



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

 Summer 2013 

"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 of The Compassionate Friends

CHAPTER LEADER

Carol Dreger
Box 29 Knutsford, BC
V0E 2A0
Phone (250) 374-6030
Email waskamloops@shaw.ca

NEWSLETTER

Arleen Simmonds
Phone (250)374-2135
Email waskamloops@shaw.ca

MEETINGS

1st Wednesday Every Month @ 7:00 PM
Kamloops United Church

421 St. Paul Street, Kamloops

TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate friends of Canada Inc.
#26 - 4270 Ponderosa Cres.
Victoria, BC V8Z 7H3
Email NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net
www.TCFCanada.net
Toll Free: 1-866-823-0141

NEXT MEETINGS

June 5, 2013
July 3 2013
August 7, 2013
September 4, 2013

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.

"The air up there in the clouds is very pure and fine, bracing and delicious. And why shouldn't it be? --it is the same the angels breathe."

— Mark Twain, *Roughing It*



FYI.....

OUR NEW SPACE: We have been in our new space in the newly renovated Kamloops United Church for a couple of months now and it is working well for us. For those who may be new or haven't been out to a meeting for awhile, our meeting room is called the Ponderosa Room and is downstairs on the right hand side. For anyone having mobility issues there is a lift to the left of the entry way off St. Paul Street.

LINKS FOR ONLINE RESOURCES

BC Bereavement Helpline

Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information. **Contact:** (604) 738-9950

Email: bcbh@telus.net **Website:** www.bcbereavementhelpline.com

Suicide Support SurvivorAdvocates@yahoo.com

Sibling Websites 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

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

Grief Watch: www.griefwatch.com

Parents of Murdered Children pomc.com

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support www.nationalshare.org

AN INVITATION: Readers are invited to submit their original writings about their grief journey experiences. Many already use the therapeutic tool of journaling. Writing is not only healing for ourselves but sharing our experience is often very helpful for others on this journey. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter please contact me (Arleen Simmonds) at waskamloops@shaw.ca

When you write from the heart, you not only light the dark path of your readers, you light your own way as well.
~ Marjorie Holmes

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 2013



Lamps For The Journey...

"I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be honourable, to be compassionate. It is, after all, to matter: to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all." ~ *Leo C. Rosten*

"And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer." ~ *F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby*

"Don't be ashamed to weep; 'tis right to grieve. Tears are only water, and flowers, trees, and fruit cannot grow without water. But there must be sunlight also. A wounded heart will heal in time, and when it does, the memory and love of our lost ones is sealed inside to comfort us." ~ *Brian Jacques*,

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time. ~ *John Lubbock*

The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook. ~ *William James*

The fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive a smile in return, are to me continual spiritual exercises. ~ *Leo Buscaglia*

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*

Keep all special thoughts and memories for lifetimes to come. Share these keepsakes with others to inspire hope and build from the past, which can bridge to the future. ~ *Mattie Stepanek*

Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down. ~ *Oprah Winfrey*

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.
~ *Henri Nouwen*

Part of the healing process is sharing with other people who care. ~ *Jerry Cantrell*

Hope is like a road in the country; there wasn't ever a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence. ~ *Lin Yutang*

Unable are the loved to die. For love is immortality. ~ *Emily Dickinson*

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality.
~ *Albert Einstein*

Parents of Infants – On Losing A Baby

Unlike parents who have had an older child die, our memories are few, and for some people, even non-existent. Those of us who have had a baby die have found it common for some people not to recognize the loss as being as tragic as the death of an older child. Maybe it is just as tragic, maybe it isn't. For *most* parents who have lost a baby, the tragedy is felt as intensely as can be. For *many* parents who lose a baby, there is nothing else with which to compare their loss. It is just like we who have lost a child (at no matter what the age) feel that no one can understand the way we feel unless they too have lost a child. Those of us who have not lost an older child have nothing else to compare the loss of our baby with, just as those who have lost an older child cannot completely understand our feelings upon losing a baby.

The death of an infant is often times considered "unfortunate" but so many feel that it can be remedied with the birth of another child. Some people find it difficult to understand the love, hope and the future that has been lost with the death of a "much looked forward to" baby.

