



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

# KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

## *Christmas/Winter 2014*

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

~ Simon Stephens Founder TCF

### CHAPTER LEADER

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### NEWSLETTER

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### MEETINGS

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

### NEXT MEETINGS

**September 3, 2014**  
**October 1, 2014**  
**November 5, 2014**

### TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

Email [NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net](mailto:NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net)

[www.TCFCanada.net](http://www.TCFCanada.net)

Toll Free: 1-866-823-0141

## Welcome

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

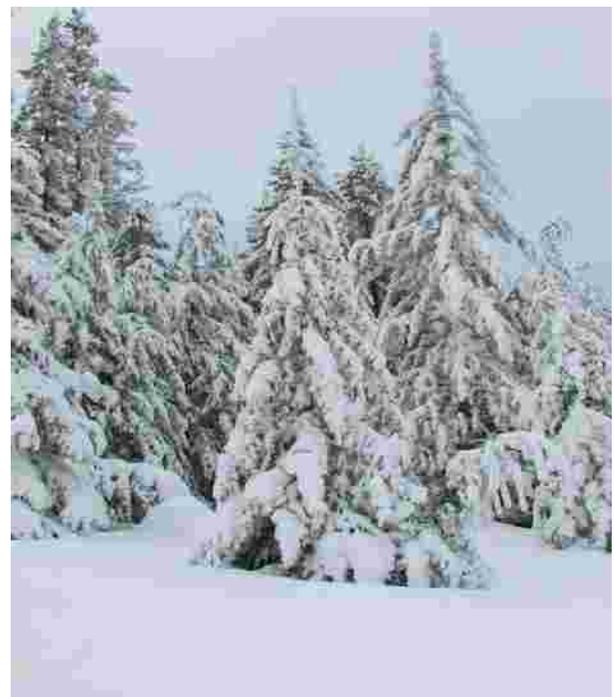
We are sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but we are glad you found us. We would like to do all we can to help you through these times. We cannot hurry you through it or take away the pain, but we can help you understand more about what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing what you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

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

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

**I love the snow, the crumpling snow  
That hangs on everything,  
It covers everything below  
Like white dove's brooding wing,  
A landscape to the aching sight,  
A vast expanse of dazzling light.**

~ John Clare from Winter's Spring



*Kent Simmonds Photo*

# *FYI . . . .*



*This coming December 2014 the TCF Annual Candlelighting Service will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in December. The date will be December 7, 2014 – 2:00 pm @ Kamloops United Church 421 St. Paul Street. Please join us for this service of hope in remembrance of our children. More details on a separate enclosure or attachment with this newsletter.*

**BC Bereavement Helpline** Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information.  
Contact: (604) 738-9950 Email: [bcbh@telus.net](mailto:bcbh@telus.net)  
Website: [www.bcbereavementhelpline.com](http://www.bcbereavementhelpline.com)

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

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

**Grief Works BC Service(s)**: Provides comprehensive support for the bereaved.  
Contact: Kay Johnson at (604) 875-2741 Email: [kjohnsoncw.bc.ca](mailto:kjohnsoncw.bc.ca)

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

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

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

**Center For Loss In Multiple Birth (CLIMB) Inc.** [www.climb-support.org](http://www.climb-support.org)

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

**This newsletter is also available in an electronic version. With the increase in postal rates we are asking if you would give consideration to receiving the newsletter via email. We will always make newsletters available by post for those without computers. Please email us at [waskamloops@shaw.ca](mailto:waskamloops@shaw.ca) if you are able to change to the electronic version. The electronic version has the advantage of being in colour and will often have bonus articles. Thank you to those who have made the change.**

**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 2014*



# *Lamps For The Journey...*

Christmas is a necessity. There has to be at least one day of the year to remind us that we're here for something else besides ourselves. ~Eric Severeid

I have learned not to worry about love; but to honor its coming with all my heart.  
~Alice Walker

