



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

Christmas/Winter 2015

"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 St. Kamloops

NEXT MEETINGS

December 2, 2015
January 6, 2016
February 3, 2106
March 2, 2016
April 6, 2016

TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

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www.TCFCanada.net
Toll Free: 1-866-823-0141

Welcome

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

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

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

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

"My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

- Robert Frost



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FYI

******* Our Kamloops TCF Annual Memorial Candlelighting Service will be held on December 6, 2015 @ 2:00 pm @ Kamloops United Church 421 St. Paul Street. Please find a separate Invitation included with this newsletter. *******

**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

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

Center For Loss In Multiple Birth (CLIMB) Inc. www.climb-support.org

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support www.nationalshare.org

This newsletter is also available in an electronic version. If you are able to change to the electronic version please email us at waskamloops@shaw.ca

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. #0792895-09 Receipts Will Be Issued For Income Tax copyright 2015*

Editors Musings

Arleen Simmonds



Words & Music

I was listening to CBC radio the other day as we were driving in the car. The program in part was how children often hear songs on a different level than adults. When you really listen to some songs like Puff The Magic Dragon or I'll Be Your Candle On The Water or You And Me Against The World there is a deep poignancy and sadness there. Even Rock A Bye Baby, imagine being put in a cradle in a tree top and having the bough break!

Anyway it led me down a trail of thought about songs that give me permission to have a good cry for people and events that matter greatly to me. Beautiful Isle Of Somewhere and It's A Lovely Day Tomorrow, remind me of my mother who had much sadness in her life and thought happiness was somewhere out there (oh, there's another one!) We'll Meet Again for a brother I didn't meet often enough this side of eternity. The White Cliffs Of Dover, the theme music of a childhood spent in wartime England and a daddy who never came back. For our Kenneth I keep hearing Drive by The Cars it reminds me of him catching rides with his sister before he had his car; and as well, The Walk of Life, we had a dance to that at the last Christmas party we attended.

There are many more songs that can trigger my emotions, many of them new since Kenneth left us but they take me to that place where I need to go sometimes.

I love poetry. Poetry says so much with such an economy of words and evokes so many feelings. Once again on CBC radio I heard a father and son, (Anthony & Ben Holden) co authors, discussing their book, Poems That Make Grown Men Cry. They interviewed one hundred men about poetry and the poems that impacted them deeply and why. It was so interesting to hear about these stories that of course I had to buy the book. They spoke with people like Hugh Bonneville, Jeremy Irons, Ken Follett and others. There are poems there that made a grown woman cry. Poetry has such a way of getting right to the heart of beauty and emotion, it also takes me to places I sometimes need to go.

Nothing against technology or busyness but a quiet space in a day to make room for beautiful sounds and word pictures definitely soothes the soul. *A personal favourite of mine:*

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound



The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"



Lamps For The Journey...

We are, each of us, Angels with only one wing and we can only fly by embracing each other.

~ Luciano de Cresscenzo

While grief is fresh, every attempt to divert it only irritates. ~ Samuel Johnson

Christmas is a tonic for our souls. It moves us to think of others rather than of ourselves. It directs our thoughts to giving. ~B. C. Forbes

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

One sad thing about this world is that the acts that take the most out of you are usually the ones that people will never know about. ~ Anne Taylor

“My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?” ~ Bob Hope

The Road goes ever on and on, Down from the door where it began, Now far ahead the Road has gone, And I must follow, if I can, Pursuing it with eager feet, Until it joins some larger way Where many paths and errands meet. And whither then? I cannot say. ~ J.R.R. Tolkien

Everything is bearable when there is love. My wish is that you try to give more people more love. The only thing that lives forever is love. ~ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

“Santa Claus has nothing to do with it,” the latke said. “Christmas and Hanukah are completely different things.” “But different things can often blend together,” said the pine tree. “Let me tell you a funny story about pagan rituals.” ~ Lemony Snicket, *The Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming: A Christmas Story*

Every good thing you do, every good thing you say, every good thought you think, vibrates on and on and never ceases. The evil remains only until it is overcome by the good, but the good remains forever.