In my own situation, I have found that the words of consolation most often given to me are things like, "You're young, you can have other babies . . ." or "It's so much better that you were never able to hold her and love her." And things like, "It's over with, forget it, put it all behind you . . ." The truth of the matter for me, at least, was yes, I could have more babies, but it did not matter how many children I could have in the future, I still had lost Jessica. She was the baby daughter I had wanted and tried to have for eight years. Upon her death, all my hopes and dreams and my happiness I felt, were gone. The daughter I had looked so forward to holding and loving and spending time with was gone. Yes, since her death I have been blessed with the birth of two children, a son and another daughter. I give thanks daily for their health and loving presence. But, just as another child could never take their place, nor have they replaced Jessica.

Was it really better that I never got to hold her? I think not. If only I had been able to hold that blessed little angel in my arms, if only for one short moment, I would be better able to cope with my loss. If I had been able to see her (even though she was already dead) I would have had a memory to hold on to the rest of my life.

Learn to love her? I already loved her. Any mother who carries a child knows love for that child even though it is still unborn. I loved her. I knew her. I knew that she would become quiet and still when I spoke softly to her, I knew she would react with somewhat violent kicking when surrounded by loud noises. I knew her while she was yet inside me. She was real. I loved her.

I can never forget about her. I never want to. I still wonder what she would have grown to be like, what she would have grown to look like. Would she have been fair and active like my son Justin, or would she have been dark and quietly composed like Ashlee? I think about these things even after four years. I expect to think about them for the rest of my life. I wonder what it would have been like around here with three children, close in age, playing together. I wonder what it would have been like with three children to love. I wonder I guess for a parent of a baby who dies, the wonderings are the worst. We just do not know. We have no memories to cherish.

I am not trying to make a comparison with the loss of a child who lived to be older. I cannot compare things which I do not know about. I just know that a parent who loses a baby feels grief, and loss, and pain and hurt. To grieve is to grieve, to feel the pain and loss is to feel the pain and loss, to miss a child is to miss a child. Of course, there are, as in everything, various degrees of feeling and to each parent his or her child was special and the feelings still go deep and the loss is still felt at no matter what age a child is lost.

-Deby Amos TCF/Anniston, Alabama

Signs After Suicide: The Red Butterfly



By Karyl Chastain Beal

Shortly after noon, I went into Arlyn's bedroom to get a few things to take with me. I was preparing to drive about three miles out into the country, to Woodhaven Road.

I stood and gazed around her room for a few minutes; it was full of Arlyn, but it seemed so empty.

I picked up a folder with some of the poems she had written. Her words. Her thoughts. Her feelings.

I held it under my arm securely while I searched for something else. A Cabbage Patch doll, the dress she was christened in, a blue ribbon she had won for baking a sponge cake when she was ten years old. They were all things that meant something to Arlyn, but I left them alone.

In moving my hands across the top of her dresser, I knocked over a small picture frame. I stood it upright; it held a photo of Arlyn with bright red hair and a happy grin. She was three years old when I had made the Raggedy Ann costume using a mop for a wig. She had flopped around the house for days practicing a Raggedy Ann walk. I smiled at the memory and picked it up to take with me. This was all I needed.

I got into the car, checking to make sure I had not forgotten to put the lawn chair in the trunk. Then slowly, I drove three miles out to the country to a place that drew me to it with an awful, yet irresistible force. To a place on Woodhaven Road.

A few minutes later, I parked the car beside a small stream. I checked my watch; I was early. The rickety wooden bridge which crossed the stream seemed to blend in with the trees and undergrowth surrounding it. There were no other man-made structures in sight.

My eyes tried to follow several small yellow butterflies as they bobbed up and down in this otherwise still picture. I placed the lawn chair on the side of the narrow dirt road, a few feet from the two wooden crosses that announced to the world that this was a place where a death had occurred.

I held on to the folder of writings and the small framed photo as I sat heavily down in the chair. I suddenly realized that I had placed the chair on the exact spot where my daughter's body had fallen when her life stopped. I briefly stiffened and thought about moving, but then, I didn't. A morbid need to connect with her held me there.

I opened the folder and picked up a sheet of paper with Arlyn's handwriting on it. I read:

"The scent of death

Surrounds me

And I am overwhelmed

By it's beauty."

I shook my head; I could not understand.

It was terribly hot, much like it was the day Arlyn died. I sat quietly wondering what she had thought during those final moments, wondering if she has been afraid, wondering.

I looked down and continued to read. I felt a dull pain in my chest. Her hands had written the words I was staring at, but her heart had felt them.

After a while, I looked up and stared at the yellow butterflies blankly. Then, I glanced at my watch and saw that it was almost that time. If Arlyn's spirit was to come, it would be now.

