



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

## **KAMLOOPS CHAPTER**



# *Christmas / Winter 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.

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

### NEXT MEETINGS

June 6, 2018  
July 4, 2018  
August 8, 2018  
September 5, 2018

### 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.

And I will light a candle for you.  
To shatter all the darkness  
and bless the times we knew.  
Like a beacon in the night.  
The flame will burn bright  
and guide us on our way.  
Oh, today I light a candle for you.

*~ Paul Alexander ~*



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# *Editors Ramblings....*



It's that time of year again when we are getting ready for The Compassionate Friends of Kamloops 33<sup>rd</sup> annual Candle Lighting Service on December 2, 2018 @ 2:00 pm at the Kamloops United Church, 421 St. Paul Street, Kamloops. You will see reference to this event in this newsletter and in a special attachment letting you know how it all works. This is especially helpful if this will be the first time you will attend.

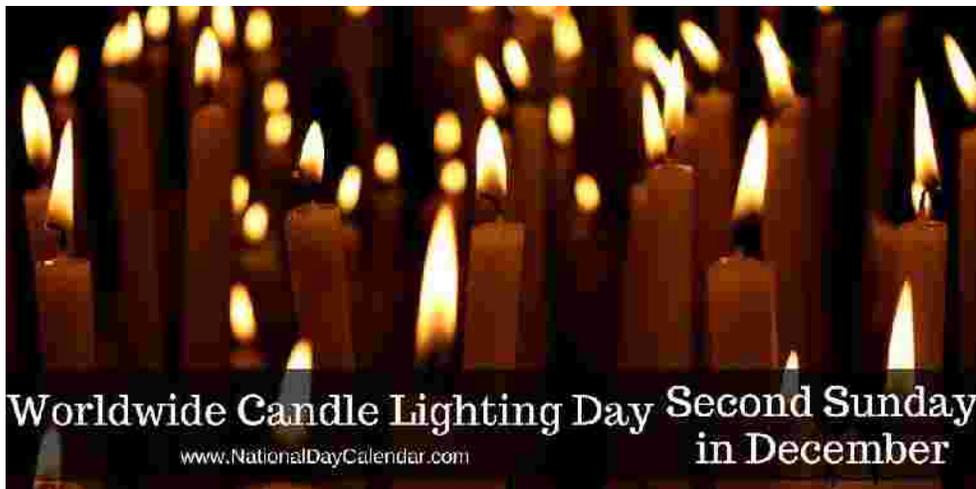
This is our big event of the year and as you might imagine there is a great deal of advance preparation and a great deal of set up on the day. There is much to be done and some extra help is much appreciated.

Some of the set up includes putting up and decorating the Christmas Tree, handing out candles, putting up tables in the reception area and helping to prepare food tables and silent auction tables. Also there is take down and clean up at the end. If there are folk who would like to bring along some baking that would be appreciated too.

As you can see this is the 33<sup>rd</sup> year for this event. Some of our faithful helpers now take a winter vacation, grow older, grow up, move away, or sadly pass away. If others feel that they have reached a point in their journey where they would like to take a part in helping to put together this event your assistance would be welcomed.

If you feel you could take part it would be helpful to hear from you beforehand. Contact can be made by emailing me, Arleen, at [waskamloops@shaw.ca](mailto:waskamloops@shaw.ca) or calling Carol at 250-374-6030.

Arleen Simmonds TCF Kamloops



Worldwide Candle Lighting Day Second Sunday  
in December  
[www.NationalDayCalendar.com](http://www.NationalDayCalendar.com)

Worldwide Candle Lighting Day is celebrated annually on the second Sunday in December.

This day was created by The Compassionate Friends organization in 1997 as a way for families and friends to honour the memories of children who have left this world too soon. What was once a small internet tribute, has grown into a worldwide wave of light as candles are lit in each time zone.

Please join us beginning at 7:00 p.m. December 9<sup>th</sup> local time, and light a candle to honor the memories of a child or children who have passed.

