



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

Summer 2016

"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

June 1, 2016
July 6, 2016
August 3, 2016

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 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 came where the river
Ran over stones;
My ears knew
An early joy.
And all the waters
Of all the streams
Sang in my veins
That summer day.

- Theodore Roethke, The Waking



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FYI

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

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

Website: www.bcbereavementhelpline.com

Suicide Support SurvivorAdvocates@yahoogroups.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

Center For Loss In Multiple Birth (CLIMB) Inc. www.climb-support.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 2016*

Editors Musings



Arleen Simmonds

Sometimes we meet people who pass quietly through our lives and leave impressions that will inform us far into the future.

In Awe Of Her

Many years ago when I was a much younger mom, as yet innocent of the world of child loss, I met a special person. I met her through a group of women of varying age and background who were seekers, we sought to explore other realms, cultures and spiritualities sharing our understanding and experience.

We met in the home of this lady once a week. Some knew one another, others including myself were newcomers eager to make new friends and learn from the wisdom of others. I enjoyed the inclusive, warm and accepting atmosphere. I felt at peace in this calm and safe haven created by this lovely and gentle woman. She had an aura about her, it was like she 'knew something', had travelled a road of life that gave her much insight, tolerance and acceptance.

One of the others told me on the quiet that this woman's daughter had died at the age of 19 of pneumonia. This was the first time that I had been in personal contact with someone who was living every parent's nightmare. I had a difficult time reconciling my horror and pity with the image this woman presented. The more I got to know her I realized that she had reached a place of peace and acceptance that she exemplified in her very real patient and compassionate interest in others.

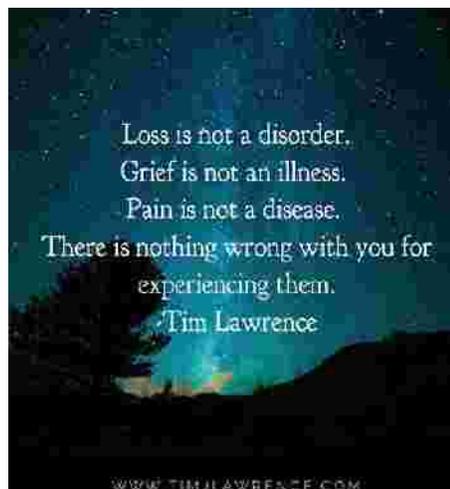
I was in awe of her. Her journey and loss were unimaginable to me, I had no reference for that. Even though I couldn't understand her experience, I benefitted greatly from her example of courage and resilience and ability to create a path of peace. Even though my own journey started many years later I still can feel that healing presence settle over me like the brush of an angel's wing. I am in awe of her and all the other 'way showers' I have met on this path of healing through grief.

Arleen Simmonds, TCF Kamloops, B.C.

*She made broken look beautiful
and strong look invincible.
She walked with the Universe
on her shoulders and made it
look like a pair of wings."*

~Ariana Dancu

I have found a new source of inspiration, a young man, Tim Lawrence, (WWW.TIMJLAWRENCE.COM) whom I discovered on Facebook. Tim writes articles regularly about his journey with grief and loss. He writes boldly and bravely, sometimes in strong language, holding nothing back. I find him refreshing and inspiring. He totally allows his readers to give themselves permission to grieve openly and without fear. He calls his FB blog/page The Adversity Within - Shining Light On Dark Places.





Lamps For The Journey...

"You can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind, your stomach, because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you." ~ *Frederick Buechner*

To be human is to be fallible, but it is also to be capable of love and to be able to retain that childlike openness which enables us to go bravely into the darkness and towards that life of love and truth which will set us free.

~ *Madeline L'Engle*

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest

~. *Elie Wiesel*

Time changes everything except something within us which is always surprised by change. ~ *Thomas Hardy*

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment

~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

I have no right, by anything I do or say, to demean a human being in his own eyes. What matters is not what I think of him; it is what he thinks of himself. To undermine a man's self-respect is a sin. ~*Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike. ~*John Muir, The Yosemite*

The sun shines different ways in winter and summer. We shine different ways in the seasons of our lives.

~*Terri Guillemets*

Two kinds of gratitude: The sudden kind we feel for what we take; the larger kind we feel for what we give.