So I began to talk. At first, I spoke casually. "How are you doing, Arlyn? What's it like up there? Are you with Mammaw and Grandpap and Lori? Have you played your guitar for them?"

continued from page 5

I waited, but Arlyn did not reply.

I felt myself growing more anxious, so I began to ask harder questions, pausing after each to listen for a reply.

"Arlyn, do you miss us? When you pulled the trigger, did you have any idea of how badly your death would hurt your dad and me? Did you know how much I loved you?"

Then, as a post-script, I asked her if she'd seen her young cousin, Adam, who was killed the day before, and I asked her to take Adam under her wings.

Again, I closed my eyes and waited. And waited.

Nothing happened. I felt so sad.

Finally, I decided I had to try one more time to persuade Arlyn to reply. I would ask for a sign that she was here. She'd been gone four years; I had waited long enough.

I opened my eyes and looked around. As I searched for a sign, I realized I would not know a sign if I saw one. What does a sign look like? Is it a blinking light? A crash of thunder? The image of a face in the clouds? What would I look for?

Then, I spotted two yellow butterflies in the woods behind the crosses. This type of butterfly is common in south Georgia at this time of year. It seems that they only come in yellow. I glanced down at the Raggedy Ann photo that was smiling up with me. The red mop wig almost looked like wings surrounding her face.

I smiled to myself then, and I spoke loudly into the trees. I said, "Arlyn, if you hear me, I need a sign! Will you send me a sign to let me know you're okay? Will you send me a red butterfly if you know how much I love you and how badly I miss you? A red butterfly, Arlyn. Please."

By then, the tears spilling down my cheeks were making their own small stream. I closed my eyes. I felt the stillness, until a cool breeze brushed past. I shivered.

When I opened my eyes again, I saw the two crosses still standing in front of me. The only thing different was that the yellow butterflies in the woods behind them had left.

I signed. I was so disappointed that I had just passed another milestone date without a sign from Arlyn. I felt myself sinking.

I was a reluctant traveler on this road. Sometimes, it seemed too hard to go on. Sometimes, I wanted to give up and join her. I missed her so much.

A moment or so later, I caught a red flicker in the corner of my eye to the right, over the stream. I turned and saw a large red butterfly come up from under the bridge. Slowly, it flew towards me, bobbing up and down as if it were on a sea of gently rippling water.

As the butterfly flew closer, I held my breath. The trees behind it faded out, creating a hazy background, accenting the brightness of its red wings.

To my amazement, it fluttered close to me. Then, it flew all the way around the two crosses that bore Arlyn's name. Not once but twice. Twice, the red butterfly encircled those crosses while I sat there spellbound, so close I could have touched it. It hovered a moment, and then it swooped through the air, heading off into the woods behind the crosses and out of sight.

Was it a coincidence that the red butterfly just happened to fly by as I was hoping for a sign from Arlyn? Was it really a sign from her? If it was a sign, what did it mean?

I do not know if it was a coincidence or not; I have visited the place on Woodhaven Road many times in the past four years. The only butterflies I remember seeing there before were yellow.

continued from page 6

A sign is something that may suggest the presence of someone who is missing. To me, that butterfly was a sign from Arlyn, because there is no logical explanation for its appearance otherwise. So, what does it mean?

I believe it was a sign that the spirit lives on after death, and that the soul of my precious Arlyn is at peace. I believe the red butterfly was Arlyn's way of letting me know that she knows the depth of my love for her, and the pain of my sadness. I also believe that she sent me this sign so I would know that she is with me always.

This knowledge does not erase the fact I miss her, but it does help me move into the future. I feel an inner calmness that was missing before. I believe I have a mission to accomplish while I am here, so I now understand that the spirit of my child will provide the wings to lift me up.

Most important, though, the red butterfly proved to me that love is eternal. It does not die when the body dies. Hearts and souls that are joined on earth are united forever.

Karyl Chastain Beal, Mother of Arlyn

Columbia, Tennessee Masters in Education, Certified Thanatologist, Support group facilitator
Mission: Suicide awareness, support and education (and prevention) Writings published in Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul, Seventeen magazine, various other magazines and newspapers
Member of AFSP Survivors Counsel & SPAN, Owner of Suicide Memorial Wall, Suicide Discussion Board and Suicide Reference Library - Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Karyl_Chastain_Beal



GRADUATION

As Graduation time approaches it brings with it so many memories and emotions. If our child achieved High School Graduation or indeed any of the other graduations that mark the important life passages, we can count on reliving every moment in detail.

