



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER



Spring 2018



"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.

1st Wednesday Every Month @ 7:00 PM
Kamloops United Church,
421 St. Paul St. Kamloops

NEXT MEETINGS

March 7, 2018
April 4, 2018
May 2, 2018
June 6, 2018

TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

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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.

~MAY~

*May is kind,
None of March's bluster,
Or April's fickle pranks,
May is gentle sun,
And scented blossom,
Set apart for spirit's ease.
May cancels winter,
And the storms of spring,
She gives birth to warmer days.
May is Mother's month,
Expression of her best,
Expectant, warm and nurturing.
May is a state of mind,
Perhaps a place of Grace,
On the landscapes of the heart.*
~ Arleen Simmonds



FYI

Facebook : The Compassionate Friends Of Kamloops

BC Bereavement Helpline Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information. Contact: (604) 738-9950 Email bcbh@telus.net 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: kjohnsonew.bc.ca

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

Grief Watch: www.griefwatch.com

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support www.nationalshare.org

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

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 As we are a non profit society with a very large outreach we have an extensive mailing list for our paper copies of the newsletter. The cost for printing and postage is significant and could be considerably reduced if those with computer capability would be agreeable to receiving their newsletter electronically. Getting the newsletter in colour is a bonus and the possibility is also to extend the size of the newsletter and send other attachments. If you are of a mind to make the change please just email as above..

The Annual Retreat in Seabeck, WA ~ June 1-3, 2018

For decades bereaved parents/grandparents/adult siblings have been crossing the wooden bridge into the serenity of Seabeck Conference Center (www.seabeck.org) in historic Seabeck, WA, just an hour and a half drive from Seattle. The majestic Olympic Mountains rise to the west, scenic Hood Canal lies between you and the Olympics and the wooded hills sloping up from the Seabeck beach set this place apart from being just another conference center. This peaceful place sets the tone for a healing weekend. One feels secluded and protected from the outside world while feeling the calm and comfort of being with other bereaved parents who understand. This is a safe, supportive place to do one's grief work. We believe that other bereaved parents are the greatest resource and support for this most difficult journey we have to travel.

Our retreat is just that...a *retreat*. We leave behind the busyness of our everyday lives and enter a relaxed and safe haven to work on our grief and bond with other bereaved parents. The retreat is a place where we share our thoughts, feelings, and precious memories of our children. The weekend includes workshops, sharing groups, a reflection room, burden basket, crafts, Children's Memorial Garden and a candle lighting ceremony on Saturday night.

Those receiving this newsletter electronically will also receive the retreat registration form and retreat information page as two extra attachments. Those receiving the print copy by regular mail may obtain more information at our monthly meetings or call 206-241-1139 or email tcfmarge@aol.com *note funds are US \$.

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.*# 88618 1395 RR 0001 Receipts Will Be Issued For Income Tax copyright 2018



Lamps For The Journey...

We cannot stop the winter or the summer from coming. We cannot stop the spring or the fall or make them other than they are. They are gifts from the universe that we cannot refuse. But we can choose what we will contribute to life when each arrives. ~ *Gary Zukav*

Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value. ~ *Desmond Tutu*

I am going to try to pay attention to the spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen ~ *Anne Lamott*

Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom. ~ *Rumi*

Music comes from an icicle as it melts, to live again as spring water. ~ *Henry Williamson*

Remind yourself that the greatest technique for bringing peace into your life is to always choose being kind when you have a choice between being right or being kind. ~ *Wayne Dyer*

"It always amazes me to look at the little, wrinkled brown seeds and think of the rainbows in 'em," said Captain Jim. "When I ponder on them seeds I don't find it nowise hard to believe that we've got souls that'll live in other worlds. You couldn't hardly believe there was life in them tiny things, some no bigger than grains of dust, let alone colour and scent, if you hadn't seen the miracle, could you?"