~ Peace Pilgrim

Sometimes even to live is an act of courage. ~ Seneca

“This Christmas may you courageously venture - toward each new and unfolding horizon.” ~ Eleesha, *The Soulful Pathway To Christmas: Soulfully Inspiring You in the Days Leading Up to Christmas and Beyond!*

We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world.

~ Marcel Proust

Past the seeker as he prayed, came the beggar and the beaten. And seeing them, the holy one went into a deep prayer and cried, “How is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them?” And out of the long silence the answer came, “I did do something, I sent you.” ~ Sufi Teaching

“If you want to feel the truest spirit of Christmas, go out and find someone sadder than you, lonelier than you, poorer than you ... and give what you can in a smile, in time, in compassion. The best Christmases always require the gift of self.” ~ Toni Sorenson

The winds of Grace are always blowing, but it is you that must raise your sails. ~ Rabindrinath Tagore

What is Homicide Grief?

Not all grief is the same. Every person will manage and display their grief differently, and certainly different types of loss can result in varying emotions for the bereaved.

However, when someone is murdered, the family left behind embarks on an unwanted emotional rollercoaster, experiencing wave after wave of anger, guilt, blame, rage, depression and denial. Unlike other losses, this sudden and traumatic loss plunges the family head first into the middle of these emotions, which only adds to the intensity of their grief.

The intensity of this loss can remain with homicide survivor families forever after the actual incident, and over time, can result in further pressures. Often, family members struggle to communicate with each other, individuals struggle to retain concentration at work, children's schooling suffers, families can even disintegrate in divorces and estrangement, and people can begin to feel despondent about life in general.

Society offers many misconceptions about grief. Many people believe it is a lineal experience where the bereaved person goes through various 'stages' of their grief, eventually reaching some kind of 'acceptance'.

Our experience, as survivors of homicide victims is that while various emotions continue to crop up, they rarely come and go in stages, and can actually co-exist.

When a homicide occurs, the family's grief is often worsened by a seemingly drawn-out legal process, of bail hearings, preliminary trials, adjournments, mental health assessment, more adjournments and perhaps finally the trial. Then comes the preparation and delivery of an impact statement, and hopefully the sentencing. For families bereaved by homicide, the constant involvement in the investigation and the legal process creates a situation where survivors of homicide victims re-live the horror of what has happened to their loved one.

When the investigation is over and it then becomes a matter for the "Crown" survivors may feel dissatisfied with the level of involvement they have in the judicial process. For loved ones of the victim, the law appears 'black and white' in other words, murder is murder! They soon realize however the law has many shades of grey. Families can often feel lost or swept up in the legal system, liaising between various agencies, and government departments in the midst of trying to function in everyday life.

So, how does someone move forward from here? Terms such as 'get over it' and 'move on' must be removed from your vocabulary! No one should ever be expected to 'get over' the loss of a loved one to murder. However, to allow ourselves to be consumed by grief, so much so that our entire life dissolves because of it; is no solution either. We never "get over it" we do however slowly and with great support, understanding and encouragement work to evolve through it. Many counsellors, talk of "accommodated grief", that is the point in a bereaved person's life where they begin to reinvest in the world again.

While it is impossible not to think about the horrendous and cruel cowardly act of murder without anger and distress, gradually over time the bad days very slowly lessen, where we can focus more on the special memories and adventures we had together. While our lives will never return to what was normal, we strive to create a new type of normal, allowing us a rare insight into what is truly important and meaningful in life. There is no guide book that exists, we write our own guidelines as we evolve through it.

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

*“I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness,
the astonishing Light of your own being.” ~ Hafiz*

A Blessing For Grief

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you becomes fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence
Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.
Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning,
You are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.
More than you, it knows its way
And will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief
Until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.

John O'Donohue

A Christmas Card for Robbie

By Kathleen Paley Smith

It's the night before Christmas, we're all filled with joy,

Except when we think of you, little boy.

The stockings are hung by the chimney with care,

And in our hearts it's as if you were here.

My children are sleeping, in their bedrooms they lie,

But we're still filled with grief for our baby that died.

You see, this Christmas you would have been two,

But every Christmas I know we'll miss you.

As I wrap up the presents my thought are on you,

And what we'd have bought if you were here, too.

A car, a ball, a red fire truck?

Or maybe a rabbit's foot to bring you good luck.

The tree is all trimmed with bright colored balls,

And decorations hang on all of the walls.