The pride, the parties, the excitement and also the fear that some tragedy would strike because of Grad celebrations. Some of us cautioned, counseled and held our breath, only to have death come anyway some other time and place. Some of us had that nightmare come true, and Grad will forever signal the saddest anniversary of our lives.

In the instances when our children did not live long enough to achieve these milestones, we are left with the emptiness of what might have been. We watch their friends or possible contemporaries moving into the next phase of life while our child is forever frozen into a block of time that never changes and sometimes fades into nothingness for others in our lives.

I hope that when Graduation time rolls around again that some of us will have come far enough to be able to acknowledge the achievements of our young friends. They are all precious children and deserve our praise and support. We honour our own children when we celebrate and affirm the youth all around us.

Arleen Simmonds, TCF/Kamloops



IT JUST GOES TO SHOW YOU

By: Tom Wyatt Bereaved Father St. Louis, MO

Back in the '70's the late comedian Gilda Radner played a character by the name of Roseann Roseanna Danna on the television show "Saturday Night Live." Roseann Roseanna Danna would give a commentary that never ended with the same thought that it began with but at the end she'd tie it all together with..."It just goes to show you....it's always something."

That's so true where grief work is concerned. I've been at this since March 5, 1991 when my son Johnny was killed. I've written a lot of poems and articles about grief work and surviving the loss of a child. I've counseled quite a few folks and lent my shoulder to a lot more. I know the ins and outs, the ups and downs (how's that for stringing a couple of clichés?) and I know just how tough it is to pick up and keep going on. But we do it and if we keep at it we make positive progress. But my grief is unpredictable and shows no mercy when it steps out of the shadows and announces that it's come for a visit. I've moved way down the road since that March afternoon fourteen years ago. Not every step has been forward but even when I would regress, I'd catch myself and move forward again. I'm a happy guy, for the most part, with the only caveat being the obvious one. Somewhere along the line I quit thinking in terms of, "I'm have a great time but it would be better if Johnny were here," heck, that's a given. Along the way there were the usual bumps and u-turns and some of them were the "firsts" as I call them. The first (pick a holiday), the first birthday, the first family vacation and so on were bad, but to be honest, I found the second's a lot worse because they drove home the permanence of his being dead. Some one who isn't in our position might be confused by that statement because they don't get it at first, and thank God that they don't.

When I went to my wife's school's open house in 1992 I watched the kindergarteners because that's the class that Johnny would have been in. I could see him in my minds eye. I looked at each kid and thought about who would have been that friend that he went all the way through school with? Would one of the little girls be his first crush? It was hard. When my son Blake was a senior back in '02-03 we had a great time at his high school. My wife, Ruth has taught in this district for 25 years and we are very active parents. There's a huge sense of pride to be a part of this district. Blake was very popular with everyone in his class. At the football games he led the senior cheers and was voted "most spirited." Heck, we watched him having fun more than we watched the football games. He was a varsity wrestler and I loved to sit there in the stands and cheer him on. I felt such joy as he walked across that stage and received his diploma. It was a great year.

The past year would have been Johnny's senior years. It really wasn't a conscious effort on my part but I didn't go to one football game, wrestling meet or any other high school function. It just always seemed that there was something else to do, but when the graduation announcement from a friend's son came in the mail it hit me like an Ali right to the chin and I crumbled. I felt so damn cheated. The anger that I thought that I'd dealt with came rushing back in spades. I was lost and I wasn't prepared for it. If this were 13 years ago I'd really be in trouble because this is definitely a case of "Thank God I know now what I didn't know then." I know that if I don't try and control this grief by shoving it down inside of myself that I'll be okay. I know that if I let it out in constructive ways and stop being destructive, I'll be okay. I'll try to not sit down with a half of a gallon of Blue Bunny. I'll cry when I need to and I'll find a way to let the anger out that doesn't make it tough on the ones around me. I'll let it all go and I know that I will survive this if I want to. Hopefully besides just surviving I'll learn something from this too. Because after 14 years, even though I know that the pain can resurface at any time, I had let myself be lulled into a false sense of security. I'd like to say, with great conviction in my voice, that I'll never let this happen to me again but as Roseann Roseanna Danna was fond of saying..."It just goes to show you.....it's always something." May we all find peace.

Shalom

Why Umbrellas?

By Valerie Bosselman

<http://valeriebosselman.com/why-umbrellas/>

Reprinted from Grief Watch www.griefwatch.com

Put up your umbrella. It all started with my first boyfriend, Greg Ptacek, in the city of perpetual rain – New Orleans. I need to start by saying that Greg was (and is) the nicest guy. To this day, I don't remember if he broke up with me or I broke up with him. If he broke up with me, it just goes to show that he was such a nice guy in doing so that I don't remember the pain of the moment. If I broke up with him, it just stands in a long line of irrevocable and outrageously stupid things I've done in my life.

