



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER



Christmas Winter 2013/14



"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

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NEWSLETTER

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MEETINGS

1st Wednesday Every Month @ 7:00 PM

Kamloops United Church,

421 St. Paul Street, Kamloops

NEXT MEETINGS

December 4, 2013

January 8, 2014 * 2nd Wednesday this month only

February 5, 2014

March 5, 2014

TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

Email NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net

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 non-denominational, non profit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child of any age. The purpose of the group is to aid each other in our grief journeys through listening, sharing and understanding.

The Winter Robin

by Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Now is that sad time of year
When no flower or leaf is here;
When in misty Southern ways
Oriole and jay have flown,
And of all sweet birds, alone
The robin stays.

So give thanks at Christmas-tide:
Hopes of spring-time yet abide!
See, in spite of darksome days,
Wind and rain and bitter chill,
Snow, and sleet-hung branches, still
The robin stays!



FYI.....



***TCF Kamloops Annual Candlelighting Memorial Service
December 8, 2013 2:00 pm.
Details enclosed in this newsletter.***

***IMPORTANT NOTICE: AS THE 1ST WEDNESDAY OF JANUARY FALLS ON
NEW YEARS DAY WE WILL BE MEETING ON JANUARY 8.***

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

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*

In Memorium

Helen Rhodes, a faithful and valued member of our Kamloops TCF Chapter, left us on November 9, 2013.

Helen is survived by her devoted husband Kevin, her partner of 40 years. Helen was a beautiful, thoughtful and compassionate woman. She brought so much kindness and understanding to our monthly circle.

Kevin and Helen gave of themselves to TCF Kamloops in memory of their beloved son Drew who passed away in 2010. We send our deepest sympathy to Kevin and all their family.



*From hearts that we have treasured, from lives that we have shared,
from loves that walked beside us, from friends for whom we've cared,
we've learned to treasure kindness, we've learned that grace provides,
we've learned to be together, we've learned that love abides.*

~ Sylvia Dunstan/from Voices United #494

Dear Friend



Because I really care about you, I'm not going to pretend and wish you a Merry Christmas as if nothings happened. Instead, I'm going to reach out to you and tell you that I realize this must be a very difficult time for you.

It probably doesn't seem fair that everyone else is smiling and laughing and enjoying the holidays as usual, while your heart is aching.

There may be times a favorite carol that used to bring a smile to your face now brings tears to your eyes. You may feel confused, cheated, and even angry . . . and I wouldn't blame you. But rather than force yourself to fake the holiday spirit, please be honest with your emotions.

Cry, be angry, do whatever it takes to get through this. . always remembering that you will get through this. Remember, too, that in time you'll be ready to celebrate Christmas again. And until then, know that there are many people whose hearts are with you, especially now . . .people who care about you very much and always will.

Renee Duvall
Lakes Area Chapter, MI



Lamps For The Journey...

Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.

~ *Winston Churchill*

The earth has grown old with its burden of care, but at Christmas it always is young, the heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair, and its soul full of music breaks the air, when the song of the angels is sung. ~ *Phillips Brookes*

“That agony returns; And till my ghastly tale is told, This heart within me burns.” ~ *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure you are. Let me learn from you, love you, bless you before you depart. Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow. Let me hold you while I may, for it may not always be so. -*Mary Jean Irion*

You have it easily in your power to increase the sum total of this world's happiness now. How? By giving a few words of sincere appreciation to someone who is lonely or discouraged. Perhaps you will forget tomorrow the kind words you say today, but the recipient may cherish them over a lifetime. -*Dale Carnegie*

The most vivid memories of Christmases past are usually not of gifts given or received, but of the spirit of love, the special warmth of Christmas worship, the cherished little habits of home. -*Lois Rand*

I read and walked for miles at night along the beach, writing bad blank verse and searching endlessly for someone wonderful who would step out of the darkness and change my life. It never crossed my mind that that person could be me. ~*Anna Quindlen*

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream. ~ *C. S. Lewis*

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared. ~*Buddha*

Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children. ~*Khalil Gibran*

"There's no way around grief and loss: you can dodge it all you want, but sooner or later you just have to go into it, through it, and, hopefully come out the other side. The world you find there will never be the same as the world you left." ~ *Johnny Cash*

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more. ~ *Dr. Suess*

My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world. ~*Jack Layton*

“The dew of compassion is a tear.” ~ *Lord Byron*

Seasons of Grief

By Sandy Goodman *Reprinted from Grief Watch www.griefwatch.com*

It is winter today. There is no sun, not even a flash of light to focus on. The air has become murky as if it has solidified, losing its clarity. Ice covers everything, smothering any life that might have been.

Staring out my window, I compare the bite of winter to my grief: the coldness, the shadows, and my reluctance to breathe in any more discomfort. Grief, like winter, appears uninvited and unwelcome. We abhor the pain and wonder why we must endure the distress, while all along we feel the imminent arrival.

Winter compels the earth to rest. Everything stops struggling, stops performing, and sleeps. Abruptly, nature's need to "do" is gone and "being" is all that is necessary. All that was living before appears lifeless. The leaves disappear from the trees, flowers no longer grace our gardens, and the grass is entombed by snow. But what is going on beneath that which we see? Are the flowers really gone, or are they only changing . . . becoming new, becoming different?

I ponder how much further I dare go with this. Can I contend that grief, like winter, is a gift? Can I talk about the metamorphosis of grief, and contemplate gratitude for its presence? I do not know, but that is where my thoughts are leading me.

