family members as they deal with their loss.

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# TCF Annual Retreat in Seabeck, WA ~ May 30 - June 1, 2014

## *“Compassion, Inspiration, and Hope”*

For over thirty years bereaved parents have been crossing the wooden bridge into the quiet serenity of Seabeck Conference Center the annual TCF retreat sponsored by Seattle-King County Chapter of TCF. The historic town of Seabeck is located on Hood Canal and is just an hour and a half drive from Seattle. The majestic Olympic Mountains rise to the west, scenic Hood Canal lies between you and the Olympics and wooded hills slope eastward from the beach. This setting sets the tone for healing. One feels secluded and protected from the outside world. One also feels very welcomed and included. This is a safe, supportive place to do one's grief work.

The retreat theme this year is Our retreat is just that...a *retreat*. We leave behind the busyness of our everyday lives and enter a relaxed and safe haven to work on our grief and bond with other bereaved parents. The retreat is a place where we share our thoughts, feelings, and precious memories of our children. The weekend includes workshops, sharing groups, a reflection room, burden basket, crafts, Children's Memorial Garden and a candlelighting ceremony on Saturday night.

The retreat is low-key and there is no pressure to attend every scheduled session. The weekend is yours to use however you need to take care of yourself. If it's time for an activity, but you want to take a nap or take a walk, do it. Do what YOU need to do.

Some people choose to not participate in sessions and yet do a lot of grief work because they have the opportunity to be in a safe and supportive setting that allows them the time and space to work on their grief away from the distractions of a busy daily life. It's a nurturing environment and you are with people who understand what you are going through.

Our TCF chapter works with WICS - Widowed Information and Consultation Services – to plan the retreat. We share the main speaker and workshops, but TCF and WICS have separate sharing groups, memorial ceremonies and housing.

Together, TCF and WICS provide a children's program for those who want to bring their children (ages 5-17). The children's group has their own program with their own activities and ceremonies. All three groups share the dining room at meal time, but each group has designated tables, so each is with their own group. (*For information about the Children's Program, contact WICS at 206-241-5650.*)

About 60-70 bereaved parents from Washington, Oregon and British Columbia attend our retreat. At Seabeck you will find bereaved parents with caring hearts who can relate to you and your grief. We truly feel that other bereaved parents are the greatest resource and support for us on this most difficult journey we have to travel.

Please join us at our Seabeck Retreat this year!! For more info call 206-241-1139 or email: [tcfmarge@aol.com](mailto:tcfmarge@aol.com)  
Or call or email Arleen Simmonds TCF Kamloops 250-374-2135 [waskamloops@shaw.ca](mailto:waskamloops@shaw.ca)  
For more information about the Seabeck Conference Center, visit [www.Seabeck.org](http://www.Seabeck.org).



# Grief Unrecognized: Loss of a Sibling

By Jill Fitzgerald Taken from <http://www.hellogrief.org/about>

*Echoes of each other's being.  
Whose eyes are those that look like mine?  
Whose smile reminds me of my own?  
Whose thoughts come through with just a glance?  
Who knows me as no others do?  
Who in the whole wide world is most like me  
Yet not like me at all?  
My sibling.*

(Faber & Mazlish, 1989, p. 114)

So often the death of a sibling is dismissed, unrecognized or even ignored. The assumption is that perhaps it is not as devastating as a parent losing a child, a wife losing a husband, or even a child losing a parent. Yet, our siblings are one of the longest lasting relationships we will ever have.

Siblings define our past, are key in our “evolution” of our identity, and they know all of the intricacies of our families. Our siblings saw us in the best of times and in the worst. There is no other relationship like the sibling connection. In an instant your world changed when your brother or sister died. In an instant, your entire family changed forever.

The impact of losing a sibling has many layers and hits on many levels. You might feel guilt that you are the one that survived, you may feel confusion about what role you now play in the family, you may be angry that your family has changed so drastically, and the sadness you experience can be indescribable.

To quote the title of a superb book- Invisible Heroes (Naparstek, B), which outlines the impact trauma has on the body, this title also represents survivors of sibling loss. Many often feel invisible as their grief is so vastly overlooked.

In efforts to combat feeling invisible, make your loss and your grief known. Educate others about how sibling grief shapes you. Just as there was a connection before your sibling died, there can be after the death as well.

Pay tribute and honor your brother or sister often. Say their name, tell their story, do random acts of kindness as a means of memorializing. Just as the poem suggests, don't allow the “echo of your being” to be forgotten. It was an important relationship and will forever be.