It looks so pretty - - I wonder if you see

Your Christmas ball we've hung on the tree.

I made it for you before you were here,

Not knowing I'd hang it with eyes filled with tears.

Tomorrow is Christmas, I'll try not to be sad;

I'll count all my blessings and try to be glad,

You've not a part of our future - -

you were a part of our past

And someday I know we'll be together at last

Infants Remembered In Silence www.irisremembers.com



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 had grown up together, sharing many things, but this night was so special!

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 quietly 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, and he didn't want me to stop him. 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,
By their mom Joan Conley, TCF Kamloops



We would like to extend our deepest sympathy to Joan Conley and family on the recent passing of Wayne, her dear husband and father to their beloved sons Jim and Jeff. With her contributions to this newsletter over many years Joan has been a valuable resource and support to other bereaved parents. We send our love and support to Joan now and in the days to come

Taming The Holiday Blues By Nan Zastrow

What can I do to help me through holiday blues during my difficult time?

Trust that the holiday blues are normal and they will pass. There isn't any single recipe that works for everyone and probably none that will cure the blues completely. But here are some ideas for taming the holiday blues that I've used in the past years to help my family and me.

Taming the "blues" #1: Cancel your expectations; traditions change. The pressure to be "happy" and "merry" over the holidays sometimes creates deeper sadness and loneliness. There are so many expectations to live up to--everyone's expectations but our own! Accept that it is difficult for family and friends to understand what and how you are feeling during this time. In most cases, it's not intentional. They want us to be happy like they are, and they think they are doing us a favor by enticing us to join in the merriment. It may be necessary to "ask for understanding and support."

Recognize that all family relationships change over time and so do traditions. So update your current situation to modify the traditions that will work for you. Your family and friends will also modify their holiday traditions at some time--and not necessarily because of the death of a loved one. You will see that as children grow and go off to college or get married, as parents and spouses die, family celebrations for most families change also. While this death in your life is the immediate source of your emptiness and grief, soothe your pain by accepting that changes are inevitable for many reasons.

Taming the "blues" #2: Communicate, but stand your ground. You know you are feeling anxious about the pending holidays. You know what your fears are and what your potential problems will be. The rest of your family and friends don't know what you are thinking or feeling. If you clue them into your fears, they may try to understand the reason for your actions and decisions and it will be easier for them to accept. However, it's important to stand your ground. Sometimes, your family and friends will try to coerce you into doing something you aren't able to handle. If you feel very firmly that this wouldn't be good for you this year, simply say, "I'm sorry. Not this time (this year), but ask me again sometime."

Taming the "blues" #3: Be socially flexible and escape. Don't make plans for social events and dinners too far in advance. But keep the option open to participate. Sometimes it's easier to say, "I'm not going to go to the church recital or to Grandma's for Christmas dinner," because you believe that it would be better to just be alone, but this isn't always true. Feel free to tell people that you are taking one day at a time, one hour at a time, or one event at a time. Most family and friends will respect your need to reserve a last-minute decision. Also, build in an escape. Drive your own car so when you are ready to leave, you can leave. Notify your host prior to coming, that you aren't certain how long you will stay. Prepare an excuse if you feel you need one to allow you to leave with no questions asked.

If you feel you really want to hold a social event in your own home over the holidays but aren't sure if you can "handle it," set limits. Invite guests, but give them a beginning and ending time such as 7:00-9:00 p.m. Ask someone you know well to be the "lead exiter" when it's time for company to leave. This will give others the hint that it's time to go, and it also gives them permission to leave without offending you.

Pre-planning makes the event bearable because you can control whether you go and when you leave. There's no need to skip all of the holiday social events, but I can certainly attest to the fact that often emotions can get in the way. Remember, it's okay to be social; it's okay to laugh and have fun.

Taming the "blues" #4: Decorate your heart first. If your heart tells you that decorating would be nice and would soothe the painful thoughts of the holidays, by all means decorate to your heart's content. If decorations and the thought of them scare you, don't put out any more decorations than your emotions will tolerate. In other words, do only what makes you feel good.