Grief necessitates a sabbatical from living. We stop struggling, stop performing, and freeze. Our compulsion to "do" dissolves, and "being" is all that is possible. Our life as we knew it disappears, dreams are shattered, and our hearts are ripped from us in the blink of an eye. We are gone, lost in our grief. But what is transpiring in our heart? Is everything gone, or is it only changing . . . becoming new, becoming different?

Grief is harsher than winter. The tasks of daily living are amplified, and what was once soft and blurred becomes sharp and ragged. While winter invariably ends and I remember that spring will arrive, grief makes no such promise. I must wait without assurance. There are moments when winter is beautiful: a blanket of fresh snow on Christmas morning or the surprise of a warm breeze in February. There are nights when winter is hard and ugly, when temperatures plummet and the howl of the wind threatens our sanity. Grief is the same. A special memory comes into my heart and grief becomes bittersweet . . . beautiful. Then, a letter addressed to my son arrives in the mail, and I am back to the harsh reality that he is gone.

My grief transformed me. It tore out everything within me and said There! It is GONE! What are you going to do? You have NOTHING LEFT TO HANG ON TO! You must begin again. You must change. And change is what I did. As winter alters the earth, my grief changed me. It gave me a period of time to step back from living and just be, a space in my existence to feel only that which I needed to feel. It was a time for reflection, reprioritizing, and searching. Without it, I would remain as empty as a garden that never rests.

"But it was painful, horrifying, and devastating," you say. "How can you be thankful for such a thing?"

Grief, like winter, freezes our world. Both appear painful, horrifying, and devastating, but it is our preparation for, reaction to, and perception of that creates our discomfort. It is our need to label that which appraises discomfort as bad. If we deny that death is possible for those we love, we will be stunned and terrified by its occurrence. If we react to the first blizzard of winter with panic and fear, we will be too afraid to honor its power. If we perceive a fatal ice storm as an act of God, we will shake our fist at Him and spend more time than we have asking why.

And if we distinguish death as the end of a loved one's existence, we will be eternally saddened by their absence. The path to spring, to the end of winter, requires only our patience and perseverance. The path to healing requires that and more: it requires that we learn to think differently.

We are a society that fears death. We consider it an end to life, love, and all that came before. Those who die either cease to be, or they exist in a place that is unavailable to us. It is not surprising that fear is present. However, if we alter our beliefs, we can then change our preparation for, reaction to, and perception of death. If we come to know that death is a change in form and not an end, we will not eliminate the winters of our grieving, but we will lessen our suffering.

When my son died in 1996, I had no other option but to change my thinking. I could not live another day presuming he no longer existed. By saying to myself often I am changing my perception of death, I announced to the universe and my higher self that I intended to change what I believed. I placed my intent, reached for it, and settled for nothing less.

continued from page 5....

I began searching for and finding information to support my new perception. I read books about life after death, mediumship, after death communication, spirituality, and reincarnation. I perused websites, joined email lists, and joined chats where these topics were addressed. I found like-minded friends who understood what I was feeling. I observed mediumship activities on television, at seminars, and on the Internet. I began to support my new belief system with knowledge.

I invited experiences by talking to Jason and asking him to come to me in a dream or to give me a sign of his presence. I meditated and made myself more aware of that which isn't seen or touched. I opened up a doorway of possibility and welcomed all that came from love to enter.

Finally, I accepted what happened and expressed gratitude. When the lights went off and then on again for no apparent reason, I was quick to say "thank you." If I was only thanking the power company, it didn't matter. No one knew. The more I accepted as real, the more I experienced. We hear often that "seeing is believing," but this is about "believing is seeing."

My journey has been both desolate and inspiring. There have been moments when I thought the cold and darkness would never end, and moments when tears of joy washed away the pain and light permeated my being. I invite you to walk the path of grief a little differently: to nurture winter's bleakness and look deep into its purpose. And just as we must think differently to see winter's grace, we must think differently to see the gift of grief. It is there, buried beneath a frozen crust that protects and restores while the winter of our soul . . . ensues.

Sandy Goodman is the author of Love Never Dies: A Mother's Journey from Loss to Love (Jodere Group, 2002), and the founder and chapter leader of the Wind River Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. website: <http://www.loveneverdies.net/> email: sandy@trib.com



Mistletoe

Sitting under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),
One last candle burning low,
All the sleepy dancers gone,
Just one candle burning on,
Shadows lurking everywhere:
Some one came, and kissed me there.

Tired I was; my head would go
Nodding under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),
No footsteps came, no voice, but only,
Just as I sat there, sleepy, lonely,
Stooped in the still and shadowy air
Lips unseen—and kissed me there

Walter De La Mere

My Son's Surviving Sibling

My oldest son Jim was killed in an industrial accident. He was not yet 26 years of age, and left a beautiful young wife, a four year old son and a three month old baby girl. The following years, never mind days or months, were extremely difficult for all of us, especially Karie. She was "lost" for a long time.

I didn't realize how "lost" my son Jeff was.

My surviving son Jeff was also a young father when Jim died. Jeff's son had been born earlier in the same month that Jim's daughter was born. In fact, one night Jim took his younger brother out to celebrate the births of their children. Apparently that was quite a night for these two brothers who had been born only thirteen months apart. They grew up together.

Jim "looked after" Jeff even though they were so close in age. He was the consummate "older brother".

After Jim died so suddenly, Jeff also was "lost" but he put on a brave face and supported Karie and us, his parents. He appeared to be the "big brother" then. I was so "lost" in my own grief that I didn't see the signs of Jeff's deep depression.