~*Edwin Arlington Robinson*

The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together.

~*Erma*

Bombeck

The wings of angels are often found on the backs of the least likely people. ~*Eric Honeycutt*

Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.

~*Thomas à Kempis, Imitation of Christ, c.1420*

When you have brought up kids, there are memories you store directly in your tear ducts. ~*Robert Brault*

"Every great loss demands that we choose life again. We need to grieve in order to do this. The pain we have not grieved over will always stand between us and life. When we don't grieve, a part of us becomes caught in the past like Lot's wife who, because she looked back, was turned into a pillar of salt." ~ *Rachel Naomi Remen*

In West Africa, when a person in the village becomes sick, the Healer will ask them, "When was the last time you sang? When was the last time that you danced? When was the last time that you shared a story?" ~*Harvey Cox*

The Loss of my Son by Suicide

I recently read the book "The Sunflower" by Richard Paul Evans. The author of "The Christmas Box", he is one of my favourite writers. One passage that he wrote struck a note with me, so I copied it and now pass it on to you:

"Suicide, the immune system breaks down or maybe they just don't turn fast enough out of the way of an oncoming semi. The will to live, or lack of, is a powerful thing."

..."the immune system breaks down..." Jeff wasn't healthy towards (what I now recognize as) "the end". He complained of aches and pains that he and I attributed to "getting older", although he was not yet 39 when he died. He couldn't sleep at night, but slept exhausted during the day. He made an appointment to see a psychiatrist and slept through the appointed time. A few months prior to his death, when we celebrated Christmas together, Jeff had huge dark circles under his eyes. As always, we stayed up really late one night and talked, just the two of us. Jeff confided that he was worried about his pre-teen children, that he was frustrated and didn't know what to do with them anymore. I let that go, thinking that he and his brother had frustrated me many times in their teen years, and they turned out fine...finally, he cried, then quickly brushed away the tears and ended the evening soon after. That night, he slept on his recliner in the front room. I wonder how many nights he spent there, feeling alone and lost, in a world that he couldn't handle any more. (Jeff told me some of these things in his "Goodbye Letter" to me. Much of this I did not know when he was alive.)

"The will to live, or lack of, is a powerful thing"; again a quote from "The Sunflower". I think these words struck me the hardest. You see, I didn't recognize my son's signs of depression. I thought it was normal to be concerned with raising children, and it is, but Jeff was also a single parent trying to get a university degree. When you think about it, those three things are very demanding "jobs" in and each of themselves. Jeff was trying to cope with all three!

Guilt is still the biggest burden that I carry. My husband and I lived in another province so I wasn't there to help with the everyday things that would have lightened Jeff's "load". Had I been a good mother? Had I given him all the tools he needed to survive and thrive in what can be a cruel world? Had I done enough? Had I loved him enough? Yes, to that last question. I did love him enough, but in the end my love wasn't enough... Although Guilt rears its head periodically, I don't dwell on it. That would be a waste of time with no resolution. I have come to a place of peace now. It has taken time, patience and support from many, including my Compassionate Friends.

I have learned to love my hobbies again, including photography and travel. Each time I visit a new place and take it off my "Wish List", I think of my boys and know that they have travelled with me, and seen the world through wondrous eyes.

"Life is Good" has been my mantra. It does not need to be said that Jeff and Jim would want me to enjoy life. My other mantra is "I will see my boys again". I do believe that they are waiting for me, on "the other side".

Written with love for my son Jeff,
Joan Conley, TCF Kamloops



Piece of my Heart

How was it to be that I now am robbed of such joy?
Of watching you grow or finding out if you're a girl or boy.
Never did I get to hear your cries or even see your tears,
Or kiss your little brow and hug away your fears.

I am just left here now with pain and few memories,
Of the days that were happy with you inside of me.
For you were loved and wanted oh so much,
What I would give just to have felt your touch.

The hours crawl by yet the time does not seem to slow,
I want to scream out to the world you are gone, why don't they know?
How is the world still turning when I feel it should have stopped?
Why are people laughing and living when it feels like I can not?

Not enough tears can be shed to express the love we have for you,
No words can describe what we all wanted to be able to do.
I would have just held you and breathed in your sweet smell,
Shouted with joy and phoned all the people we wanted to tell.