If a nativity instills the real meaning of Christmas, put it up. If a tree with keepsake ornaments is painful, forget the tree this year. I tortured myself the first year, but I felt I was making a sacrifice for my family. My daughter and Chad had received a keepsake ornament every year that was theme based. Jalane wanted to put the "kids" tree up; Gary thought it might be good for me. I did it, in private, and cried through every keepsake ornament I hung. Once the tree was decorated--a few days later--it was a source of loving memories.

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I didn't hang stockings. I didn't send holiday cards. I didn't attend the usual church and social events. I didn't bake cookies. I struggled with buying simple gifts. I didn't watch the favorite holiday videos. I didn't put out my Santa collection, but I did add to my angel collection. These were some of my limitations and my sources of comfort.

Taming the "blues" #5: Seek support, not sympathy. Rethink your attitudes about the holiday season and be honest with yourself. Are you rebelling because you are feeling sorry for yourself? Or are you truly feeling helpless, blue and a need for quiet, private time to sort out your thoughts? Or do you need someone to talk to, give you a hug or spend some time with you?

Sympathy will come automatically. How could anyone who cares about you not sympathize with the loss you are feeling? I don't believe for a moment that a loving human being can deny the evidence of pain and deliberately withhold comfort. Disarm your feeling of helplessness and use the feeling of sympathy to gain control. Ask for support. This is something everyone can relate to and rally around. People want to help, so tell them what they can do to help you.

If your blues are part of multiple past losses, and you are feeling the magnitude of loss, recognize that when you grieve wholly, you will be able to experience good feelings when you reminisce. You may feel a twinge of sadness, but the deep pain will recede.

Coping with and enjoying the holidays doesn't mean that you don't miss the person who was a special part of your life. Nor does it mean that you don't miss times the way they used to be. It means that you will continue to live after this difficult change. And you will honor the memory of your loved one in new ways.

Surround yourself with people who understand that the holidays may increase your grief and you need their loving support that honors your feelings and helps you express your grief as needed.

Taming the "blues" #6: Forget words; find ritual. This is a lesson we learned repeatedly from Dr. Alan Wolfelt. Rituals can emphasize loving memories and give expression to feelings far beyond our vocabularies. As an individual or as a family, find a ritual that demonstrates your heartfelt feelings and do it! Memories are your keepsakes; treasure them. Take some time during the holidays to talk about good memories, share pictures, light a candle, place a wreath, contribute to a charity, or anything else that makes you think of your loved one.

Taming the "blues" #7: Seek treasures of the soul. Going forward into the New Year is often difficult, but it can also be a time for cleansing and rejuvenation. Spend some time thinking about the experience you have been going through. What does it mean in your present and future life? Think about purpose and assess yourself as an individual. How can you help others through difficult times? Think about the positive things in your life and how you can use them to help you cope. Find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new meaning for existence.

Taming the "blues" #8: When the giving hurts, keep on giving. We are nurtured to believe that when something hurts, it's time to pull back, quit or change what we are doing. Not a holiday has passed since Chad's death in 1993 that hasn't caused me to hurt in some way. So Gary and I decided if it hurts anyhow, we may as well "give" until it hurts a little more.

Each year, we host a "When the Holidays Hurt" workshop for the community, and in our hearts we feel the newness of the pain everyone in our workshop feels. We've walked in their shoes. But it's our way to give of ourselves and remind them that life goes on--and we need to catch up or it will pass us by. We also give to charities, but the most upsetting of these was a program we participated in that purchases gifts for unfortunate children and food to fill the family's refrigerator. Along with Santa, we delivered these gifts to the door and saw the beautiful smiles and laughter of children whom Santa wouldn't have visited any other way. We also felt the thankfulness of parents who were grateful for blessings. It was a beautiful "hurt" and it felt so good to give.

Giving of self to others is by far the best antidote for holiday blues. When you wipe away the tears, clear the frog in your throat and calm the racing of your heart, you know what love and true joy are all about. There is no louder message that speaks of infinite peace on earth, goodwill to men.

I know that Chad and my departed family will be looking down on us--missing the good times we had together--but giving us the grandest "atta boy" of them all.

Published in the Wings magazine, Vol. X, No.4, 2003. This piece was taken from Grief Digest Magazine, Oct. 2005. For a full copy of the article email: centeringcorp@aol.com.