The year after Jim died, Jeff's daughter was born. Jeff was elated! Now he had the "perfect" family, just as his brother had, a boy and a girl...but the marriage was not strong and things deteriorated to the point that Jeff and his wife separated. At first, she left the children with him and Jeff was more than happy with that arrangement...he wanted his children with him...but when the children approached their teens and spent time with a mother who had no rules and made living with her look pretty attractive (after all, Dad was no fun, he had rules), things got bad. First, Jeff's son left his dad and went to his mom; then his daughter thought things looked pretty good at her mom's, too, and she left. Now, not only had Jeff lost his beloved brother, he had "lost" both of his children!

Jeff found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on his studies to be a teacher. He couldn't sleep, he didn't go to bed but dozed fitfully at night in his chair in the front room. He was short-tempered and angry. He spent long, lonely hours by himself. His new partner was herself attending school to improve her employment situation, and thought that the problems could be dealt with when she was finished in a couple of months.

Jeff couldn't wait. He made an appointment with a psychiatrist but, due to not being able to sleep at night, slept through the alarm. He made out a will, went to his university, found a couple of friends and asked them to witness the will. He paid all his bills, then got in his car and drove to a secluded spot outside of town and ended his life.

He wrote a "Goodbye Letter" addressed to "Mom" apologizing and writing (Jeff excelled at writing in university). He said all the things that he had been afraid to tell me...afraid because he didn't want me to know how desperate and lonely he was; he didn't want to hurt me. My son thought that the only answer was to leave this cruel world. He said, "I just want the pain to end". He thought that he could never finish school, that he wasn't good enough to be a teacher; that he was a bad father and a poor partner to the woman he loved, and not a good son at all. My son was so wrong!

I failed him; I didn't see the signs...I wish that I could have a second chance...Jeff was the sibling of a much loved son who died too soon, too young...and in my grief, I didn't see how much my surviving son Jeff was suffering.

If you are a bereaved parent and you're lucky enough to have surviving children, watch them, love them, help them, tell them you love them over and over. I don't have any more time...you do!

Written with love for Jeff, Jim's surviving sibling,
Joan Conley, TCF Kamloops

HAVE YOU DECORATED YOUR TREE?

My tree is clothed in dark and light
And I sit before it in the night
Remembering how, with loving care,
A child once hung those trinkets there
And though the tree seems fully dressed
Alone, I now must hang the rest
Then the tree with greater love will shine
With memories of that son of mine.
I hang the sparkle from his eyes
That shone each day with sweet surprise,
I hang a gentle heart-shaped kiss
And a glowing ball of childlike bliss.
I hang a bow of loving charms,
And a hug he once held in his arms
Now every light will hold a part
Of all the memories in my heart
For though my grief will never sleep
His heart would break, and he would weep
If we never again felt the Christmas Joy
That was so much a part of my angel boy.

Written by Lynnette Siler,

Chris's Mom 5/10/72 - 2/1/95

TCF Troy MI Jan 1998 Newsletter



A Christmas Blessing

During this Christmas season,
May you be blessed
With the spirit of the season,
which is peace,
The gladness of the season,
which is hope,
And the heart of the season,
which is love
Somehow, not only for Christmas
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others
Is the joy that comes back to you.
And the more you spend in blessing
The poor and lonely and sad,
The more of your heart's possessing
Returns to you glad.

John Greenleaf Whittier

Wintersong

Season of lights, season of love and peace
Season of shadow, season of memories
Season of warmth and joy, season of secret tears:
Give us the courage to laugh again
Give us the vision to hope again
Give us the power to love again
For all our new seasons
And all our new years
by Sascha from Wintersun

Surviving the Holidays After SIDS by Peggy Crane <http://sids-network.org>

All my life I have dearly loved all holidays. I enjoyed the planning, decorating, family gatherings, and presents. By the time my eldest daughter, Danielle, was about two years old she was a full-fledged holiday lover, too. In the spring of 1990 I found out that I was pregnant with my second child and that the baby was due on Christmas day. Since we had been trying to get pregnant for quite a while, I was ecstatic with the news. The additional bonus of having a Christmas baby only added to my joy. Particularly in the last few weeks of my pregnancy I enjoyed going to church and listening to the familiar Christmas stories full of reminders that a very special baby was about to be born. It was very special to me to rehear the historical accounts of the anticipation of Jesus' birth at a time when my mind was so full of thoughts about the impending arrival of my own baby. Maegan was born just four days before Christmas. Her one and only Christmas was a beautiful, peaceful day for all of us.

After Maegan died of SIDS at the age of four months, I found myself dreading all holidays. Every special occasion was a sorrowful reminder of the beloved child that was no longer with us. Since Maegan's first birthday and our first Christmas without her came all at once, this was an especially painful time.

For the sake of my sanity, and to keep the wondrous joy of the holiday season alive in Danielle, who was then five, I sought advice from friends who had suffered similar losses and I read articles on the subject. The following is a summary of the information that I found to be the most helpful:

Be easy on yourself. The holidays will most likely be difficult for you, don't be alarmed if you find yourself crying without warning. If you can accept these facts, it may help you relax a little bit. Do attend whatever gatherings you most want to go to, but don't force yourself to accept every invitation. Trying to cope with the loss of your child takes enough energy without burdening yourself with a lot of social obligations.

Prioritize your holiday rituals. This may be a good time for you to take stock of the activities you do each year and weed out those that you no longer feel inclined to do. For example, if holiday baking is something you dread, look for a place to buy your holiday goodies or consider swapping with friends. Or, just because you don't have the energy for an elaborate list of Christmas cards this year doesn't mean that you can't resume sending holiday cards next year if you feel more able.