But this time we called loved ones with the sad sad news,
That too little were you to live among us and we were meant to lose.
But nothing will ever erase those twelve weeks we had together,
For a piece of my heart you now hold always and forever.

~Kerri-Anne Hinds

<http://www.myforeverchild.com>



A Father's Grief

Bernadette McCauley

<http://www.irisremembers.com>

He has a hard time looking me in the eye when I talk about her. His eyes fill with tears. He fights them back.
"Don't cry, never cry", his ego tells him. All the strength leaves his face and he holds the weight of his head on his hands.
He can't say her name. He says "baby", "the baby". When I say "Kathie" his insides are trembling.
But he battles for control; fights back for strength; fights for energy; fights out of fear.
He lost his daughter, he can't lose himself.
Crying, I ask him if he holds the same memories, the same feelings.
He says, "I think differently than you do."
with all the strength his voice can muster.
His face says he is lying. But I let him lie.
What purpose would it serve to force him to suffer more? I have my answer. I am comforted.
We hold each other, protect each other, and tuck her in safely, lovingly in our hearts and minds.
Until another day...
Maybe then he can love her without being afraid.

Graduation Time

It's June and graduation time again. Your child would have been among those wearing the cap and gown, walking down the aisle to the ever stirring "Pomp and Circumstance". Now there is a vacant spot in the line. Should you attend? Can you stand the pain? Will people think you are strange?

As always you must follow your heart. So, go if you'd like to and don't hide your tears. It's quite all right to miss your own child while celebrating the achievements of others.

Just remember: That your instincts are the most important ones; that no one else can make this decision for you, and that it doesn't really matter what other people think.

It was your child who died. This is your pain and you have the right to feel it and deal with it in your own way - and may a bit more healing take place in the doing.

Peggy Gibson, TCF Nashville, TN



GRADUATION-A TIME TO REMEMBER

I was driving down the road the other day, thinking of how the retail market makes any event an opportunity for revenue. Graduation seems to fall into that category, with cards and gifts for every Graduate. This time of year reminds me that my graduation from high school was a bittersweet time.

Really, it was the first time I had "surpassed" my older brother, David, in anything significant. I turned the age that he was when he died, 18, in the beginning of my senior year of high school. That year was difficult for me, as I felt that I was getting to move past where he had been cut short. Graduation day was no exception. I was happy to be getting out of high school, and looking forward to that coming August when I would go to college. But why was I getting to do these things, and not David? What made me so special that I got to stay here and experience these things? I still am not quite sure of the answer to those questions. Graduation from high school was really just the first of many events which I have gotten to experience that David never will. College graduation, my wedding, and the birth of my two children are examples. And for me, each event has been a bit bittersweet.

The good news is this: that while time does make it easier to bear day-to-day activities without your sibling, each major event in your life presents itself as a new opportunity to remember your brother or sister, as well.

For me, figuring that out was a huge relief, as it meant that my fear of forgetting David was not something I needed to worry about any more. His memory is just as alive for me today, 15-1/2 years later, as it was when I took that walk across the stage to accept my high school diploma.

Amy Baker Ferry
Heart of Florida TCF, Longwood, FL

Father's Day It Will Never Be the Same

Our precious daughter and only child, Jill Kathleen, passed away on September 3, 1990 from a brain stem tumor. She was less than three months over six years old. I think back to my own father's Father's Days. It's pretty hard to remember what we did. Maybe we went fishing or to a baseball game. I know I always told my dad I loved him, because I did. We probably always had a good dinner that day too, a favorite of Dad's no doubt. To me somehow Father's Day always meant at least part of the day devoted to house or yard work.

When Jill came into my life, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me and when she left it, it was the worst that ever happened. Therefore, Father's Day will never be the same. I keep diaries and for Jill's last year and the years after, there are some very painful entries. But, before she passed on there are some interesting entries. When she was four, I noted that I got a card from her. Have it stashed away someplace. When she was five, she gave me a card but hid my present and couldn't remember where she put it. We went to a church picnic that year, and Jill had her "first date" with a neighbor boy from up the street. I played Monopoly with her in the evening; she won! I put her to bed and read her a bedtime story. When she was six she was sick, but could still get around pretty well. We made a big deal of the day. She gave me a "rainbow" colored, golf size umbrella for a present. I still have it because it's now very special to me. I'd rather get wet than see that umbrella wrecked on a windy, rainy day.