~ *L.M. Montgomery, Anne's House of Dreams*

It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive - to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are. ~ *Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*

A friendship can weather most things and thrive in thin soil; but it needs a little mulch of letters and phone calls and small, silly presents every so often - just to save it from drying out completely. ~ *Pam Brown*

You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes. ~ *A. A. Milne*

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future. ~ *Nelson Mandela*

I wasn't prepared for the fact that grief is so unpredictable. It wasn't just sadness, and it wasn't linear. Somehow I'd thought that the first days would be the worst and then it would get steadily better - like getting over the flu. That's not how it was ~ *Meghan O'Rourke*

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

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. ~ *Melody Beattie*

Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself. Love possesses naught nor would it be possessed; For love is sufficient unto love. ~ *Khalil Gibran*

The Secret by Bob Baugher, Ph.D.

You've probably heard about it on Oprah: The Secret. It's a book, a DVD, an audio CD, and it's big. What is The Secret? Well, the folks who produced it probably won't like my brief definition, but here it goes. The Secret states, "Whatever you think about most, the universe will bring to you."

You want a mate? A car? A new career? More money? Better health? Don't say, "I wish for these things." Instead, see and feel yourself having them. Don't focus on lack. See abundance. If this sounds familiar to those of you who remember the New Age thinking of the seventies, the author admits that this wisdom has been around for centuries. What's the difference? Nothing really. It's just that successful people have always been using The Secret—many of them without realizing that many people haven't discovered it. The rest of us have been floundering around in our lives without understanding the simple elegance of its logic. Don't get me wrong; I've seen this approach work in the lives of many successful people I've met over the years.

The question I have is: What about grief? When a person we love is taken from us, is there anything that we can gain from applying The Secret to our grief? Let's look.

First, what do we want when our loved one dies? Of course, we want him or her back. This is what we ache for on a moment-by-moment basis. Since this is unrealistic, visualizing this goal will not help. But, if we can't have our loved one back with us, we are desperate to find ways to hold him or her close to us. You've heard many of the ways:

- A picture album of our loved one's life
- A video DVD of pictures and music
- Poetry inspired by our loved one's life
- A DVD of home videos
- Items that are connected to our loved one
- A book of written memories
- A quilt made of our loved one's clothes
- A pillow, bed sheets, or clothing that holds the smell of our loved one
- Telling and listening to stories of our loved one's life
- Listening to music
- Going to places that bring back reminders

So, the principles of The Secret do not apply to the ultimate cure for grief: the return of our loved one. But they can, in time, ease a little of our grief by gently moving us to a place where we can hold onto the precious memories. But, wait: there's a problem here. Take a look at the list above. For those of you who have some distance on the death, you may remember that engaging in any of the behaviors on the list may at first have been associated with pain—often times gut-wrenching pain. But with time and with subsequent return to each item, the pain began to soften and the experience turned from negative to more positive. Perhaps we can call this "The Secret of Shifting Grief." That is, for many people, at first the reminders are too painful—you just can't look at her pictures without crying, or smelling his pillow produces instant sobbing, music brings sadness, avoiding rather than visiting places is preferable. If you are early in your grief, you may have a difficult time accepting The Secret of Shifting Grief. Your raw grief may prevent you from embracing reminders as positive. Instead they continue to be associated with pain.

Second, what else do we want when our loved one dies? For some of us, the answer is easy: If we can't have back our loved one, we wish to join them. This we can call "The Secret of the Unmentionable" that we thought no one knew. Because I had heard it so many times from so many bereaved people in the depth of their pain, I grew to never be surprised when I heard the words that went something like this, "Bob, I want to die. I've thought about taking my life. If a big semi were coming head on toward my car, I wouldn't move out of the way. I'd just let it happen. If I let myself die, I'll be with him."

My response has always been the same, "I hear that you are in so much pain that all you can think about is how to stop it. But if you let yourself die, think of all the hurt that you will be adding to your family members who are already in so much pain. So, wishing to die is understandable, but your death would devastate so many people already in grief."

continued.....

Third, in addition to Shifting and Unmentionable Grief, let's look at one more possible version of The Secret. After a person dies, perhaps at some point in the future a wish for a happy life is the most logical goal that can be attained by using The Secret. Just look at all the well-meaning people around you who early on have been wishing to see you smile, laugh and lighten up. They want the old you back. They want you to just be happy again.

Of course you know that at first happiness is not a goal. I mean, what if you woke up tomorrow happy? What kind of person would you be if you allowed happiness into your life when your loved one is not here anymore? In the workshop I give on Guilt, I bring up a type of guilt called "Moving on Guilt" in which the bereaved person catches him- or herself laughing or for a brief instant, forgetting that their loved one died. At that moment, the person often takes in a startled intake of air. Guilt floods the thinking and the person comes back to harsh reality with the self-reminder, "Don't ever do that again." Sound familiar? This can be called, "The Secret of Moving on."