Find a new place to celebrate the holidays. I am so thankful that a friend suggested that we break from tradition and spend our first Christmas after Maegan's death away from home. We rented a cabin in the mountains from Maegan's birthday until the day after Christmas. Being in neutral surroundings allowed us to focus on our immediate family, away from the pressures of our well-meaning family and friends. The mountain setting was so peaceful and beautiful that it helped to remind us of the joys of life.

Do something special to commemorate your beloved baby. Many people find that it makes them feel better to make a financial contribution to a charity in loving memory of their baby. You might want to suggest to family members that they take the money they would have spent on a gift for your child and make a charitable contribution. Some people like to buy a toy or clothing that they feel their own child would have enjoyed and donate it to a children's charity. Among other traditions in our home, Santa always leaves a special present for Maegan's family and we provide the altar flowers for our church on the Sunday when the children's Christmas pageant is presented.

Do keep an open line of communication with friends and family about how you are feeling. These times can be very awkward for those around us. Many people avoid mentioning your loss, for fear it will make you feel worse. It will most likely be easier for everyone if you bring up the subject and discuss your feelings openly. I think that this is particularly important on the days that are unique to you and your baby such as their birthday and the anniversary of their death. Over and over, I have heard people say that they were thinking of us on these special days but they were afraid to call or to bring up the subject.

*Reprinted from **When The Bough Breaks II** A book compiled by San Diego Guild For Infant Survival. Stories, poems and letters from those affected by SIDS. Please send a check for \$12.95 to: Guild for Infant Survival 14297 Hacienda Lane Poway, CA 92064*

Lights of Love

*Written by TCF Member Jacqueline Brown
For National Children's Memorial Day*

Can you see our candles
Burning in the night?
Lights of love we send you
Rays of purest white

Children we remember
Though missing from our sight
In honor and remembrance
We light candles in the night

All across the big blue marble
Spinning out in space
Can you see the candles burning
From this human place?

Oh, angels gone before us
Who taught us perfect love
This night the world lights candles
That you may see them from above

Tonight the globe is lit by love
Of those who know great sorrow,
But as we remember our yesterdays
Let's light one candle for tomorrow

We will not forget,
And every year in deep December
On Earth we will light candles
As.....we remember



Candle On The Water

I'll be your candle on the water
My love for you will always burn
I know you're lost and drifting
But the clouds are lifting
Don't give up, you'll have somewhere to turn

I'll be your candle on the water
'Til every wave is warm and bright
My soul is there beside you
Let this candle guide you
Soon you'll see a golden stream of light

A cold and friendless tide has found you
Don't let the stormy darkness pull you down
I'll paint a ray of hope around you
Circling in the air
Lighted by a prayer

I'll be your candle on the water
This flame inside of me will grow
Keep holding on you'll make it
Here's my hand so take it

Look for me reaching out to show
As sure as rivers flow
I'll never let you go
I'll never let you go
I'll never let you go

*Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn
From Disney's Pete's Dragon*



When Grief During the Holidays is New

by Pat Schwiebert, R.N. pat@tearsoup.com Taken From www.griefwatch.com

As we officially enter the holiday season those who grieve enter into a quagmire of emotions.

Is it okay to experience joy when your loved one is dead?

Can you be grateful for the time you had with your loved one while being overwhelmed with missing that person?

Will you give yourself permission to join in the festivities of the season or not gather with family and friends depending on how you feel in the moment?

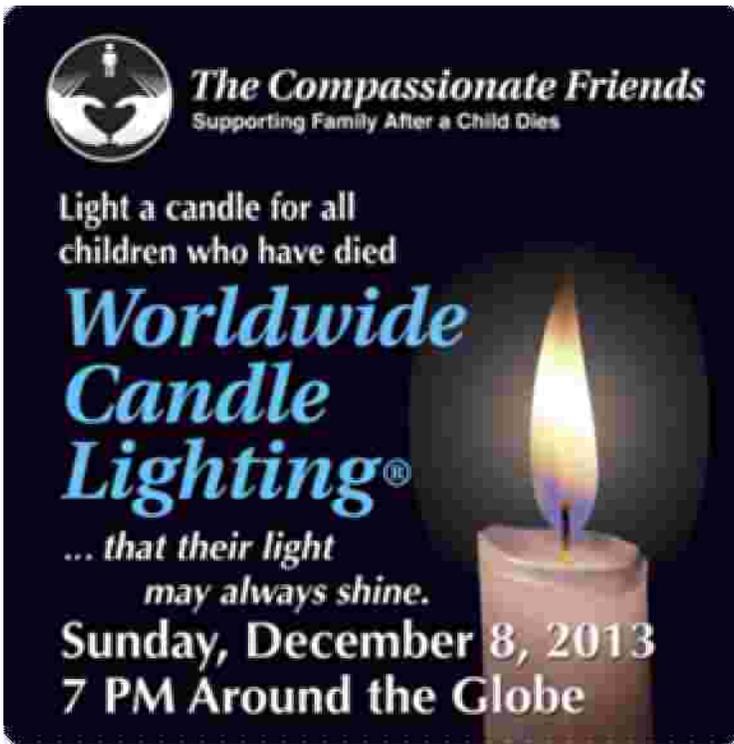
For those in their first season, you may be surprised at how challenging this time of year may be. Friends and family may or may not be aware of what this may be like for you. Because holidays are more intense, and hold more expectations than other times in the year, they are a set up for those who grieve. Holidays tend to be family time. You would think it should mean that family will be around supporting each other and remembering holidays past and those no longer present. Some will do it well. Others will deny there's someone missing, while the atmosphere will be like there is an elephant in the room, but everybody's pretending that nothing special is going on.