Since Jill is gone, Father's Days have been different. For the first three years our friends and relatives tried to console me as best they could on this day. In 1992 I wrote in my diary, "I'm not a Dad without you, Jill." Now I have to correct myself-- I was a Dad and always will be one except that I had to bury my daughter. It's not the way it should be, but it's the way it is, and I can't change it. God, how I wish I could.

I don't cry as much anymore, but the feelings that will trigger the tears are just under the surface waiting for the right emotional circumstances.

Dad, you have every right to be sad, depressed, and heart broken on Father's Day, because you have lost a son or daughter who can never be replaced. I know because I'm one of you. If you try to work through grief (it is hard work) and not run away from it or stuff it somewhere, your pain will lessen as time goes by. The scar you have from the loss, however, will remain forever. The day will never be the same again, but you can make it different. Life isn't easy, and it isn't fair. But you can make it bearable by treasuring the memories of your daughter or son. Some of you, unfortunately have lost more than one, but even one is too many. Treasure also the memorabilia of your daughter or son no matter how long they lived. Cry if you feel like it. I feel better after I do, because it makes me feel I'm not losing touch with her. Do whatever works for you.

Think of how your son or daughter whom you loved and who loved you would want you to feel on Father's Day. Then plan and do something that will make you feel just a little bit better and dedicate it to your daughter's or son's memory. It's worked for me. -- Michael Ebert, BP Chapter Hinsdale, IL



How Summer Was

It's been hot, really hot, in this inland valley where we live. It's in the 90's by mid-morning, 102 by noon, enveloping our little house in a blanket that doesn't lift much at night. It's made us all lazy, sweaty and cranky. We pick our activities carefully, doling out precious energy in smidgens.

I can almost hear the garden calling: "Water me, water me." It's too much effort to even think about facing the blaring heat, dragging out the hose to the far end of the property and dashing back in before I wilt. Once I'm out there, I can see that there's so much to do. The tomatoes are ripe and ready, the pepper plants are heavy, and the peaches are begging to be picked. They all produce more than we can either eat or give away, so I grudgingly face the additional heat producing duty of canning tomatoes and making jam. It seems unfair to have to do this during the hottest week of the year, but the garden won't wait.

I remember doing this when we lived at the beach when the children were very young. Our garden was smaller then, mostly tomatoes and an unruly berry patch, but it always gave us more than our small family could consume. So, I learned to "put things up." It's hard to explain the pleasure of opening a kitchen cupboard and seeing shelves of identical glass jars filled with things we had grown from seed. Because I was new at it, and because I was "putting things up" while also trying to care for and entertain a preschooler and an infant, the finished product was rarely perfect. The jam was usually yummy, and I'd often forget to peel the tomatoes. It didn't seem to matter much to Jennifer, who liked to line the jam jars on the window sill so she could see the sun shine through them. It bathed the kitchen in a warm rosy hue. "It looks like summer," she remarked. "It will remind us of how summer was." It appears that in addition to making jam, we'd also made some memories.

I wish I'd worked harder at making memories with Tyler. There simply had not been time-only seven months to know everything about one another. When I look back, it sometimes seems that the only thing I taught him was how it was to live in a house where a sleep deprived mother tried to cook, clean, chauffeur and coordinate the lives of a preschooler and a baby. Why hadn't I spent more time on the floor playing? Why hadn't we gone to Disneyland?

My heart reminds me of the things we did do: we went to the beach and watched seagulls play. We sang and danced to both Big Bird and The Beatles. We went for a walk every day. We spent time in our little garden in the late afternoon, and while he played on a quilt right next to me, I yanked weeds and tried to make things grow. Perhaps, somehow, I did tell him everything about me.

He died in May, before the boysenberries were ready to pick. When they ripened later that June, I didn't care. Jen picked a few for her cereal, but most fell to the ground and rotted. The vines, having done their job, shriveled up and went to work conserving their energy for next year's crop. The fence, once completely covered with lush green vinery and brilliant berries, was bare, dark & drab gray. Another reminder of what we had lost.