We were both students at Tulane University. Creative and thoughtful in all he did, Greg gave me the most fabulous umbrella from England on my birthday. He purchased it at a millinery (frilly hat shop) located behind the St. Louis Cathedral in The French Quarter on the corner of Pirates Alley and Royal Street. I can still picture the umbrella. Its handcrafted wooden shaft was topped off with classic tan fabric. The mechanism that opened and closed the umbrella was the finest. It came in a lovely carrying case that matched the umbrella. The case sported a strap to wear over my shoulder fashionably to carry the umbrella when not in use. I kept it with me often. I loved it. It was maybe one of the nicest gifts I've ever received; unique, unusual, functional, and oh so beautiful.

The umbrella took on a life of its own when a suite-mate borrowed it from my dorm room without my expressed permission. She left it at a New Orleans restaurant for it to be lost forever. My roomie didn't immediately tell me. She waited until I was at the point of insanity looking for it, and then guilt made her confess.

She offered to replace it. Normally I'm the "Oh, never mind, it's okay" kind of girl; normally, but not this time. I boldly told her "Yes, I want it replaced". While my friend could not match the original, she bought me a lame replacement. Nonetheless, I kept (and used) it for many years, always missing the real thing.

Time marched on. I married Dann Bosselman, and I gave birth to two beautiful children early on in our marriage. When my children Megan and Ryan were about 6 and 8, they joyfully danced around the yard in the pouring rain with the counterfeit umbrella (shades of New Orleans second line at Mardi Gras). I can still remember gazing out the front picture window watching them laugh. The umbrella was left out for the night, and the wooden handle warped beyond repair. It was a sad ending.

The memory of the umbrella lived on. Megan went to England as a high school graduation gift. Wanting to surprise me, she searched high and low for the infamous umbrella. She came home empty-handed and disappointed.

Megan named Greg Ptacek "The Umbrella Guy", not because he gave me the English umbrella, but he passed on to us a metaphor for life. When my daughter was discouraged, I would tell her "Put up your umbrella". It would be my way of telling her that seasons change, and by putting up her umbrella it would mean she was waiting for the rain of blessing, a rain of change, a rain filled with fresh new life. Maybe you can't see it, but you can smell rain in the air and should always be ready for it.

It stormed in our lives. Days after Megan graduated from college I knew something was critically wrong with our girl. I told Dann either Megan was having a nervous breakdown or something was horribly wrong in her body. In August of 2004 we got the news that Megan had adrenal cancer – a condition almost unheard of in someone her age. Life expectancy for adrenal cancer is five years from diagnosis. The rain kept coming down.

continued from page 9

In the midst of the life and death of my girl we made every effort to keep track of our metaphorical umbrella. People became the umbrella, and they covered us and protected us; People showered us with love in the midst of dying and people were servants that held up the umbrella for us when we were incapable of doing it on our own.

It had been Megan's wish to survive and one day fall in love. She wanted her wedding on our outdoor patio. The gift she wanted to give all of the guests? Pink umbrellas. It's good luck for an Irish girl to have rain on her wedding day.

Megan Bosselman. In memory of my girl, put up your umbrella.



THE BEAUTY PLACES

Edgar A. Guest

Here she walked and romped about.
And here, beneath this apple tree
Where all the grass is trampled out,
The swing she loved so used to be.
This path is but a path to you,
Because my child you never knew.
'Twas here she used to stoop to smell
The first bright daffodil of spring;
'Twas here she often tripped and fell
And here she heard the robins sing.
You'd call this but a common place,
But you have never seen her face.
And it was here we used to meet.
How beautiful a spot is this,
To which she gayly raced to greet
Her daddy with his evening kiss!
You see here nothing grand or fine,
But, oh, what memories are mine!
The people pass from day to day
And never turn their heads to see
The many charms along the way
That mean so very much to me.
For all things here are speaking of
The babe that once was mine to love.

And Then There Are Dragonflies. By Jerre Peterson

(Jerre's 12-year-old daughter, Audrey died April 5, 2000, a month after being diagnosed with a brain tumor. Part of Jerre's healing comes through putting his experiences since Audrey's death to print.)

And then there are dragonflies.