So, where does the wisdom of The Secret leave us bereaved people? I believe that the ultimate secret of dealing with grief lies in Faith. Not necessarily spiritual or religious faith—however, such faith is of comfort to many who have experienced the intense pain of grief. The faith I'm speaking of is that offered by those people who have grieved before us. If you are a parent, it is the parents you've met whose child died years ago. When you first met this mom or dad, you may not have known of the death of their precious child. If you did, it may have crossed your mind that, "This mother isn't grieving much. She must not have loved her child as much as I do mine." But, the more you got to know these moms and dads, not only did you realize they are just like you, but their love for their precious child is as strong as yours. If you are a widowed person, look at the people in your life who have learned to live without their beloved husband or wife, not because they are strong, but because that had to live day after day being without their lifelong partner. If you are a bereaved sibling or child, look to those people who have been doing this for years and know that one of their secrets is that they had no choice but to wake up day after day without the ability to see, talk, and touch their brother, sister, mom or dad. Picture this person standing before you: brotherless, sisterless, parentless. You wonder how they did it. And you realize that, barring self-destruction, these people felt they had no choice but to live another day—and another.

So, the Ultimate Secret for us is Faith. Faith that you and I, like those who have gone before us into the depths of grief, will be forced to find ways to live without our loved ones. I know you may not agree as you read this: but someday you may be the person that others will look to. And they will say to you, "You have managed to live years without your loved one. I have no idea how you did it. There must be some secret to it. Perhaps someday I, too, will find it. But for now, if you have survived this long, maybe I can, too."

And you will turn to this newly bereaved person and, with your Secret of Grief finally understood, you reply, "Yes, maybe you can, too."

In summary, we began by looking at the principles of The Secret. But as we attempted to apply this concept to grief, what emerged were three secrets:

- Shifting Grief—the transformation of painful memories into comforting ones
- Unmentionable Grief—the wish to join our loved one
- Moving On—the wish for a happy life.
- Faith—if those who have grieved years before us can survive and find ways to cope and live, perhaps we can too.

The secret of grief, then, can be summed up in the following way:

My loved one has died and for that I will always carry him or her in my heart. But people who have grieved before me can provide the faith that, despite my pain, someday I will find happiness again. And, after all, that is what our loved ones would want for us. And that's no secret.



Online Support Groups

Grief After Suicide: Support is Just a Mouse-Click Away

By Karyl Chastain Beal, Founder of the POS-FFOS Internet Community

“I’m sorry, Ma’m, but someone you care about took his own life.”

Those are some of the most devastating words anyone could ever hear. How can those left behind go on in the face of such news? Where do people go for help when they experience a tragedy that confuses the mind and shocks the heart?

Some people search for help on the Internet. They google words like *suicide*, *grief* and *support*, and links to Internet support groups come up. Online groups emerged in the early 1990’s, and over time, they have become a popular source of support, information and inspiration.

What is it that draws people to an Internet support group?

When members of on-line groups are asked what they get out of being in the group, the number one response is that they find out that they are not alone. They feel relief when they realize that others have experienced losses similar to theirs.

In the group, the members can read the experiences, thoughts, feelings and memories of many other people who are walking the same road they are on. Some of them may have lost their loved one years ago, while others may have just found out. Some of them may be in Tennessee or Idaho or Alaska; some of them may be in Australia or Ireland. The common bond of suicide loss pulls them together, no matter who they are or where they are from.

The members of an on-line group also appreciate the fact that they can write to the group and tell them about the person who died without fear of being told it’s time to move on. They can also write to the group about their experiences, thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, they discuss things that they could never talk about with people in person.

One of the best reasons for joining an Internet support group, however, is the fact that the members can connect with group 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Not only is the group accessible at any time (as long as there is a computer and Internet connection), but it can be reached almost anywhere in the world, from the comfort of one’s home to wi-fi coffee shop, libraries, airports, and more. With increased use of smart phones, getting connected to the group is amazingly quick and easy today

Finally, Internet support groups today provide much more than an e-mail connection. The members may socialize with each other in private chat rooms or on facilitated group phone calls. They post photos for others to see; they work on special memorial projects together, and they may also meet in person.