Christmas is forever, not for just one day, for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf. The good you do for others is good you do yourself... ~Norman Wesley Brooks

Treasure the love you receive above all. It will survive long after your good health has vanished.  
~Og Mandino

I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that - as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. ~Charles Dickens

In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same. ~Albert Einstein

Christmas - that magic blanket that wraps itself about us, that something so intangible that it is like a fragrance. It may weave a spell of nostalgia. Christmas may be a day of feasting, or of prayer, but always it will be a day of remembrance - a day in which we think of everything we have ever loved.  
~Augusta E. Rundel

And ever has it been known that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.  
~ Khalil Gibran

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it. ~William James

As we give presents at Christmas, we need to recognize that sharing our time and ourselves is such an important part of giving. ~Gordon B. Hinckley

I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve. ~ Albert Schweitzer

"When we recall Christmas past, we usually find that the simplest things - not the great occasions - give off the greatest glow of happiness." ~ Bob Hope

The easiest thing to be in the world is you. The most difficult thing to be is what other people want you to be. Don't let them put you in that position. ~ Leo Buscaglia

## Seasons of Grief By Sandy Goodman

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.

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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.

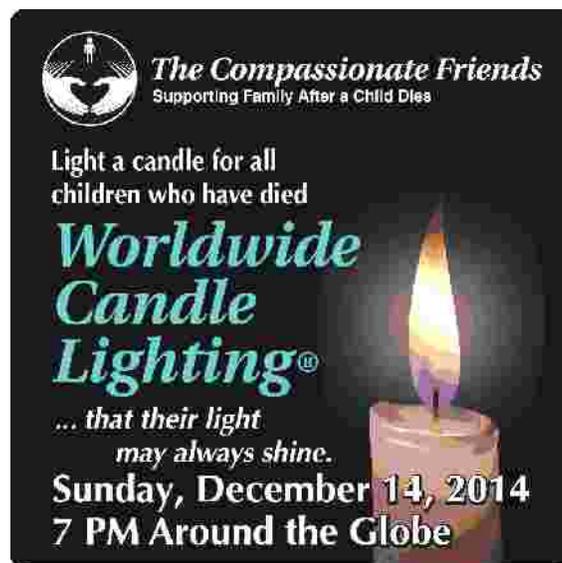
I began searching for and finding information to support my new perception. I read books about life after death, mediumship, after death communication, spirituality, and reincarnation. I perused websites, joined email lists, and joined chats where these topics were addressed. I found like-minded friends 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](mailto:sandy@trib.com) Reprinted from Grief Watch [www.griefwatch.com](http://www.griefwatch.com)*



**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.**

## **Christmas Eve Is Hard For Me** *Claire McCarthy, M.D.*

Pediatrician, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School From The Huffington Post via Grief Watch

Christmas Eve is hard for me.

It was in the early hours of Christmas Eve 16 years ago that my newborn son was diagnosed with a horrible brain malformation. My husband and I were wrapping presents late on the 23rd (so now I associate wrapping presents with this diagnosis and throw everything I can into gift bags) when he began to have seizures so bad that we called an ambulance. Over the night the news went from bad to worse, and by dawn we knew that he would be severely disabled and die young. He died less than a year later.

It was a very long time ago, but grief has a way of working its way into your bones and nerves. I mourn the loss of my son every Christmas Eve -- the loss of the healthy baby I thought I had until then, and the loss of the blessing Aidan turned out to be.

For those of us who have endured losses like these, there are always trap-door days (or trap-door smells or sounds or songs or pictures) when the ground gives out and we fall down deep. For the first few Christmas Eves after Aidan's death I cried a lot in private, and in public held my breath and put my head into the wind of the day, making it through by sheer will.

But bit by bit, year by year, I've learned that there are ways to keep from falling down deep, ways to be made strong against the wind of the day. Nice presents and pretty lights don't do it -- they are too ephemeral -- nor does music, no matter how lovely (a friend of mine who suffered from chronic depression once said wisely, "Some things take more than Mozart"). It takes things more fundamental and enduring.