Many of the wonderful signs I believe I've been given by Audrey are perhaps to let me know she is ok. Is heaven a place where we go where we can be anything we want? Is heaven a place where all those that leave the earth meet and share their experiences, their loves, their dreams? Have some of these little messages been delivered to me by the dragonflies?

Not long after Audrey was gone, I would say within 4 weeks of her passing, I started to dig. I started to excavate my backyard with shovel in hand. I know while I dug the time seemed not to hurt so painfully so I kept on digging. I was going to dig myself to the center of the earth. I don't know, maybe subconsciously I was digging my way to hell to see if this is where indeed the Devil lay. Surely the Devil had a lot to do with the death of my child. Instead I dug a hole some 60 feet long 4 feet wide and 3 feet deep.

Before too long this hole became the liner of one of the most beautiful projects I had ever created. It turns out to be 2 Koi ponds, and the first inhabitants were Audrey's aquarium fish. Surely she would love looking down from the heavens and she would enjoy admiring her beautiful fish swimming freely in such a beautiful creation. And surely she would love knowing I was taking care of her fish with all the love and protection I once gave her.

Over several months I moved 50 PLUS yards of earth and hauled in several thousand pounds of cobblestone and slate, I learned how to plumb and how to electrify. I read books on masonry, plumbing, and Koi fish and learned how to care for these fish in the harshest of seasons. Nothing was going to stop me from building a home for Audrey's fish, a home that would allow them to live their lives to the fullest. Before summer ended and the project was finished I had created two attaching ponds. I did this so that if one pond became contaminated I could transport the fish into the other while I treated the sick one. I created a water fall that would trickle into both ponds and a pump system that would allow them both to maintain equal water levels, yet give them both a beautiful look and sustain them both with life giving oxygen. Surely someone was lending me a hand from the heavens.

These two ponds started to harvest frogs on their own and Audrey's fish were growing faster than anyone could imagine. I started to plant water plants throughout them and even they were multiplying faster than I could give them away. The water hyacinths during this first summer grew literally several thousand plants. Weekly I transported two hundred plants at a time down to my golf club where the owners let me fill the ponds around the sixth and ninth greens. The growth in these ponds alone was becoming quite a chore, but I was loving it because the work kept me busy and my mind occupied.

During the summer I came home one day early from the office and my wife was having a sad afternoon recalling some of the summer days she and Audrey spent together. When I arrived home she was sitting in the backyard with my youngest daughter staring into the pond with her eyes glassed over. Obviously she had been crying. We talked as I reached over into the pond to flip the leaf of a lily pad onto its proper side, when all of a sudden a dragonfly landed on the outside palm of my hand. In an amazing few seconds I thanked the dragonfly for coming to visit and it even allowed me to softly brush its tiny wings, then I gently blew on her wings and thanked Audrey for the visit and asked her if she would return soon. The dragonfly then flew away gracefully. Julie, Cherie and I had a quiet conversation on the possibilities of this ever happening again, and whether or not it might have been Audrey herself visiting us to remove some of the sorrow we were having. Then within an hour this beautiful blue green dragonfly returned again, this time landing on the lily pad I had been working on earlier. And again, she let me gently brush her wings. I swear this had to be one of the most special moments in my entire life. I knew without any doubt in my mind that this indeed was a gift from the heavens. But something as strange as this, we had doubt, who wouldn't?

Later that evening I drove to Home Depot for some plumbing supplies. There at the corner where I needed to turn into the lot was a white van. On the back of the van was a sticker of a green leaf that sort of looked like a maple leaf, and there on the leaf was the dragonfly again. I arrived home later and spoke with my family regarding the incident and the dragonfly being now many miles from home. It was indeed special to us.

continued from page 11

The next evening my youngest daughter wanted to go to the golf course and hit some golf balls. I thought it would be a good idea to get out, so we went off and there on the range as we were hitting golf balls, Cherie, my 7yr old yells out in her screechy little voice “Dad, she is back.” And sure enough, 24 hours later, this dragonfly was back and flying around me and Cherie.

Later that same evening, a friend that I had not seen in several years came over to greet us. As we stood there talking face to face I heard this buzzing right next to my ear. David, my friend in all his amazement said to me that there was a dragonfly hovering next to my ear. Cherie and I just looked at each other and laughed and wondered.

A few weeks later I was invited to play in the Ronald McDonald House golf tournament, “Brian’s Bash”, with the host being from the Portland Trailblazers. This had to be the most significant day of all the dragonfly sightings. I was playing with one of Oregon’s premier amateurs, Denny Taylor, and Bill Shonley, the former voice of the Blazers, along with a team member from my golf club. I was asked about my daughter’s illness and that led to my sharing with them the amazing stories of the dragonfly. As I told the story they sat in their cart next to ours and it was apparent I was losing their attention when all of a sudden, the man sitting next to me in the cart was overcome with amazement when he notices the green blue dragonfly that landed on my knee and sat there for the remainder of the story.