Why are the Internet groups effective?

One size does not fit all, so Internet groups may not be for everyone, however, many people believe that the groups give them a connection to others who truly understand. The members care about each other. The acceptance they give is remarkable.

When someone writes to the group saying they are drowning in sorrow, it doesn’t take long for someone else to write back and say, “I care. I’m reaching out to you. Would you like to take my hand?”

What’s even more remarkable is that today, as soon as someone hears the sad verdict that someone they cared about has died by suicide, they can find help within moments; Internet support groups are just a mouse-click away.

Internet Bereaved by Suicide Support Groups

The main web site is www.pos-ffos.com

To join POS (Parents of Suicides) or FFOS (Friends and Families of Suicides), the quickest way is to either email Karyl Chastain Beal (arlynsmom@bellsouth.net) and ask for an application, or to go to <http://www.pos-ffos.com/>

Snapshots Of A Too Short Life: Understanding Infant Loss

Alexa Bigwarfe <http://www.scarymommy.com/understanding-infant-loss/>

I remember the first time I saw a photograph of a stillborn baby.

It was on one of the pregnancy website forums that I had joined for mothers that all had estimated due dates in April 2007. I was pregnant with my very first child, and the image disturbed and terrified me.

I didn't understand. The photo weirded me out. It seemed so strange to me that a woman would put a picture of her deceased baby as her profile picture in a *pregnancy* forum of all places.

Fast forward to December 2011. I delivered identical twin girls at thirty weeks gestation. They suffered from a disease of the placenta that affects identical twins, Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS.) One of my beautiful girls passed away two days later.

And I posted a picture of my beautiful daughter in her white gown, taken shortly after she passed away.

I enlarged and printed that picture, framed it, and hung it in my living room for all to see.

Suddenly, I understood. Suddenly, I was part of the "club" of grieving mothers.

Those pictures were no longer disturbing or strange; they were beautiful. I completely got why a mother would post her stillborn baby as her profile picture; that photo captured the few moments that a mother was able to hold her precious baby. It represented the only (or one of only a few) of the images that that mother has to hold through her entire life.

Because there will be no pictures of first birthday parties, first teeth, trips to the zoo, the first day of school, growing up, high school graduation, weddings, and so forth. There are only those treasured moments when we met, and then said goodbye, to our child. Our hopes, our dreams, our future, gone in an instant.

I understand why it makes people uncomfortable. Death is uncomfortable. It's difficult to know what to say and do. Seeing a picture of a baby gone from this world captures our greatest fears as parents. I just ask you to remember that that picture is not about you and your feelings. It is about a grieving parent, trying to grasp on to anything that they can; to remind the world to remember their child.

We, grieving mothers, are bonded by a common sadness. A common experience that you have to share to truly understand. But many of us are determined to do what we can to alleviate the pain for any parents new to this "club" we never wanted to join, but paid the highest dues to enter.

About six months after I lost my infant daughter, I began to write and blog about my grief, pain, and life in general. I found and connected with other grieving parents. A whole new world opened up to me. Faces of loss, stories of grief, but most importantly, stories of survival, which have encouraged me and propelled me forward.

One of the common themes we share, whether our loss was an early miscarriages, late pregnancy, infant loss, or an older child, is that desire to make known that we will *always* be that child's mother. Whether we are mothering them in our arms or in our hearts. Hence, the posting of the pictures, that are purely a statement of that mother's love and devotion to her baby, taken too soon.

To the grieving moms out there: you are *always their mother*.

And to the lucky moms who get their children here on earth: The next time you see a mother post a picture of her stillborn baby, or an infant that died shortly after birth, try not to be offended or disgusted. Try to remember that for her, that is all she has.



Easter . . .

If you are early on your grief journey this Easter, I'm sure the furthest things from your mind are Easter Bonnets, Easter Parades and Peter Cottontail and all that aspect of this festival of life.