This Christmas Eve at dawn I went for a run. I pushed up the hills and sprinted down them, the cold air rushing into my lungs. I felt physically strong and capable, and as the sun lit the trees and filled the sky everything felt clean and possible. It helped.

My eldest daughter brought her kitten home for the holidays, and all day we laughed at Beau as he played with ornaments on the tree or hid inside boxes ready to pounce or chased the laser pointer absolutely anywhere we pointed it (what it is with cats and laser pointers?). My 6-year-old, Liam, has a belly laugh that makes us laugh even more. It helped.

At church, two teenagers gave up their seats and stood so that an elderly couple could sit and it made me feel hopeful. A girl from the children's choir who couldn't have been more than 13 stood up in front of the crowd and led everyone in singing the responsorial psalm; I watched her steady herself, take a deep breath, and sing out brave and strong. It helped.

A friend of my daughter's, who spent so much of her childhood with us that we all came to think of her as family, came to visit us for the first time in many months. I had missed her so, and seeing her again, and seeing the wonderful woman she is becoming, and seeing how happy she was to see us -- it helped.

And there was Liam's sheer excitement as we laid out cookies and he wrote a note for Santa. He got out of bed three different times to remind us to go to bed so Santa would come -- and one other time to tell us he was sure he'd heard bells outside. It helped too.

I lost Aidan, and others dear to me. And as not just the mother of a child who died but a doctor, I know more keenly than most that we are all vulnerable, and loss is inevitable. We all have our trap doors of grief, we all have days or months or years when life's winds seem too much to fight. This is simply true; nothing can be done to change it.

But, I have come to see clearly, that doesn't mean that life can't still be good. Joy, beauty, excitement, laughter, bravery, kindness -- they all endure and shelter us against the wind. Most of all, the ties that bind us together make the difference: when we reach out our hand to take another, we do not fall so far.

# Sitting Up At Christmas

It's late on Christmas Eve,  
I sit alone, but not lonely.  
Images of Christmas past  
people my mind and fill the room.  
Voices, smiles, and laughter;  
trees decorated, turkeys cooked,  
candles lit, carols sung, and stockings filled.  
All the children home and safe.  
It's still the same in many ways but one.  
There is one child, one voice, one smile  
missing from our throng.  
One tree trimmer, cookie baker,  
laugh maker, he is gone.  
Missed, but never forgotten,  
he is felt in every smile, laughter,  
and memory of every Christmas we shared.  
When I sit alone with his candle lit  
I'm not lonely, because I can  
unwrap the gift of memory;  
the gift that keeps on giving  
through Christmas and all year long.

Thank you Kenneth for gifting us with your life and love.

*Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops, B.C.*

In loving memory of Kenneth Simmonds



## **Grieving the Loss of A Child to Suicide** Maria Bradshaw March 19, 2012

Today is the fourth anniversary of the suicide of my only child. Since Toran's death, I have been involved in 9 government enquiries into the circumstances that led him to end his life including an inquest that spanned 3 months.

During the inquest I learned techniques for numbing myself. I had to. How else do you survive listening to a pathologist describe what happened to your child's body and brain when he hanged himself? How do you not become homicidal when a psychiatric registrar smirks at you and says that two weeks after he prescribed your child Prozac, when told of the suicide, couldn't recall your child's face or name?

Despite this ability, the tributes posted to my son on facebook this morning and the text messages of love and support left me curled up and wailing like a wounded animal. As I write this, I am in so much pain I can barely breathe.

I want to write it though because one of the things I must steel myself against today are the well-meaning but ill informed comments I will receive from friends and supporters. I am speaking on suicide tonight at a meeting of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors too and while I know they will be kind I also know they will make all sorts of judgements based on the DSM and grief literature.