One evening, as the summer was about to end Cherie and I went out to the club to play a few holes and just for fun, drive the cart around. As we drove around the course that evening our dragonfly followed us the complete distance.

Never before in my life have I experienced so many sightings of these beautiful creatures as I have since Audrey’s death. Dragonflies now have become a large part of our lives and whenever one appears, I simply say, “Hello my beautiful Audrey.”

P.S. – Audrey’s fish survived all of Oregon’s changing weather and are the most beautiful of all the fish we have added since creating the ponds. Currently our ponds house over forty beautiful Koi and more are expected. We have been honored to watch our fish this past summer give birth to their babies. The weather in Oregon leaves the water a murky brown through the winter months so I am eagerly awaiting spring and cleaning out the silt to see how they have grown. U R Loved, Jerre.



WHAT IS LEFT?

When a child dies, you ask, among other questions, what is left? A beautiful, sensitive, intelligent child has died. What can be left after such a crushing blow? Others will point out that you have a spouse, other children or grandchildren, perhaps relatives or friends, that are left.

You read books on bereavement, scarcely remembering what you have read; you attend meetings, talk with others who have suffered a loss like yours. If you are fortunate, you have one or two friends who, while they cannot fully understand, are there to love and listen. Perhaps there is a therapist who guides you in your search for an answer. But, for a long while everything you read or hear has little meaning and certainly cannot provide the answer to your question.

Or can it? Does all that you have read and heard and experienced finally come together and answer the question of what is left? For me it does. The answer was 13 months in coming, but how clear it comes now. I am left. That’s it! I am left and I have been left with the love of my child. It is a new love; it is different, more intense; it is understanding; it need not be reciprocated; there are no strings attached. I love this love of my child. It warms and comforts me. It is a wonderful love, but I cannot keep it. It is too precious to keep to myself. I am left with the love to spare and love to share. It will never run out. My child will always be with me to replenish it. I have found my answer. I am left to share my child’s love with you.

~By Betty Stevens, BP/USA, Baltimore, MD

THAT FIRST SUMMER VACATION

Summer time is here and with it you may be planning a vacation. If you have recently suffered the death of your child, that first vacation can be very difficult. I would like to share with you our experience the first time we took a vacation after our son, Paul, died. I have included some suggestions to help you through your first vacation and to help you plan around your grief. If any of you are planning a vacation, here are some suggestions that may help:

-Be gentle with yourself. Don't expect too much on your first vacation. Remember as bereaved parents, the first time we do anything without our kids is tough whether it be going to the movies, shopping or on a vacation.

-Plan to do some grief work because you will, planned or not. Give yourself time enough on the trip if you have a bad day so that you can just do what you feel like doing.

-Know that your child will be on your mind day and night just as he or she is at home. Our grief goes with us.

-Plan to do something your child would have loved to do, but did not get a chance to. Plan this in his or her memory.

-If you plan to visit relatives for the first time since your child's death, remember they mean well even if they seem insensitive with their remarks. They have not lost a child and can't see through your eyes.

-If you have other children, remember them. They are also having a hard time coping on this vacation. Plan some activities that will be especially for them.

-Be especially careful to communicate with your spouse. Plan a vacation that is suitable for both of your needs. Remember you are both grieving for the same child, but we all grieve differently and in our own way.

-If you have been maintaining your child's grave site and feel guilty about leaving it unattended, let a family member or friend see to it while you are away. You need not feel guilty and it could fill a need for one of your family.

~Diana Hammock, TCF/Central Coast, Cal.



A Bear Hug For Father's Day

As Father's Day approaches, we are reminded of the significant contributions and unique love of fathers and stepfathers. Their defined role, after the death of their children, is to support their wives and surviving children. But their pain is deep.

Men, by their nature and in response to our society's expectations, do not usually grieve as openly as women. They do not talk as candidly about their loss. They generally do not reach out to others for comfort. They are, after all, the rock, the solid center of the family. Their wife's pain supersedes their pain because women are fragile. Or so we are told. Yet, as I look into the eyes of so many bereaved fathers, I see a deep, gripping pain. The tears left unshed, the words that are never spoken, the anger, guilt and agony ... all remain in the eyes of the bereaved father.