People will mean well. But their tendency may be to want to fix you. They want the old you back. They want you to be happy in order to reduce their discomfort. But there is no fixing a broken heart. Your heart will never again be without blemish. The scar from your sorrow will remain, and the healing that you will go through will make you a different person. That's not a bad thing. But it's helpful to know that part of you will be changing.

To simplify the holidays it may be helpful to assess just what is important to you. Here are a few questions to ask yourself about the holidays:

1. What kind of celebration do I want to have this year?
2. Do I really have to put up all those decorations?
3. Can meals be more simply prepared and be just as filling with a few less calories?
4. Who is it important for me to see and visit with during the holidays?
5. Who makes the rules about who I must give presents to and how much I must spend?
6. Must I attend every event that I am invited to during the holiday season?
7. Can I give myself permission to create some new traditions?
8. Can I believe that people are coming to visit me and that they are not there to check on my housecleaning abilities or lack thereof?
9. Can I be kind to myself and plan some quiet times during the holidays to provide myself with enough rest?
10. What does this time of year mean to me personally and how do I wish to celebrate it. For example will I attend or not attend church services etc.?
11. What traditions do I want to hold onto and which are important to others in my family?
12. Am I willing to let others know what will help me feel safe at gatherings and to ask what their needs may be?
13. What rituals could I create around the holidays to help me remember my loved one?

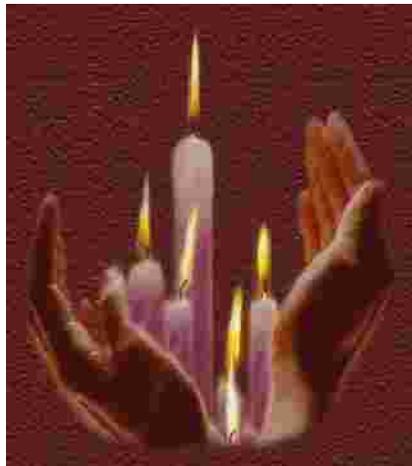
There is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays. Set out with the intention to do the best you can, given the circumstances. Whether you stick to old family traditions or change the pattern, it's all OK. You will not be able to please everyone. Next year you may have more energy and more interest in participating in holiday routines than you do now. This year you may have to figure out how to get through the season and not set yourself up for what you're not ready for. Try to recognize that the holiday is just another day of the year filled with all sorts of activities, not just dreaded memories.



The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, Sunday December 8, 2013, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.

Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten

THE WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING IS NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH OUR TCF KAMLOOPS ANNUAL MEMORIAL CANDLELIGHTING SERVICE WHICH ALSO OCCURS ON DECEMBER 8 BUT TAKES PLACE AT 2:00 PM. A SEPARATE SHEET OF DETAILED INFORMATION IS ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER AND IS ALSO REFERRED TO ON PAGE 2 UNDER FYI.....



Terminal-ology

Terminal-ology, yes I know it's not a real word but it sums up for me the meaning of all the terminology of death; Terminal. Whether we say, passed on, passed over, transitioned, we know it was terminal.

A while back I was at an end of life series where the subject of grief terminology came up and I was reminded once again that I have very strong feelings on the subject.

I know that in this phase of human development it is very correct in some professional circles to urge us to use the dreaded Dead word right away in case we get stuck in our recovery by the use of gentler terminology. We are intelligent people, we know that whatever words we use to describe it our loved ones died and they aren't coming back; at least not in a physical or corporeal way.

However in the initial stages of our grief some Spirit of kindness or Grace shelters us for awhile by allowing the use of gentler terminology. We sometimes need to ease into the harsher reality. To some at that stage, telling us that we *have* to say our loved one is Dead is like pouring acid into an open wound.

Very early on in my journey I attended a grief recovery group. We were told at the outset that we needed to say the word Dead in relation to our loved ones. In those early days of mind numbing grief it seemed so harsh and cruel to be told that I needed to do that if I would have hope of recovery. I remember going home and journaling about it. I wrote a letter to my son, Kenneth, I got out a little dog eared paperback dictionary and found some interesting definitions of death that I haven't found to this day in my big Webster's. What I found in that dictionary was that Dead meant a place of darkness, desolation, no recovery, no light, no hope. I told my son that when I thought of him I thought of light, laughter, kindness and joy. I told him that the definitions of being dead I had read did not describe him, but definitely described me and how I was feeling.

I don't remember at first using any words, Dead or otherwise in those early days. I probably choked out the word drowned if I had to say something to describe what happened to him. In the fullness of time I started saying that he had died but I did it in my own time. No matter what terminology any of us use, we all know the truth; we may just not choose to use certain words in conversation with others in order to protect our feelings and privacy.

As for me, I can say my son died, there, I just said it aloud and wrote it down, but I will not say he is Dead. To me he lives on in every sunny day, in every sparkling lake, in every happy memory; in every Easter Sunrise, in every Christmas morning, in the loving aspects of every brother, sister or nephew, in every kindness done in the name of love.

*In Loving memory of Kenneth Simmonds
Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops, B.C.*

***“Never apologize for feeling.
When you do so, you apologize for the truth.”***

~ Benjamin Disraeli

Happy Holidays

A Santa parade – a troupe of Christmas angel twirlers – a little brother’s question – “Do you think Amy’s there? She’s an angel! Isn’t she? Maybe she came down for Christmas....”