Suicide kills over one million people every year. That means that it is likely that anyone reading this blog will have had contact with someone bereaved by suicide in their personal lives and some will be involved in supporting suicide survivors professionally.

Here are some things I would like you to know about the impact your responses to grief may have on someone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

I wonder how many of you use the phrase committed suicide?

This is of course a relic of the quite recent past when suicide was a crime. For many families this term is really offensive and upsetting. Saying 'died by suicide' is much more sensitive and much more accurate.

On days like today, people often tell me how proud they are of me for doing so well. I'm not. I'm not doing well at all. When they say this, I experience it as minimising the pain I experience and rendering my pain invisible. Often the people who tell me this are those I have learned it is not safe to be honest with. The people I put on a brave face and pretend for. It's much better to ask me how I'm doing than to tell me what your take on it is.

Please, please don't talk to me about recovery. I will live with my child's suicide for the rest of my life. I will never be 'healed' or 'recovered.' My right arm has been cut off, my heart has been ripped from my chest. No one will ever call me Mum again. My son will never get married to his beautiful girlfriend or have a daughter as he planned.

Don't talk to me about closure or moving on. Where would I go without my child? How would I close off the part of my life that my son lived with me?

Don't tell me everything happens for a reason. My son's death was the most senseless event in the universe. Nothing good came out of it. It served no purpose. I am not a better person because of it nor is the world a better place because his death led me to do the work I do. What might I have accomplished with him alongside me? How might he have changed the world? His death is a tragedy, the senseless loss of a beautiful young life, please don't try to define it as anything else.

I read a piece of research on grief and suicide survivors recently which said "The majority of survivors spoke about needing and wanting to find meaningful ways of continuing to love the deceased youth" and "maintain healthy and continuous bonds with deceased individuals."

*continued from page 8*

This is my reality. You do not stop loving your child because they die. You don't stop wanting and needing to be their parent and have them in your life. You just have to find different ways of doing it. This is not an adjustment disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, complicated grief or major depressive disorder. Don't pathologise my grief or characterise my response to it as some kind of personal deficit.

Telling me to let go of my son and the relationship I have with him is like telling me to let go of myself and my life. I loved him before he was born and it would take more than death to sever our bonds. I long for his physical presence. What I have now is so much less than that but it is something and I can't imagine letting go of the little I have left.

I know you have read that we feel angry with the child who died and that we feel guilty for feeling this anger. You are being kind when you say you understand our anger and urge us not to feel guilt over it. The thing is though that I have never felt a moment's anger at Toran. How could I be angry with a child who ended his life to escape the torture of prescription drug induced akathisia? How could I be angry that he did the only thing he felt was possible at the time?

Don't avoid talking about my child for fear of making me cry. I'm crying not because you reminded me he's dead (like I could forget that for a minute!) but because he is dead. Giving me the opportunity to talk about him is such a gift and sharing your memories of him with me is the closest I get to Christmas. I want and need to talk about him and need you not to be afraid of my tears.

My experience of my child's suicide is not a universal experience although the issues I have raised strike a chord with most of the families I work with. Others will undoubtedly want and need different things from their friends and family and the professionals involved in supporting them and have a different 'don't list.'

My plea is not that you adopt this list of don'ts as definitive or representative and change your response to suicide survivors accordingly, but that you challenge your own beliefs around grief and suicide and allow your responses to be guided by those who have experienced this loss, rather than by the DSM or grief literature which doesn't include survivor views.

Ask us how we feel. Tell us you don't know what to say. Understand you can't fix us. And that we will resent your attempts to try.

**Maria Bradshaw** *DelusionNZ*: Maria Bradshaw, who currently lives in County Wicklow, Ireland, writes of social models of suicide prevention, pharmacovigilance, and alternatives to psychiatric interventions for emotional distress.