What can a father do? Talk with other bereaved fathers. Read books written by bereaved fathers. Talk with spouses, private counselors and close friends who are not as structured in their "male" societal roles. Try to attend three meetings of Compassionate Friends. You don't have to talk. But you might decide to express a single thought or idea, logically presented, to the small group. You might find peace in this place, and then again, you might not. But, as my own dad often said, "Step up to the plate and see what happens." He was a pretty wise man ... a child of the Great Depression, a football player, Greatest Generation, WW II Marine, a fighter, a provider, a protector ... a man's man. He endured much in his 78 years, and I only saw him cry a few times. But when his friend lost a child, my tough dad was the first one to reach out with a bear hug that wouldn't let go until the tears began to flow. They both cried. They both knew that the agony of losing a child was far worse than the horrors of war. Together, they cried.

This Father's Day may your bear hugs be many and your memories become sweeter with each passing year. May your child live forever in your heart so that peace embraces you always.

Annette Mennen Baldwin In memory of my son, Todd Mennen And my father, James M. Mennen TCF, Katy, TX

When Fathers Weep at Graves

I see them weep, the fathers at the stones,
taking off the brave armor they are forced
to wear in the work place; clearing away
the debris with gentle fingers. Inhaling
the sorrow diminished by anguish, their
hearts desiring what they cannot have ~~
to walk hand in hand with children no
longer held ~~
To all the fathers who leave a part of their
hearts at the stones –
may breezes
underneath the tree of time, ease their pain, as
they receive healing tears...the gift the
children give.

Alice J. Wisler Greenville, SC TCF



Gone Fishin'

I look at your picture,
My favourite one.
There you are,
Standing on the deck
Of a boat; your hand
On the mast, looking
Far off, into a future
Neither one of us could foresee.
Twenty-five summers this year
Since you sailed on into the
Unknown sea of eternity.
I imagine you out there,
With Kindred souls,
Casting for the elusive fish;
Your soft laughter,
Drifting on the night air,
The campfire reflected
In your sleepy smile.
I feel you, as the warm nights
Of summer wrap around me;
Like one of your hugs,
Creeping up from behind,
Surprising and delighting me still.

For my dear son Kenneth Simmonds
Who drowned while fishing.
October 30, 1964 – August 11, 1988
Arleen Simmonds TCF Kamloops



Summer Breezes

There's a hint of laughter
Wafting past the porch.
For a moment I pause ...
To listen
In the warmth of the summer sun.
Memories to bask in,
Trees you climbed, kites you flew,
Bikes you raced, waves you splashed in.
At night we wrapped time around us
As we gazed toward the heavens.
The stars were full of wonder then,
And lazy days seemed endless.
Life spread before you,
Laughter filling the wind with happiness.
Just now I thought I heard you once again.
How pleasant this breath of summer,
The breezes hold such memories.
Of life. Of you.

~ ***K Nelson***



MY BROTHER

After three and a half years without you, I still don't want to
Believe that you are gone
Cuz it just isn't right.
Day after day, I
Expect you to call and make a joke in a
Funny voice.
Grief
Has built up inside of me.
I miss you and love you, Owen!!
Jakob Owen, your nephew, was named after you.
Know always that I
Loved you,
My baby brother. Memories
Never fail me,
Of your
Precious 27 years.
Quite the little boy you were, Jakob Owen is a lot like you.
Roxy was a pretty dog, only one year old
She was with you on the river, in a
Tiny boat
U are forever in my heart
Valerie loves and misses you too
We have to stick together now, as we are the only siblings left
Xactly
Y did you have to die ?
ZZZ...in Heaven is where you now reside. (Resting up for
your next adventure)

*Written with love by Jennifer Hanna for her beloved brother Owen
Hanna who drowned in 2009 at 27 years of age. TCF/Kamloops,*

DO YOU KNOW ?

Do you know the way we feel for you
Do you feel the heavy sorrow too
Do you miss the special times we shared
Do you cry because it hurts to care
Does it seem as though we have moved on
Learned to live without a precious son
Do you see me wishing on a star
Hear me communicating from afar
Do you miss the ones you left behind
Do you ever see your smile on the faces of my sons
Do you know, I wish you happiness
Eternal peace that has been blessed
With the knowledge of, our everlasting love
Do you know, until we meet again
You will always be my brother and my friend
Do you know how much we miss you Ken?
Do you know?

*Kelly Simmonds TCF Kamloops
In Loving Memory Of My Brother
Kenneth Simmonds
October 30, 1964 – August 11, 1988*