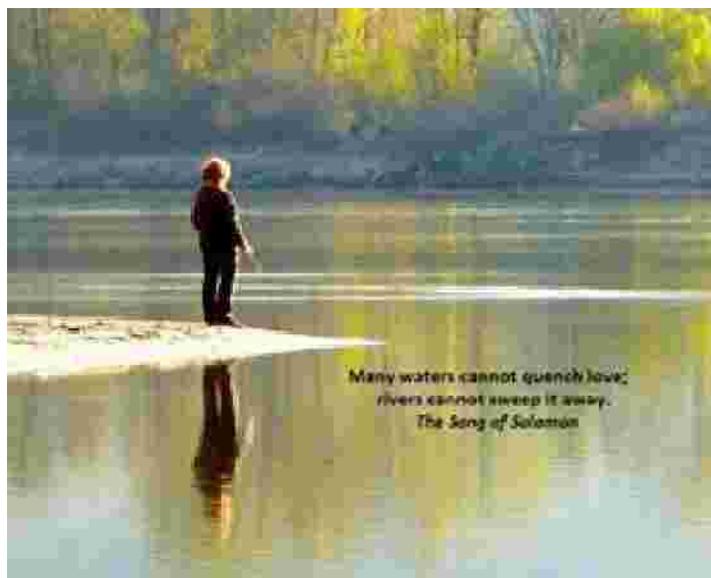
Peeking out of the cocoon of grief ,the light of Spring, and the colours of nature's renewal are almost blinding, the glare too sharp for eyes that are dimmed by tears. The promise is still there though, no matter how we try to hide from it, the message of resurrection won't go away; it relentlessly pursues us with every crocus and daffodil, every robin and hummingbird, every sunny day and soft shower .

Somehow we do rise again, bearing our wounds, yes, but also giving rebirth to all the memories we treasure, the connections that have sustained us and our new understanding of our renewed place in the world. Little by little, day by day, we slowly awaken to the life that is still going on around us. Perhaps in our recovery we might become what Jean Vanier calls wounded healers, what better gift could we make in our children's memory; giving the hope of renewal to those who join us on this path and enlightening those who need to understand.

I hope you'll soak up some warmth from the season and from all those who care for and love you. Especially know that your Compassionate Friends are here for you whatever the season, whatever your stage on this journey we share.

As for me very early this Easter Sunday morning, as I usually do, in the company of others, I'll be on a beach beside the river that claimed my son's life. Together we will share song and scripture, a meal of bread and fish, and appreciate the true gift of Easter.

*Arleen Simmonds/TCF Kamloops, B.C.
In love & thanksgiving for the life of our son,
Kenneth Simmonds 30/10/64 – 11/08/88*



Spring Cleaning

“March bustles in on windy feet
And sweeps my door step and my street
She washes and cleans with pounding rains,
Scrubbing the earth of winter stains.
She shakes the grime from carpet green
Till naught but fresh new blades are seen.
Then, house in order, all neat as a pin,
She ushers gentle spring time in.”

~ Susan Reiner/



Kent Simmonds Photo

Spring Song

“Hark, I hear a robin calling!
List, the wind is from the south!
And the orchard-bloom is falling
Sweet as kisses on the mouth.

In the dreamy vale of beeches
Fair and faint as woven mist.
And the river's orient reaches
Are the palest amethyst.

Every limpid brook is singing
Of the lure of April days;
Every piney glen is ringing
With the maddest roundelays.

Come and let us seek together
Springtime lore of daffodils
Giving to the golden weather
Greetings on the sun-warm hills.

~ Lucy Maude Montgomery

April Rise by Laurie Lee

If ever I saw blessing in the air
I see it now in this still early day
Where lemon-green the vaporous morning drips
Wet sunlight on the powder of my eye.

Blown bubble-film of blue, the sky wraps round
Weeds of warm light whose every root and rod
Splutters with soapy green, and all the world
Sweats with the bead of summer in its bud.

If ever I heard blessing it is there
Where birds in trees that shoals and shadows are
Splash with their hidden wings and drops of sound
Break on my ears their crests of throbbing air.

Pure in the haze the emerald sun dilates,
The lips of sparrows milk the mossy stones,
While white as water by the lake a girl
Swims her green hand among the gathered swans.

Now, as the almond burns its smoking wick,
Dropping small flames to light the candled grass;
Now, as my low blood scales its second chance,
If ever world were blessed, now it is.