**FYI . . . .**



***TCF Kamloops Annual Candlelighting Memorial Service***

***Sunday December 2, 2018 @ 2:00 pm***

***Kamloops United Church 421 St. Paul Street***

***There is a separate letter of invitation attached to this newsletter. Please read and respond***

***before December 2nd.***

**TCF Kamloops Facebook Page: The Compassionate Friends Of Kamloops**

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

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

**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)**

**Change Of Information: If you have a change in your contact information—postal mailing address, email address, telephone, name, etc. or wish to be removed from our contact list please let us know by emailing Arleen at [waskamloops@shaw.ca](mailto:waskamloops@shaw.ca) or 250-374-2135 or Carol at 250-374-6030.**

**This newsletter is available electronically if you can help us by doing this please contact us as above.**

**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 ...*

“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*

There is no despair so absolute as that which comes with the first moments of our first great sorrow, when we have not yet known what it is to have suffered and be healed, to have despaired and have recovered hope. ~ *George Eliot*

When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love which is not simply a recollection of a bygone past but a living force which sustains us in the present. Through memory, love transcends the limit of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives. ~ *Henri Nouwen*

The holiest of all holidays are those kept by ourselves in silence and apart; the secret anniversaries of the heart.  
~*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

Hope is like a road in the country; there never was a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence. ~ *Lin Yutang*

“The death of a child is so painful, both emotionally and spiritually, That I truly wondered if my heart and spirit would ever heal. I soon learned that I could help myself best by helping others.” ~ *Barbara Bush*

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

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

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

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

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*

There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. Yet that will be the beginning. ~*Louis L'Amour*

“Adversity is like a strong wind. It tears away from us all but the things that cannot be torn, so that we see ourselves as we really are.” ~ *Memoirs of a Geisha*

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# How The Death Of A Baby Changes You Forever

During those intensely painful days after my daughter Laura was stillborn five years ago, I remember feeling that I was at a crossroads in my life-that two separate paths lay before me: I could either let this tragedy destroy my life and break my spirit or I could find a way to make something positive come out of my daughter's death.

Fortunately for me, I inherited the stubborn gene from my parents, so giving up on life really wasn't a viable option for me. So, by default, I gravitated toward the second alternative: finding a way to make something good come out of this most searing of losses.

While I would never have wished this on myself-the death of a baby is too big a price to pay for any personal growth experience-I have been forever changed by the experience of losing Laura. In many ways, I'm a better person than I was before that fateful day five years ago when a tiny piece of my heart was forever broken.

For one thing, I'm more compassionate. I feel an immediate bond with any parent who has experienced the death of a baby as well as anyone else who is grieving the death of someone significant in their life, be it a spouse, a parent, or a close friend. My volunteer work with grieving parents and the articles and books I've written on miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death have allowed me to make a difference in the lives of other parents who've experienced the tragedy of losing a much-wanted baby. That means a lot to me.

In terms of other ways I've been affected by the death of my daughter, I'd say I'm more aware of what it feels like to be really connected to someone-heart-to-heart and soul-to-soul. I have a very special friend whose baby died shortly after mine did. The two of us spent a lot of time together in the weeks that followed, sharing our grief about the babies who would never come home. We don't see each other as often these days-we've both insanelly busy with work and family-but each time we meet for lunch, it's like we've never been apart. That speaks to the powerful bond that we developed during the most nightmarish time of our lives.

Another perk: I'm less of a control freak. After all, I've learned the hard way that some things are out of your control-and some things can't be fixed, no matter how desperately you want to put the pieces back together again. As a card-carrying Type A, it's been healthy for me to learn to let go of things-well, at least a little!

Along the same vein, I've come to terms with my fear of death. Being forced to deal with the death of my child has forced me to confront my own mortality. As a result, I'm more at peace with the knowledge that life doesn't last forever-and more inclined to make the most of today.

I've also learned how to put things in perspective. A leaky ceiling, a missed deadline, a squabble with my husband, or a minor fender bender no longer qualify as a crisis for me. I now save the "crisis" label for the real life-and-death situations.