Hold on to what is good  
even if it is  
a handful of earth.  
Hold on to what you believe  
even if it is  
a tree which stands by itself.  
Hold on to what you must do  
even if it is  
a long way from here.  
Hold on to life even when  
it is easier letting go.  
Hold on to my hand even when  
I have gone away from you.

- nancy wood - 1974

# HOW THEN SHALL I LIVE?

How many times in our early grief have we asked the question? How then shall I live ? Will I live? Can I live? Do I want to live? A short time after our son Kenneth drowned a friend, more of an acquaintance really, stopped by to offer her condolences. I found out that she had lost two children. All I could say was, "how did you live?" Her response was, " from one moment to the next, day by day." I couldn't imagine at the time even getting to the next day. How then shall I live?

This same friend mentioned a group called The Compassionate Friends, a support group for bereaved parents. She said perhaps when the time was right we might want to look into that. Some months later we did connect with The Compassionate Friends. I remember one couple there whose son had died five years earlier and they were still broken with grief. I was shaken, thinking, five years, I don't think I can make it. Once again, how then shall I live?

Live we did though, moment to moment, day by day. We lived because our family lived for one another. We lived because our Compassionate Friends guided us down the well worn path they had already travelled. We lived because there are always new travellers who follow in our footsteps, who need our compassion. We lived because we can live to honour Kenneth and continue the goodness he would have lived. We lived to keep his memory alive to share with the young ones in our family who never got to meet him.

Linnea Good wrote a song, "How Then Shall I Live?" it says in part:

Took a walk outside of my walking

Stepped inside another's shoes

Walked the dusty borders between us

Path's I'd never chosen to choose

How then shall I live?

How then shall I live?

How then shall I live, O God?

How then shall I live?

It was way outside my walking to put on the shoes of a bereaved parent and walk the dusty road of grief. We wear each others shoes with love and compassion and that is how we shall live, moment by moment, day by day. Our children, forever in our hearts, a legacy of love to be lived and shared.

Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops, B.C.  
In loving memory of Kenneth Bruce Simmonds

Linnea Good  
©year Borealis Music  
from "Greatest of These" CD  
for download or sale on [www.LinneaGood.com](http://www.LinneaGood.com)  
and on our concert DVD Linnea Live@Epiphany

## December 12—Twenty Years After

Our son died twenty years ago today—tonight, actually—around midnight. His father Woldy and I have had nineteen times to practice living through his death anniversary. The worst day of our lives. I remember lying on Alex’s bed on the first anniversary, determined to stay awake to prevent the knock at the door at midnight. When that knock came, we had been asleep. If we’d stayed awake, could we have saved him? Of course not. He and his best friend, whose family Alex was staying with at Whistler, climbed a tennis bubble around 11pm when they were out walking the family dog. The seam Alex stood on when they reached the top was weak. It ripped and he fell to his death. Jonny managed to grab a cable on his way down and was only bruised. A freak accident. Two seventeen-year-old boys being adventurous—doing what they weren’t supposed to do. Twenty years later, I still find it hard to believe that it really happened.

This morning, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month, and, in this case, the 12<sup>th</sup> year of this century (2012), I spent writing Christmas cards, composing cheery notes about adjusting to our new life in the little town of Salmon Arm. Woldy was in his downstairs den, writing a sermon—a sermon for next Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent with the traditional theme of JOY. How to be joyful on the anniversary of our son’s death?

Woldy suddenly emerged from the basement with “I need to go for a walk. Do you want to come?”

“Just let me finish these last two cards and I’ll be with you.”

Walking along the bird path edging Shuswap Lake, it’s easy to get a rhythm, a good pace. Yesterday’s snowfall had been padded down by other feet, by duck feet even—so sweet to see bird footprints on the bird path! We paced along, heads down, raised only occasionally by bird calls from the bushes. We each knew that the other was thinking similar thoughts—thoughts about Alex, thoughts about surviving twenty years without him.

“I’m walking with bated breath,” I finally said, breaking our silence.