Mother's Day

by Sherrie Cassel

The time passed since my son's death, has been one year, 3 months, and 16 days. There is still a deep ache in my chest, a chronic longing that I know can never be filled. I hurt in a way that only another parent who has lost a child can understand. I am not being unfair to those who have incurred other losses, because their pain is also great, but when it is the child who you carried in your body for nine months, or the child you lovingly chose when you made the monumental decision to adopt, the loss evokes a physical pain, a howling pain, with an infinite echo.

My own mother has spinal stenosis and sciatica. After several doctors' appointments, and experimental treatments, she has now been told that her pain is something she will have to learn to live with. I understand. My pain is something I will have to live with, until the day I die, and for once, my words are not hyperbolic, dramatic, or histrionic; they are true and accurate, with maximum impact.

As I face Mother's Day, again, it's not a matter of maybe, it's a matter of certainty that I will hide from the pomp and circumstance, the celebrations of mothers, the lunches at crowded restaurants, and there will be no cards for me this year, just as there were no cards last year, just as there will never be any cards for future Mother's Days. I will rebuff the roses, and if I never hear the words from anyone else again, "Happy Mother's Day," I will be just fine.

Last year a well-meaning checker at a grocery store my son and I frequented, who knew about Rikki's death, came running up to me and said, "I just wanted to say, 'Happy Mother's Day'." She meant well. I stoically bagged my groceries, and then made a mad dash to the car, where I loaded my groceries into the trunk, and then sat in the driver's seat and sobbed for 30 minutes. He'd been gone a total of 5 months; it was too soon, not that the same thing wouldn't happen today, or next week, as the United States prepares itself commercially, and unmercifully to grieving mothers, its onslaught of chocolates, cards, dinners at Olive Garden. There will undoubtedly be memories of necklaces made of macadamia nuts, which as a loving mother, you will wear proudly.

There is an artery that runs through my heart. It is the largest artery in my body. You see, it runs from my heart to heaven, as I understand heaven to be. This artery stretches from my body, across the space-time continuum, and attaches to wherever my son is now. Even as I doubt everything I've ever believed in, this connection is so strong that it will never be broken.

My broken heart joins all mothers on this very difficult day. If you have other children, may the words come softly, as your grief reminds you that the voice you long for is too distant to hear, for now. May you be surrounded with people who will love you through it.



Siblings & Grief: 10 Things Everyone Should Know

By Dr. Christina Hibbert <http://www.drchristinahibbert.com/about/>

I'm an expert on siblings and grief. Not because I'm a psychologist who specializes in grief. No. I am an expert because I have lost two of my sisters.

As I write, it is September 8, 2013—20 years to the day that my youngest sister, McLean, or Miki as we called her, died. She died of cancer of the kidneys. She was eight years old. I was eighteen. We buried Miki on September 11, 1993, my mom's birthday—a date that would forever be marked for my family, a date that would become marked for the United States, and the world, just eight years later.

On October 17, 2007, my closest sister, Shannon, died. Just 16 months apart, we'd grown up together; we knew each other intimately, we were best friends. (You can read a little about both my sisters' deaths, here, in chapter 3 of my new memoir).

Siblings & Grief

Losing Shannon was even harder for me than losing Miki, and not just because we were closer. For one, I was older when she died—I understood loss better—but even more, because her husband had died just two months prior and she left behind two young sons. My husband and I would raise her sons as our own.

Tragic as it was—hard as it was to suddenly inherit two sons, and as much as I missed her—I still felt sorrier for my parents, for her children, for her close friends, for everyone but me. *I'm just the sibling*, I thought. How wrong I was. *How wrong so many of us are about siblings and grief.*

These two experiences have given me unique insight into sibling grief. I've experienced how the death of two different siblings, at two different times of my life, and in two unique sets of circumstances has impacted my family and me. These two death experiences were completely different. My understanding and the impact these deaths, based on my age when they died, was completely different. But, both of my sisters' deaths had a profound impact on my life.

10 Things Everyone Should Know About Siblings & Grief

There are many things people need to learn about siblings and grief. Here are ten *I* would like everyone to know.