There were no jars of glistening preserves in the cupboard that year. There seemed little to help us remember happier times. Our garden lay barren in the fall. It was too hard to be there. It was Jennifer who, digging through the pantry, found it: the very last jar of the previous year's berry jam. It was November. She had it on her broccoli. We laughed. We cried.

I'm pulling out the canning equipment tonight because the garden won't wait. I've found the funny little spiral bound cookbook that taught me how to do this: Crescent Dragon wagon's Putting up Stuff for the Cold Time. Its pages are tomato and berry-stained; I've used it for many harvest seasons. Still, I will follow its directions carefully. As if it were the first time, I'm so afraid of messing things up. In spite of my good intentions, I know that the peach jam will be runny. It always is. But we will enjoy it anyway, because it is sweet and good and because I worked hard at it and did the best I could.



And because it's like looking at memories. Its how summer was.

Kansas City (MO-KAN) Region July-August 2002

A Walk At Walhachin

We went down to the river at Walhachin,
past the green and gentle fields,
the graveyard of orchards of the past.
At the bottom of the dusty road
we come to the rocky river shore.

As I walk slowly and carefully, feet sliding,
trying to keep a clumsy purchase
on the boulders large and small,
I think of how it was for you
on that fateful day.

Did you walk confidently,
your young legs striding out,
hurrying to reach the river's edge?
Were you filled with the joy of a summer's day
eager to cast your line in that age old ritual?

Do I step where you stepped?
Am I standing on the very stones
where you slipped and were yourself cast
into the river, swept away by
its swift and tumbling currents ?

I look around me, can this softly flowing water,
this blue sky, this gentle and calm landscape,
be the scene of horror that changed us forever?
How can so much beauty and sadness co-exist?

Part of our hearts are left at Walhachin.
Looking down I can see a replica of mine,
broken, imbedded in the never ending stones at Walhachin.

Arleen Simmonds, TCF Kamloops, in Loving Memory of Kenneth 30/10/64 – 11/08/88



The Loss of a Lifetime: When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies

By Lynn Shattuk taken from HuffPost Healthy Living

When I was 24, my younger brother, who was my only sibling, died. The day the phone rang and I heard my mom say dark, foreign words like *coroner*, *needle*, *heroin*, *autopsy*, was the most impactful day of my life. In the thickness of shock, I didn't realize that the rest of my life would be measured in *before* and *after*. Before, when my family was intact. After, when I would somehow learn to live without the person I was supposed to get a lifetime with. —

“Be strong for your parents,” said blurs of people at Will's memorial service. I nodded, but inside me, something twisted. I stood in a daze as people streamed by, offering their awkward words and hugs. *Be strong for your parents?* I thought.

I was barely breathing. I was barely standing here. Strong was the last thing I felt.

In the early months after Will's death at 21, I existed in a heavy fog. Nothing was as I knew it. I'd abandoned the little life I'd started in Maine and landed back in Alaska where my parents were, where my brother and I had grown up. My friends were living their lives — going to college, working, falling in and out of love and lust. Meanwhile, my life had stopped.

My childhood home was filled with the cloying scent of flowers just starting to die. It struck me then how terrible it was that we send flowers to the grieving — *here you go, another reminder that nothing is permanent, that everything lovely will be lost*.

My brother's absence was heavy in the house. Though he had died in Seattle, his room was scattered with relics: the bed he had slept in for so many years, his big flannel shirts hanging like shadows in the closets, a handful of videos and books. Memories pinned to each corner.

Having always taken comfort in words, I scoured the internet for a book for someone like me — an adult whose (barely) adult brother had died. What I found was unimpressive: ***There were more books on losing a pet than losing a brother or sister***. A few books existed for surviving children after a death in the family, but they were for small children. One memoir documented a sister's grief following her brother's death, but it was out of print.

What did it mean that there were no handbooks for me? That people asked me to be strong in the face of the biggest loss I'd ever experienced or imagined? At times I felt like I didn't deserve to feel so shattered, especially in the shadow of my parents' immense loss.

A few months later, I started attending a local grief group. I sat in a circle with a few widows and widowers, a woman whose daughter had died, and a woman whose mother had died. I was younger than any of them by at least 30 years, but I could relate to their shares: “I feel like I'm going crazy.” “I'm so damned angry right now.” “I can't sleep at night.”