Finally, I'm better able to celebrate the wonder in everyday life. Rather than looking forward to that magical day when my mortgage is paid off, I reach my goal weight, and I have a book or two on the bestseller list (hey, a girl can dream, can't she?), I'm more inclined to delight in what's happening in the here and now: to savour the joy I feel when my youngest child, Ian, hugs my leg and says, "I really love you, Mom" and to enjoy the way my heart lifts when the telephone rings and there's a special friend on the other end of the line.

These are just a few of the gifts that Laura gave to me during her brief journey through my life. These gifts are her legacy to me.

By Ann Douglas

Author : TRYING AGAIN: A GUIDE TO PREGNANCY AFTER MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH, AND INFANT LOSS (Taylor Publishing, 2000) and THE MOTHER OF ALL PREGNANCY BOOKS (Hungry Minds, 2002)  
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Phone: 705-742-3265 Printed with permission from Grief Watch <http://www.griefwatch.com>



## Thoughts from a Parent who Lost an Older Child

" Perhaps I had my child longer than you had yours, but thirty-eight years does not seem long. Perhaps there are more memories to hold in my heart, but I know yours are just as dear to you as mine are to me, even if your memories are memories of only one or two days. Your dreams for your child are gone. So are mine. Never did I imagine that I would have to deal with my child's death instead of him having to deal with mine. In thirty-eight years there was time to give me a legacy of three grandchildren. This is a very special blessing and one that I do not take for granted. My mission is to sustain the relationship with my three granddaughters who now live three thousand miles away from me.

My child died from a terminal illness that is not one of the "acceptable" diseases. My child died of alcohol and drug addiction. The tools for remission of this disease are placed in the hands of the person who has the disease. Even with the help of four treatment centers, the recovery was not to be.

One day at a time, my recovery is taking place. The pain, after two and one half years, has gone to a place where it can be tolerated. My story and my age may be different from yours, but the bottom line is the same: my child has gone to a place where I cannot go and I miss him so much. The pain of grief is still there, but I am living life one day at a time enriched because my son came through my body into life.

*by ~ Helen Godwin, TCF/ Orange Park Jacksonville, FL*

## A Holiday Memorial

For many people the candle is a symbol of something special. When you are a child, candles are equated with birthday cakes. When you are first in love, a candle is a symbol of romance. Candles are often lit in churches to symbolize a religious celebration. During this time of preparation for Christmas, we light Advent candles. Sometimes we light candles when the power goes out and there is thunder, lightning and darkness around us. Grief is like the darkness and so we light candles to give us hope through the difficult days. The lighting of candles is an important symbol and ritual which is very much a part of our grieving process. These candles act as reminders that we are grieving the loss of a very special someone who was a part of our lives. You may use the following ritual in a support group, in a family gathering, or where people have gathered to remember and to reflect. Use four candles: one for your grief, one for your courage, one for your memories, and one for your love.

### **Light the first candle:**

This candle represents your grief. The pain of losing someone is so intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for that person.

### **Light the second candle:**

This candle symbolizes your courage to confront your sorrow, to comfort each other, and to change your lives.

### **Light the third candle:**

This light is in memory of the person that died—the times you laughed, the times you cried, the times you were angry with each other, the silly things you did, the caring and joy you gave to each other.

### **Light the fourth candle:**

This candle symbolizes love as you enter this holiday season. Day by day you cherish the special place in your hearts that will always be reserved for the person that died. You are grateful for the gift that person's living brought to each of you. by ~ Marilyn Hollinger, MSW, M



## SHOPPING & GRIEVING . . . . .

Unfortunately after a profound and shattering loss, life inexorably marches forward. We are forced to meet our needs and those of our families no matter how weary and confused we are. Those early trips down the food aisles can defeat the bravest among us. Reminders of our loved ones shout to us at every turn. Favourite cereals, treats, hot sauce, pancake syrup, maybe it was the Oreos. They are all there waiting to trigger the tears and either send us into hiding behind a display or rushing out, leaving the shopping cart behind.

I remember going to a mall to visit the drugstore, I encountered a gang of young people acting out very badly, shoving, shouting and cursing. My reaction was one of outrage and anger. I had to get a grip on myself so I wouldn't shout out what I was thinking. Why is my precious son dead while you are roaming free to be your very worst? Why is he not here and you are? It didn't occur to me that they were precious children to some other parents and would be missed. Grief and anger, part of the shopping experience.