“What? Why?”

“I’m wondering when you’re going to ask me for lunch.”

“Do we have time?”

“Yes, we have an hour till it’s time to pick up Ainsley.”

Parents again in our seventies, raising a now eleven-year-old granddaughter, Woldy with a new career as church minister, we have little time to spend with each other.

I chose my favourite pub/restaurant, the only one in town situated right by the lake. I love looking out its windows at the serene lakescape, backdropped by mountains and pierced frequently by bird flight.

Woldy ordered the day’s soup and sandwich, declining my suggestion that we order calamari in Alex’s stead. It was one of the many dishes he loved. I ordered it for myself. We had fallen silent while waiting for our food, so I pulled out a little red notebook I carry in my purse.

“Let’s do one of my journal writing exercises. We’ll each list ten blessings that Alex gave us, and then compare them.” (It’s hard to really retire from being an English teacher!)

I tore out two pages for Woldy, dug out two pens from my purse, and we set to it. We’d each reached ten before our lunches arrived. Between bites, we took turns sharing our lists, and telling little anecdotes with them (“Remember the time....”). Alex’s capacity for joy was on the top of both our lists. And both lists included gifts from Alex after he left us—compassion, tolerance, hope.

Some of you reading this may be new to this long hard journey of grief and are not able to believe that joy will ever return to your lives. Have faith, I believe it will!



Cathy Sosnowsky  
TCF Salmon Arm

## Christmas at Midnight

Christmas Eve at Midnight, the family's fast asleep,  
There's still some hours before the dawn,  
But right now it's just me,  
I slip out the back door, unplug the Christmas lights  
Turn my face up to the heavens  
Hoping for a cloudless night,  
Now I'm not gonna pretend, I don't miss you every day,  
But there's something about this time of year  
That makes it worse some way  
So I come out at midnight, just looking for a star,  
Some kind of sign to tell me,  
You're doing okay where you are  
Christmas at midnight, wishing you were here  
Surrounded by memories,  
Of the times we used to share,  
I know you knew I loved you, 'cause I told you 'fore you went,  
But I'm missing all the good times, and all the things you meant  
Christmas at midnight  
I smile at pictures in my minds eye,  
Of every Christmas past,  
Of the music and the laughter,  
And the memories that last,  
it hurts that you're not here tonight,  
But I know that you're not gone,  
These memories are precious gifts,  
And lessons to pass on,  
Those kids asleep and dreaming, need memories when they're grown,  
Of the music and the magic and the laughter all their own,  
I know they won't remember, half of what I say,  
But I'll tell them all that I can before I must go away,  
Christmas at midnight, wishing you were here  
Surrounded by memories,  
Of the times we used to share,  
I know you knew I loved you, 'cause I told you 'fore you went,  
But at dawn there'll be more memories made, so now its time for bed,  
Christmas at midnight

*Words & Music By Jeremy Neal Willis In Memory of His Dear Friend Clayton Smailes  
Taken from Jeremy's CD Remembering Christmas*

[www.willisentertainment.com](http://www.willisentertainment.com)



# Christmas Grief: Tips for Enduring After a Child's Death

Written by Chris Mulligan taken from Open To Hope <http://www.opentohope.com>

Anniversaries, birthdays, special memories and holidays intensify the pain after the death of a child. And although we may have discovered daily tools to help guide our everyday grief, December seems to require special tips and ideas to navigate the days leading up to the holiday dates.

The following are some helpful ideas I have compiled over the years from my own history and from those shared by other bereaved parents. These ideas seem to follow the categories of Self Care, Traditions and Honoring Your Child.