Though the losses were different, the feelings were the same.

So much was lost:

My parents, who would never be the same. Their pain was almost visible, as if a piece of their bodies had been cut out. I had lost myself, too, or at least the version of me that was unscathed by tragedy: an innocent version, who walked around in some parallel universe where her brother was still alive, ignorant to the incredible fortune of an entirely alive family.

My brother, my past. Will's big blue eyes. His loud laugh. He was the co-keeper of my childhood. The person who was supposed to walk with me longer than anyone else in this life. The only other person who knew what it was like to grow up with our particular parents, in our particular home.

The future. I cried for the nephews and nieces I would never have. I cried for my own faceless potential children who would never know my brother. How would I explain him? How would I ensure that his essence wasn't lost, that he wasn't just a figure in old photographs, a handful of stories? And I had to have children someday, right? I was the only person who could make my parents the grandparents they always assumed they'd be.

And all the hard times ahead when my brother wouldn't be by my side. When my parents began to age. When my grandparents died. There would be no one to share these dark milestones.

Continued from page 11

And so I had to stay alive. Burden of needing to stay healthy, to stay safe, to stay close.

I felt like our family had been a four-legged table, and one leg had suddenly been torn off. The remaining three of us wobbled and teetered. We felt the missing leg like an amputee, each morning waking to the horrible fact that Will was gone.

I wrote letters to my brother in those early months and years. At first, memories blazed through my head and I used the letters to capture them before they flitted away, gone forever: my brother walking towards me when he visited me in Maine, the sun splattering his cheeks, turning him golden. The time I taught him to make snow angels in the front yard of our childhood home, our bulkily clad limbs sliding in synchronicity under icy stars. My tiny hand on my mom's belly, feeling my brother kick.

Later, I wrote the letters when I needed to cry — when the grief sat coiled and waiting in my chest, needing to be let out, released. I couldn't find the words of other bereaved sisters or brothers to bring me comfort, so I created my own.

One day, when I was lost in my sadness, my mom said, "You won't always feel like this. You'll have a family of your own. You'll move on." This seemed impossible in my 24-year-old skin. I couldn't imagine this potential future my mom spoke of, this predicted family.

But very, very slowly, I began putting my life back together. I finished college. I made the difficult decision to leave home again and move back to Maine. I met my husband and after several years, we had two children. Our son has my brother's big blue eyes and his love of music. Our daughter possesses the lighthearted spirit my brother had at the same age. The sibling love between them is palpable; they spat and giggle, they dance and huddle. Though sometimes adult siblings aren't able to close the distance between them, all those shared experiences and time and space and relationships matter. They tether us, they twine our stories together. I pray that my children remain close as they grow, and that they enjoy a long lifetime together.

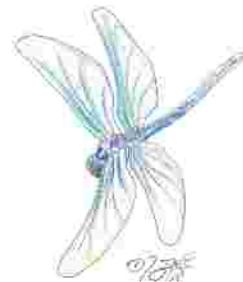
After nearly 15 years, the sharp shock and grief I felt in those early months and years are gone. It took years for the pain to fade, for the words "your brother is dead" to stop pounding in my head — but they did. Will's absence is mostly a dull hurt, the ghost of an old broken bone that aches when it rains. I feel it more on holidays and anniversaries, when someone else close to me dies.

I'll always wish he was still here. I'll always wonder what he would look like and what he'd be doing if he was still alive — at 36. At 50. At 75.

I move on and through. Perhaps I am even strong, like those well-meaning mourners at my brother's memorial asked me to be. But my brother's loss will remain with me for my whole life — just like he was supposed to.

This essay originally appeared on the elephant journal.

Visit Lynn at her blog at <http://thelightwillfindyou.com> or on Facebook.



ENCOURAGEMENT

One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own. There are times of great uncertainty in every life. Left alone at such a time, you feel dishevelment and confusion like gravity. When a friend comes with words of encouragement, a light and lightness visit you and you begin to find the stairs and the door out of the dark. The sense of encouragement you feel from the friend is not simply her words or gestures; it is rather her whole presence enfolding you and helping you find the concealed door. The encouraging presence manages to understand you and put herself in your shoes. There is no judgment but words of relief and release.

John O'Donohue
Excerpt from ETERNAL ECHOES