Tommy's Tangerine Tree By Ruth Hilton Hatfield

When Tommy, our youngest son, was a little boy, he loved tangerines. At Christmas, when they came on the market, I always kept a plentiful supply especially for him. He ate them for breakfast and supper, and there were always lots of them in his lunch box. As well, he loved to snack on them while he read or watched television. One day I caught him flipping the seeds on the carpet. I scolded him, telling him to put them in an ashtray or a flowerpot. The result was that come spring, four little orange trees sprang up in a pot of geraniums in the kitchen window. I selected the tallest and sturdiest and replanted it in its own little pot. Tommy was intrigued. "Do you think I can have my own tangerines?" he asked. I told him that it might take a very long time.

Time passed. Tommy grew up and became a petroleum geologist on the east coast, searching for oil and gas off Newfoundland. He loved the Atlantic Ocean with a fervor which I attributed to the fact that he had seagoing ancestors on both sides of the family. He married and built a house in Nova Scotia in sight of the Atlantic. But he always came to visit us on his birthday, which was on New Year's Eve, and each time he would ask to see his tangerine tree.

In the twenty years that had passed since the little tree sprang up, it had grown amazingly. Each year I would put it into a bigger pot and place it in a warm, sunny spot in the garden, then bring it inside for the winter. But by the fall of 1981, I had no receptacle large enough to hold it, as it was now six feet tall.

Our daughter, who lived near us, offered to look after it as she had a very large urn, which she placed in a sunny window. When Tom came that New Year's Eve, he wanted to see his tangerine tree in his sister's home. "Do you think it will ever bear fruit?" he asked. I told him not to hold his breath - that although it would bear both male and female flowers if it ever bloomed, it was a Japanese tree and probably our climate was too cold for the flowers to set. He decided that he would take it down to his home in Nova Scotia the following summer. The foliage was beautiful anyway, he thought.

At that time he was working as a geologist on the Ocean Ranger oil rig off the coast of Newfoundland, and he was very proud to be doing exploration on what was probably the largest and most modern oil rig in the world. It was like a huge man-made island - indeed, the crew called it "Fantasy Island." They had to go out to it by helicopter, the only time, Tom said, that he was actually nervous. "It's a long, long way down there, Mum!" I said, "I do

wish you didn't have to go out in this bitter winter weather." "I'm safer than you are, driving out of your driveway between ten-foot snowbanks," he assured me. "Besides, the rig's unsinkable!" "So was the Titanic!" I said. "You're mixing apples and oranges," he replied.

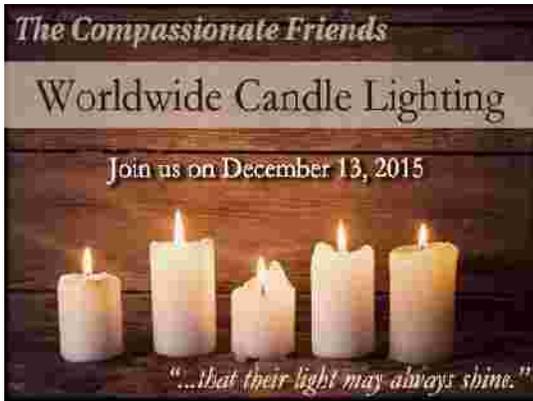
So when he telephoned us after he had returned to Nova Scotia and said he would be going out on the next shift change in a few days' time, I said, as I always did, "Be careful! Early on the morning of February 15, my husband turned on the radio and woke me. "Tommy's in trouble," he said. "The Ocean Ranger is listing!" We did not know it then, but it had already gone under the waves around one o'clock that morning.

There followed grief mixed with desperate fear, until we finally realized the unthinkable had occurred. Our dear, kindhearted, life-loving son had been taken from us. Amidst the wild despair and unbearable sorrow, we were borne by the belief that a spirit such as our beloved son's could not possibly disappear completely - that he was still with us and loving us. But I longed for some kind of assurance. And how I dreaded the coming of Easter that year! How could I join in the celebration of eternal life when I was not sure of it myself? Then, on Good Friday, I got an answer. When our daughter telephoned, she said excitedly, "Mum, you won't believe this, but Tom's tangerine tree is full of blossoms!" It was true. On Easter Sunday they opened fully, and their fragrance filled the house. Surely no flowers had ever been so beautiful! Someone had responded to my doubt and hopelessness with this little miracle. Since the tree was inside, with no honeybees to pollinate it, we did not expect the blossoms to set. But again a miracle happened! Four tiny tangerines appeared.