## Self Care

- Accept support
- Allow/ask others to help with Christmas tasks (card writing, shopping, baking, decorating, child caring for certain activities or short term to care for self)
- Feel your feelings (which may mean crying or leaving the room or activity)
- Choose whether to participate in activities or not
- Try one new activity for the holiday season: do something for someone else, adopt a family to sponsor for Christmas giving, attend a new church, volunteer for the sick, elderly, hospital, soup kitchen, humane society
- Join or connect with a bereavement support group
- Buy yourself a special gift to open on a particularly difficult day
- Allow yourself grief time (to cry, feel your feelings, watch a sad movie, take a walk)
- Avoid excess food, drink, activities, spending

## Traditions: Choose to Change, Create, or Eliminate

- Choose whether you want to decorate at all, continue as in the past or change some or create new traditions
- Choose whether to follow established traditions or create new ones when it comes to food. Will you bake cookies, candies, treats or not? Will you continue the serving the traditional menu or change it? Will you continue the same seating pattern or try buffet style or TV trays? Will you change the dinner hosting placement as in a different relative's home or will you eat at a restaurant? Will you leave town altogether or celebrate in a different location?
- Continue to hang the deceased child's stocking in which family members place written memories of the loved one to remain in the stocking year after year (to be read at a time of the family's choosing)
- Plan an activity your deceased child loved to do (sports game, pizza night, movie night, skating, baking cookies)
- Buy presents for disadvantaged children/families in the deceased child's name
- Decorate the child's headstone at the cemetery (with cards, Christmas trees, lights, stuffed animals)
- Decorate someone else's headstone at the cemetery
- Create a memorial to your child in your home, school, office. This could be their own small tree with collected ornaments or memorabilia.
- Set a place setting at the holiday table for the deceased child
- Have family members share a memory of the child at a time of their choosing with all family present

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- Bake cookies/treats for a needy family, homeless shelter, fire department, non-profit agency
- Participate in community-based memorial services where you can hang ornaments in public places for your child

Honoring the Deceased Child:

- Sew blankets or make quilts representative of your child
- Make handmade ornaments for family, friends, neighbors as reminder of your child
- Including all family members, create a memory wreath, a memory box, or memory book using pictures, memorabilia, ornaments, etc
- Decorate outdoor memorial trees
- Plant an outdoor Christmas tree and decorate it yearly
- Light a candle or candles in a wreath each day or create a routine to light the candles to honor your child
- Donate a financial amount of what you may have spent on your child in their name to children's fund, organization or foundation
- Buy a special yearly Christmas ornament and start a memorial tree for your child
- Give gifts with memories attached of your child: pictures of the child, a tree to plant, a recipe, music, art
- Order US Postal stamps with your child's picture on them, ([www.stamps.com](http://www.stamps.com))
- Pray. However this looks to you, it lifts you and your child.

Our lives are altered after the death of a child or loved one. Further, holidays will not be the same. They may intensify the pain causing overwhelming feelings as well as obstacles to the grief journey. One must expect sad days, good moments and difficult moments that will require gentleness, compassion, support and planning.

The pain of grief will remain with us, will fluctuate and will come and go at various times. But healing the wound of grief comes as the result of change; the acceptance and welcoming of the ongoing changes inside the self and the transformation of the pain into a new presence of who we become due to our identity of a new life purpose beyond our grief.

I hope you can plant some seeds of change for yourself during this holiday season.

## FULL CIRCLE

The year has gone again  
from spring to winter –  
and in this year;  
your memories may have found  
a breath of calm between them,  
quiet respite – sometimes.  
Then why must there be  
twice as many now –  
these feelings, now,

these visions, songs and voices,  
from Halloween to New Year's:  
Twice memories and smiles  
Twice memories and tears...  
You know the answer,  
even while you cry:  
your tears are  
(like your smiles)  
the season's face of love.