Four – count them – one, two, three, - a walk in the woods to search for the perfect tree – one’s missing – bur a yesterday – there’s the fourth; running, excited, covered in mud and snow – a runny nose – frosted cheeks – a Christmas twinkle in the eye – four of them – see – one, two, three.....

We wrap ourselves for the holidays much like the presents we give. The brightly colored paper hides what’s within. When people look at us they only see the outside.

We promise ourselves we will not come unwrapped. We’ll make it through the family celebrations, the church services, and the big occasions. The paper and the ribbon will remain intact.

But it’s the small thing that manages to untie the bow. The little insignificant moment; the Christmas parade, the search for the tree, the discovered ornament, the special carol, the memory, and the paper gets wrenched off. The true Christmas presence shows itself.

The inevitable tide of feelings bursts out of the artificially decorated façade. The emotions pour out. The anger wells up. The tears are shed and the holidays come. These are as sure as the tide of the sea and the march of time.

Only a Compassionate Friend, a bereaved parent, knows of what I speak. Yet the answer is not in fighting or denying these feelings. We have paid the price. We have the right to grieve. The resolution to our grief is in grieving.

Our hope for all who read this letter is that you will make it though the holidays. We cannot make the pain go away. But know there are others who suffer with you. We have made it through, and together will continue on.

~ Hank Hewett / TCF Scranton, PA

S N O W



*Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design.
There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake
and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings.
These patterns change again and again – even after the flake touches the ground.
Each snowflake is a cause for wonder; each flake is one of a kind.
No two are exactly alike. Like the snowflake,
our beautiful children were each unique and special;
some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth.
They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world.
We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever.
We shall remember them always. At this time of remembering,
it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched
by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children.
Our children leave treasures behind
that time can never take away*

Denise Falzon – TCF, Lake Area MI in loving memory of her son, Brian Falzon

Today I wove a wreath of bone and fir
And filbert withes: twined in sacred holly,
Incense cedar from an ancient tree.
Iwove, affixed a star, and spoke a spell:
‘Let this circle stand as a gate of winter
Sure passage to the days of lengthening light.”
And then I whispered names in the fragrant bough
Lacing love like a scarlet ribbon through the fronds.
Long I wove and dreamed back friends and kin,
Each great soul calling forth the sun.
Ithought at last, “My life here is not done,”
And some bright star rekindled from within.
-excerpt from: The Solstice Wreath by Sandra Jensen



*One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences.
Often secrets are not revealed in words, they lie concealed in the silence between the words
or in the depth of what is unsayable between two people.*

~John O'Donohue, Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom

THE SMALLEST MIRACLE

One Thursday in December (2000), Jonah, my then three year old grandson, and I were hanging out in what was then the Thompson Park Mall in Kamloops. We were refugees from the toxic fumes of a bath tub being re coated. What a time of year to do it! It was freezing cold outside and stinky and cold inside due to having windows open etc. Jonah has bad allergies and grandma wasn't doing so well either!

So off to the mall we went, pushing Jonah in his stroller, braving the shoppers and crowded aisles at Sears. After we got tired of Sears we decided to go to the lower floor to have a turn on a kiddie ride. As usual Jonah stretched as high as he could to reach the button of the elevator, a very important part of our mall ritual. When we arrived downstairs we cruised along the passageway with Jonah saying "Merry Christmas" to selected individuals, receiving delighted Merry Christmases! in response.

When we reached the rides I carefully searched my pocket for change knowing I had come away in a hurry with virtually no money in pocket or purse. Sure enough, I had enough money for a couple of rides with maybe a tiny bit over. We had our two rides and great fun, but even more, the location of the rides gave a vantage point from which we could see much activity in an empty store location across the way. Some adults in that place were wearing what I call Adeely boppers, little head sets with antennas on which were perched lit up Santa's or snow men. These items claimed little Jonah's full attention! A Grandma, where did they get those from?! Could we get one?! We immediately crossed the hall and approached a tall man wearing lit up snow men; could he tell us where to get them? He wasn't sure, maybe try the dollar store.

I told Jonah that we had one more thing to do downstairs and then we'd go back up and try the dollar store. Meanwhile I'm doing some mental calculation, my next and last stop downstairs would require at least a \$2.00 coin, a Toonie, would there be enough left over for this great prize even if the Dollar Store did indeed have them? I already knew that the dollar store didn't take plastic!

We proceeded down the mall to that last stop downstairs, it was to the Hospice Christmas Tree, a destination of mine for the twelfth Christmas since 1988 when our dear son Kenneth was taken from us, tragically drowned at age 23. Jonah stretched up again and dropped our last Toonie into the donation box; a few coins remained in my pocket. I wrote Kenneth's name in the Memory book. Jonah helped me exchange a white Christmas tree bulb for a red one and hang a tag with Kenneth's name on the tree.

Having done that we went down the hall to the elevator, Jonah, happily anticipating his trip to the Dollar Store, was dispensing Christmas greetings on the way, while I was partly with him and partly thinking of another Christmas of missing Kenneth and trying to keep the spirit in spite of what is sometimes overwhelming sadness. Eventually we arrived at the elevator and ascended to the main floor. Once again strolling along to our destination. We passed Santa this time, Jonah only wanted to say hello, no pictures thank you, even though I knew Santa took plastic! Santa said, "you don't have to sit for a picture, Santa will talk to you anytime, come again and chat!"