A short time later, two of them dropped off. Over the next few months, however, two more beautiful tangerines grew and eventually ripened. On the following Christmas Day we ceremoniously divided and ate Tom's tangerines. We felt that he knew it, and we were comforted. A horticulturist has said that perhaps people had spread the pollen when they smelled the fragrant blooms. But I believe "someone" sent those blossoms to comfort us when we most needed a miracle - the miracle of Tom's tangerine tree.

Now, five years later, another little tangerine tree, a child of Tommy's tree, is growing on my windowsill. We had planted the seeds of the tangerines we ate on Christmas Day, 1982. I shall not live to see it blossom, but I shall nurture it as a symbol of life everlasting.





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

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the 19th annual 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. TCF's WWCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance, but has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. 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.

Every year you are invited to post a message in the Remembrance Book which will be available, during the event, at TCF's national website.

www.compassionatefriends.org/News_Events/Special-Events/Worldwide_Candle_Lighting.aspx

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

Jacqueline Brown

Peace Valley TCF, New Britain PA

What a Son Will Tell His Mother About Grieving the Death of His Sister

My son's only sibling, Maggie, his younger sister, my daughter, died almost four years ago, suddenly. She was twenty-two; he was twenty-seven. Perhaps because he is a man who does not easily talk about his feelings, we usually share our grief in oblique ways, but those moments are nonetheless intimate and meaningful.

However, this past summer, when I was visiting my son and his girlfriend, Jacqui, for a week, we had a chance to talk about his grieving more directly. He was relaxed, on vacation from his teaching job, and we pattered around his new house, making a garden, and enjoying being together. We spoke often of Maggie and slowly, as we worked side by side, we made our way around to talk of how it is now, this grieving his sister. Here's what he told me:

"I've had a broad reach about all the things that were going to be affected by Maggie's death right from the beginning. I thought about the immediate losses and into the future; maybe that's just me and my personality, but I cast a wide net into the realm of all that Maggie's death was going to touch. And I knew it was never going to go away. I'm not sure that my grieving has really changed a lot; once the initial shock wore off the depth of the grieving has been pretty constant, which has surprised me.

The process of becoming an only child is a lot of things. Obviously, it's not always like that for everyone who loses a sibling, you might go from being four to being three, but for me, I'm the only child now. I always consulted with Maggie about stuff, family stuff and life stuff, and I miss that. No one else knew me like she did. The other part is thinking about my parents' getting older and being now the only potential caretaker and the prospect of doing that from a distance and alone is daunting. Having all the attention on me is weird and sometimes hard; it's not like everything got doubled when Maggie died, but just knowing that all family-oriented business and conversations are falling just to me is sometimes a lot. There's no divide and conquer going on when it comes to the kids and Mom and Dad.

Having someone who you were expecting to have through all the big life events not be there is really what gets me the most. Maggie won't get to come watch my soccer team play and she won't ever visit us here at the new house. She'll never know Jacqui. Jacqui is very receptive to Maggie still being a presence in our lives. It's really nice that she has dreams sometimes about Maggie and almost feels like she knows her. I do wish that they had known one another so that Maggie could be more of a person to Jacqui than just an idea.

Obviously Mom and Dad have been important in helping with processing the grieving, but a lot of my support has been in Mike, who has always been a surrogate brother but now he's really filling the role of the person who has known me the longest in a sibling kind of way. And I can really talk to him. I find I have very little patience for drama and fighting, especially among family members. I just think: Get over yourselves. Family has always been important to me but now those relationships are more important than ever and the little problems and differences are not worth getting worked up about. We just have to love each other."

It's hard living over five hundred miles from my son, but I make an effort to be with him often and for no specific reason other than that with this child, I can love him in person.

Meg Tipper, September 2012 Meg Tipper's book about the first year of grieving Maggie's death is entitled *Standing at the Edge: A Year of Days After Sudden Death*. Article from the Newsletter of BP/USA, A JOURNEY TOGETHER www.bereavedparentsusa.org. Lovingly Lifted From TCF Minneapolis Chapter

"Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief."

~ Shakespeare