- Sascha

## Ask Dr. Paulson

*Mary A. Paulson, PhD, is a bereaved sibling as well as a child and adolescent psychologist at Harding Hospital in Worthington, Ohio. Her question and answer column, aimed at bereaved siblings and the family that loves them, appears in the quarterly TCF national magazine, We Need Not Walk Alone . Copyright 1998-2011. These excerpts were reprinted from the December 2010 and January 2011E-Newsletter of The Compassionate Friends.*

**Q.** I'm getting ready to face the first holidays since my older brother died. As his only sister, I adored him and he felt the same about me. I don't want to see the New Year come. How can I handle going into a new year where I know my brother can never give me a hug and I can never tell him how much he means to me? I'm seeing a counselor who tells me I will survive this holiday, and each one after that will be easier. How can this ever get easier? I just seem to be getting more and more depressed the closer January 1<sup>st</sup> comes.

**A.** One of the hardest things that we go through after a loved one dies is "picking up and going on." How are we supposed to create a life that does not include them? The answer ends up being – that we don't. We realize that we will always carry them with us – their love, their hugs, their laughter, their pride, their strengths, and our relationship. You're right – it is hard to start a new year that he won't know about, that won't include his hugs, his time, and the ability to tell each other how much you care. I won't kid you, the first holidays are the hardest!! After my brother's death, we didn't celebrate Christmas for a long time. What I finally came to realize is that part of him would always live on inside of me. Then I looked for ways I could include him (remember him) and celebrate his life at each of the holidays and other major events of my life. As you celebrate your brother's life and remember him, you carry him forward with you into the new life you create. Consequently, it does get easier.

**Q.** My twin sisters were killed in an automobile accident three years ago. My parents have put pictures of them all around the house and talk about them all the time. I think they are so afraid I'll forget them that they force it on me all the time. Our house is beginning to look like a shrine. What can I do?

**A.** Over the years I have heard one thing more than anything else – the fear of forgetting your loved one. Not only the fear parents (spouses, etc.) have that in their pain and attempts to avoid the pain of memories, the loved one's memory will be erased completely by their children (or spouses). There's another fear, and that is the fear of forgetting how they laughed, what they'd do when they were excited, the sound of their voice, the things they liked, etc. Anything that can stimulate those memories is sought after, and if you hear new stories about them from acquaintances and friends, those quips are like little gems that are treasured and stored away. So if you could look at those pictures not as a shrine or as something to compete with, but instead as a way of stimulating memories of their laughter, how would that change the relationship that is developing between you and your parents? And how would it change the way you remember your sisters? You just may end up looking at everyone (you included) differently.

"It is the capacity to feel consuming grief and pain and despair that also allows me to embrace love and joy and beauty with my whole heart. I must let it all in."

*Anna White, Mended: Thoughts on Life, Love, and Leaps of Faith*

**Now** we look out on a winter landscape. The earth is cold, the land sharply defined. Yet underneath the hard crust, the energy and warmth of our earth is guarding and providing life to all that grows.

We may personally know the coldness and hardness of a grief so fresh that we feel numb-a grief so hurtful that our body feels physically hard, our throats tight from tears shed or unshed, our chests banded tightly by our mourning heart. If we are not now experiencing this, our memories recollect so easily those early days.

Yet as we live these days, like the earth from which we receive our sustenance, we too, in our searching, find places of warmth and change and love and growth deep within. Let our hearts and minds dwell in these places and be armed and renewed by them, and let us have the courage and love to share them with our loved ones, to talk about even that first dim shape of new hope or new acceptance, new understanding, or of new love.

These are our new roots, born of our love of our child that are forming and stirring within, gathering strength so that our lives, at the right time can blossom once again and be fruitful in a new and deep way. ~ By Marie Andrews South Maryland Chapter



## New Year

The new year comes when all the  
world is ready  
for changes, resolutions - great  
beginnings.

For us, to whom that stroke of  
midnight means  
a missing child remembered,  
for us the new years comes  
more like another darkness.

But let us not forget that this may be  
the year  
when love and hope and courage  
find each other somewhere in the  
darkness

to lift their voice and speak:  
let there be light.

*From "The Sorrow and the Light" by Sascha*