As I was going along thinking about how I would obtain some cash should we find the hoped for Adeely boppers, we ran into a friend and stopped to say hello. While we were exchanging greetings a young lady approached us. In her extended hand was a shiny Toonie. She spoke softly, "My grandfather would like to give this to the little boy." I looked up and nearby stood a very old gentleman, leaning heavily on a shopping cart. He looked very ill and frail. We went over to him to say thank you, he had trouble breathing and speaking. He looked at me the longest and most compelling of looks. It seemed almost as though he saw inside me, or was telling me something without words. It was an uncanny moment. Jonah said his thank you's very quietly and seemed to sense that something out of the ordinary was happening.

We took our leave from the kindly old man and went on our way. I was so preoccupied with the encounter that we went past the Dollar Store and had to go back. We made our way into the store with our shiny Toonie clutched tightly in Jonah's little hand and we looked all around for our special treat. We focused on the wall display of Christmas novelties and almost missed them. There they were, just a few were left! We had reached our goal at last! There were Santa's and Snow men!

They were \$1.95. Jonah had the Toonie from his unexpected benefactor and Grandma had just enough loose change to pay the tax and buy the batteries! What to choose, what to choose. "Snow Men? No, the Santas!" Jonah paid and we were on our way once again.

Outside the store we sat on a bench while Grandma fumbled with the headset trying to install the batteries. The nice man from the dollar store came out and helped. Hooray, mission accomplished! The light up Santa's were in place on Jonah's tawny curls, bobbing and shining for all to see, and they did see! Smiles and comments galore all down the Mall as we headed to meet Poppa. who was coming to drive us home. Jonah even had to stop and impress Santa himself. What a triumphal procession we had, Jonah, eyes sparkling, head nodding, royally receiving his due as a cherubic dispenser of cheer and good will.

Poppa was duly impressed as he loaded us into the car and Jonah showed off his shining head gear as we related the story of the wonderful gift of the Toonie. Just as we settled in our seats for the drive to Jonah's house the car radio caught my attention and I turned up the volume. The group Alabama was singing a song, "I believe there are Angels among us". The story of the song was of a little boy going home from school when he became lost in the woods and was very afraid, an old man suddenly appeared, like an answer to a prayer and guided him home. When the boy realized his mother couldn't see the old man he knew he'd been rescued by an angel. And the song went on, "I believe there are Angels among us sent from up above to guide us in our darkest hours @ and "they wear so many faces; show up in the strangest places."

It was then that the impact of the whole adventure washed through me and my tears could not be stopped. That miraculous Toonie was just the wrapping for the real gifts from our angel in disguise; to a small boy he gave joy, to me he gave peace and hope.

I believe there are Angels among us, some sent to tell us that life is still good and that there are still Christmas miracles if we can just open our eyes and hearts to see. Miracles can even happen in the mall. Angels don't discriminate between malls and churches. Where there is a need to redeem the true Gift of Christmas every place is Holy ground.

Arleen Simmonds, TCF Kamloops, B.C.

**“T he golden moments in the stream of life rush past us,
and we see nothing but sand;
the angels come to visit us,
and we only know them when they are gone.”**

~George Elliot

A Constant Reminder

Apparently, I am a “constant reminder”, and not in a good way...

After our oldest son died May 26, 1986, we returned to Jim’s home town to visit with his widow and our two grandchildren. A family wedding was happening during the time we were there. Everyone was invited, including Karie.

At one point, my husband was in deep conversation with Karie. Suddenly, she jumped from her chair and ran to the Ladies Room. It looked like she was crying. I raced after her and asked what my husband had said to upset her. Karie replied that it was nothing that he had said, simply that we are a “constant reminder”... a constant reminder of the death of her husband; of her position now as a widow and as a single mother raising a 4 year old son and a 3 month old daughter...we were Jim’s parents and every time Karie saw us, it brought back all the old sudden grief and pain of her loss.

Fourteen years later, on May 25, 2000, our surviving son Jeff took his life. He and Jim were only 13 months apart, and Jim was the typical older brother who advised and generally took care of Jeff in many ways. Jeff left behind his two children, a 14 year old son and a 13 year old daughter...a terrible loss for them, especially as teens...they were only away from school for a week; then had to return to a school full of curious students, although some were caring and protective. (Suicide is still an awkward situation to deal with, to say the very least...and I’m sure that many students regarded my precious grandchildren as “odd”, to have a father who would “commit suicide”!) To my knowledge, no counseling was given to them. We lived in another province at the time, and since they were returned to their mother (our son had primary custody), there was little conversation between us and her, except when I called to see how my grandchildren were doing.

Fortunately, my relationship with Jeff’s children has been good. Recently, I had lunch with my (now) 26 year old granddaughter. We always celebrate our birthdays together, since our birthdays are only 9 days apart in September. We had a fantastic lunch at our usual restaurant and caught up on all our news, including Samantha’s new (and wonderful) boyfriend. Then, I asked Sam if she would like to go to the cemetery with me, to take flowers to her dad and her Uncle Jim. Samantha replied that she didn’t go there often, and usually when she did, she was angry at her dad and spent most of the time crying...but in my “extreme insensitivity” that day, I let her reluctantly say that she would go with me. By the time I arrived after her, I could see that she was upset and had been crying. I told her that she didn’t need to stay, that she should go home...but she said, no, she was already there. Needless to say, what I had hoped would be a shared healing experience, certainly was not for Samantha. She left shortly, anxious to get away from the gravesites and me – the “constant reminder”!

I have vowed that I would never again ask any of my grandchildren to visit either of my sons’ gravesites!