1) Sibling grief is often misunderstood—by parents, families, friends, and counselors, even by the siblings themselves. So much focus is given to the parents of the lost child, to the children of the lost parent, to the spouse of the lost adult sibling. And, rightly so. But, what about the siblings? What about the ones who, like me, have grown up with the deceased? Who believed they would have a lifetime with their sister or brother? Who now face that lifetime alone?

2) Sibling grief “has been almost entirely overlooked in the literature on bereavement.”^[1] It's no wonder, therefore, that even mental health providers misunderstand sibling grief. How are families supposed to know how to help siblings through grief if even the research on the subject is lacking?

3) Common emotions siblings may feel when a brother or sister dies include:

- Guilt
- Abandonment
- Loss of Innocence
- Fallout from the Family
- Somatic Symptoms
- Fears and Anxiety

4) Siblings may feel “trumped” by the grief of other family members. I sure felt this way, and it’s common, since the focus is usually on the parents if a young sibling dies and on the surviving spouse or children if an older sibling dies. This may lead to minimizing a sibling’s own loss.

5) Young siblings lose innocence when a brother or sister dies, which may lead to fears and anxiety; “Survivor guilt” is also common. Experiencing death as a child becomes a lifelong experience of processing and understanding the loss. Children grow up with grief, understanding more as they get older. Fear of death or dying is common. Anxiety or worry about getting sick may become prevalent. In young siblings, guilt for provocative behavior or for unacceptable feelings (jealousy) is common. Young children may think, before the death, “I wish my brother were dead!” then believe they somehow caused it to happen. Older siblings may wonder, “Why them and not me?” Because siblings are usually similar in age, it can bring up many questions about the sibling’s own life and death, and guilt along with it.

6) Surviving children do, unfortunately, end up taking the fallout from parents’, siblings’, or other family members’ mistakes, emotional blowups, or neglect. In many ways, siblings often experience a double loss: the loss of their sister or brother, and the loss of their parents (at least for a time, but sometimes, permanently). I know this from experience. Though my parents did the best they could, after my youngest sister died, our entire family was different. My mom retreated into her own grief, staying in her room, depressed and sick for years. My dad retreated into work and anything to take his mind from his pain. Luckily, I was already on my own, in college, at the time; my younger siblings weren’t so lucky. At 9, 11, 14, and 17 years old, they grew up with a completely different set of parents than I had. I tried to step in as a “parent” figure over the years, but the separation from my parents in their time of need profoundly influenced their lives. It profoundly influenced *my* life. It profoundly changed our family.

7) Siblings may manifest somatic symptoms of grief, including symptoms that mimic the deceased sibling’s symptoms. Especially in young children, symptoms like stomachaches, headaches, nightmares, body pain, digestive symptoms, and trouble sleeping are common. These should be seen as symptoms of grief, and hopefully, an adult in the family can help siblings work through their feelings and show them how to grieve.

8) Having someone explain the loss to younger siblings, to be there for them and help them grieve, is ideal. Little children don’t comprehend death in the same way adults do. It is therefore important to have somebody who can walk them through the loss and the grief process, to explain it wasn’t their fault, to validate what they feel. If parents aren’t able to do so, another family member or friend may, and hopefully will, step in.

9) Even adult siblings will feel the loss deeply. The pain isn’t less simply because you’re older. In fact, in many ways, it’s harder. You understand more. You know what it means to die, and you will feel the pain of the loss in a different way than young children, who still haven’t developed abstract thinking and understanding, will. Grieve your loss. If you’re not sure how, here are some ideas.

10) My best advice for siblings in grief: Feel the loss as long as you need to, and give yourself time to heal. Because sibling loss is so misunderstood, you may receive messages that make you feel like you should be “over it by now.” They don’t know sibling loss. Now, you do. It takes time. Lots of time. It’s not about “getting over” the loss of a sibling. You don’t get over it. You create your life and move on, when you’re ready. But you will always remember your brother or sister—the missing piece of your life.

I once heard someone say, “When a parent dies, you lose the past. When a child dies, you lose the future. When a sibling dies, you lose the past *and* the future.” That is the grief of a sibling—grief for what was past, and grief for what should have been the future. Just remember these things, my friends. Remember to be there for siblings in grief. You can be the difference in helping them create a bright future, even if they now must do so without their beloved sibling.

Be sure to check out Dr. Hibbert’s Amazon Bestseller,

This is How We Grow—available now on Amazon.com!