I have learned a valuable lesson: that just because it brings peace to me to visit my sons’ graves and “talk” to them, it may not bring peace to my precious grandchildren...that I am, like it or not, a “constant reminder”...

Written with love,
Joan Conley,
Jim and Jeff’s mom
Kamloops TCF
October 2013

To Bereaved Grandparents Margaret Gerner TCF/St. Louis, MO

I am powerlessness . I am helplessness, I am frustration.

I sit here with her and cry with her. She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine. I can't help her .I can't reach inside and take her broken heart. I must watch her suffer day after day and see her desolate.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back. I can't bring Emily back for her. I can't even buy her an even better Emily than she had, like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child.

I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away. I can't even kiss a small part of it away. There's no Band-Aid large enough to cover her bleeding heart. There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him. Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun-loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony. Where is my power now? Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better? Why can't I join in the aloneness of her grief? As tight as my arms wrap around her, I can't reach that aloneness.

Where are the magic words that will give her comfort? What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this? He has told me everything else I've needed to know. Where are the answers? I should have them. I'm her mother.

What can I give her to make her better? A cold wet wash cloth will ease that swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears. What treat will bring joy back to her? What prize will bring that "happy child" smile back again?

I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again. I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? This hour? This day? I can give her my love and prayers and my care and my concern. I could give her my life. But even that won't help.

Grandchild

Her toddler feet
are seldom seen to walk. They trip
a tiny barefoot light fantastic
up and down my narrow halls
and dance a merry saraband
around my rooms, her kisses thrown
as pat pat patting
she darts by.

She teeters; brrrump
she drops upon a diapered derriere,
then, small feet splayed,
she's up again to tap
her little victories, not knowing
how precariously she balances
my fragile and adoring heart.

Joy Balyeat Nash, TCF/ Atlanta GA

A Sibling Dies

It is January first. My heart twinkles once again because the holidays are over. How can a season of light bring so much dark? Thirty years ago, on Christmas morning, my brother died in our home by suicide in a very violent manner. He was 23; my other brother was 24; and I was 19 years old. Our family five was irretrievably shattered.

Don, my brother who died was so much a part of us. He brought so much joy in his living and then so much pain in his dying. Who am I to grieve him still? The memories well up every December like a deep dark night unbidden. Anger, sadness, rejection, guilt become my Christmas ornaments. "Give me back my family – give me back my Christmas, you creep, give me back your laughter," I want to shout at him. Who am I to miss him? Who am I to rage when he was the one in the grips of a pain so untenable that he could not speak of it, but only act upon it. Who am I to cry?

Well, I'm entitled, I'm a survivor after all. One doesn't get there on a waterslide, if you know what I mean. When Christmas rolls around, I do my dance with grief once again. Some years later, it's a waltz; other years a tango. It doesn't seem to matter if it's two, twenty or thirty years since my brother died, I get out my dancing shoes. I don't go looking for pain some wacky masochist. It finds me.

Some years I announce – around November 25th, "I'm over this." I act accordingly. I shop for Christmas Cards and don't go near my dancing shoes. It doesn't matter. They find me. It's not like I don't have therapy. I've had dance therapy, regular therapy, travel therapy, friendship therapy, biofeedback/hypnosis therapy, creampuff therapy, swimming therapy, forgiveness therapy, spiritual community therapy, law school therapy . . . Law School therapy? The fun had to end somewhere.

Seriously, losing a sibling is heart wrenching and no laughing matter. It took me ten or fifteen years to truly laugh again, let alone make light of myself. That just happened this year. No doubt, because I am writing of it, rather than speaking of it, which I rarely do. It feels safer to write. Other than to therapist, I've spoken of his death to three people in thirty years. Who could understand, I felt, and why diminish his being or expose myself?

I adored my brother Don – he made me laugh like a monkey. I adore both my brothers; as a child they were my world. Not very healthy perhaps, but it worked for me. Home was chaotic and quite frightening because my father was more than a little nuts. My mother's energy was spent containing his insanity and keeping our bodies and souls together. She was part steel, part angora.

We never spoke of Dan after his death. The community ostracized us: my father took a trip down devil's lane, and my mother mourned my brother until the day she died. I'm sad to say that we never had Don's picture in our home again, because the pain was too severe. It seems we could not get past it. We went to our separate corners and quietly mourned. It was different years ago; so much remained hidden. Self – healing groups were non-existent, shrinks were stigmas, and the Catholic Church unforgiving. I couldn't save him. I was the last person he talked with on Christmas Eve. For months I barely spoke and relived the shock daily. I ate a lot. Death by mashed potatoes. That was sure to bring him back. I retreated into a private world for several years where if I wasn't dead, I'd sure like to be. This is grief. And it does soften over time. It softens like water softens rock, in its flowing, gentle, rushing, mysterious way. It softens like a sweet whisper of a memory that lulls you to sleep, knowing that love knits the bones of despair together, tighter, stronger, more curious, more delicious than ever before. Knowing that the fires of your being burn the dross of despair. Knowing that the chamber of the heart is strong beyond measure and can take it and transform the pain into joy.

Joy is for having known this person, for a day or ten years or two months. Joy is for having the courage to be. For knowing yourself in many garments. For taking a risk to love anyone again: a neighbour, a friend, a cat, a lover, a stranger, yourself. The broken heart opens and mends itself. In the middle of the night, when no one is there but many are listening. Joy seeps into me. After all, I'm entitled, I'm a survivor.

L. Nicole Dean

TCF Marin County & San Francisco Chapters – Special Newsletter on Suicide

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