Another time I was passing through a store when a woman I hadn't seen for some time approached me. She said she was sorry for my loss but I must be getting over it by now, it must be a couple of months. My only reaction was mind numbing speechlessness and a very quick exit.

That first Christmas was exceptionally hard. In spite of going through the motions like a robot, my feelings were always close to the surface, almost anything could trigger them. One day I decided to go shopping for some black pants to get me through the season. I entered Sears, feet dragging, weary beyond measure. I grabbed the first likely pair of pants and went into the change room. As usual in those days I tried to avoid the mirror unable to look at that pain riddled reflection. I slowly undressed and started to try on the pants. There I was suspended on one leg struggling to get into the pants when it happened; "I'll Be Home For Christmas," wafting over the PA system. I fled that dressing room in tears and surprisingly I arrived home fully clothed. No new pants that Christmas. It really didn't matter.

I think about all the newly bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents this Christmas who are struggling to carry on for each other. We stand in front of Christmas wrapped in the memories of Christmas past, struggling with Christmas present and the painful anticipation of all the Christmases future without our loved ones. We will get through, we will make Christmas again when we are ready. Some new traditions may emerge but nothing can replace the memories we carry forward and enjoy recalling year after year.

Wishing everyone a gentle, peace-filled Christmas. May love be what you remember the most.

Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops



# The Holidays, How We Survived

By Bart Sumner [Healing-improv.org](http://Healing-improv.org)

We all know that the holidays create stress and expectations that can often make the family visits and busy schedules seem more painful than festive, but after the death of a close family member, the holidays become more of a challenge than ever. In our case, losing our 10 year-old son David in the beginning of October 2009 poised a particularly difficult task. Halloween was coming, followed quickly by his little sister Abby's 8th birthday, then Thanksgiving (where there would be very little to be thankful for) and finally Christmas. It was like staring down the barrel of a cannon loaded with pain and heartache. Holiday time has always been so festive and joyous in our house, but like many of the newly bereaved I have encountered since, we didn't know where to start. The following paragraphs chronicle some of what we did. Perhaps there are bits of our journey that will give you solace, or ideas, or even a glimmer of hope that others have faced this same dilemma and found a way forward. Take from my tale what you can use, and ignore the rest, because though none of us travel through grief in the same way, we can all find strength in our shared nightmares.

It was our daughter Abby that proved to be the lynch pin to us moving forward. My wife, Leslie, and I were totally devastated by losing David, but we knew that even with all we had lost, Abby had lost the most. Her big brother and her were great friends. They relied on each other for everything. Even though we were operating in a massive haze of sadness, the one thing we both could see was that we did not want life to stop for Abby. She needed us, and as normal a life as possible, more now than ever before. Thankfully the weekend before David died I had decorated the front yard for Halloween, otherwise pulling all the Styrofoam gravestones and pin-up ghosts and ghouls from storage would have been impossible for me. Abby had already decided she wanted to be a witch for Halloween, and that's what she did. We did the whole trick or treating thing, and visited friends' houses. We did exactly what she wanted, which was what she would have done if her brother were still alive. We talked about how David would have loved it. We joked that if there really were things such as ghosts, surely David would be hanging out with us. It was painful, full of tears, laughter, lots of comfort candy eating, and exactly what we needed to do. We kept moving forward, day by day, moment by moment. A week later was her birthday party. She wanted to go to a restaurant where you could order at the table on computer screens. We took her and several friends to the restaurant, only to discover the restaurant had closed the week before. More disappointment! But we improvised, found another fun restaurant, and the party rolled on. Leslie and I were going through the motions, but for a 7-year-old little girl, it was exactly what she needed. She was sad David wasn't around, but her life kept moving forward.

Thanksgiving was harder. A day built around the idea of thanks became very sombre. We watched the Macy's parade and tried to remain festive, but the idea of giving thanks was difficult. We set a place for David at the table that year, and when it came time to eat we talked about all the foods David liked or didn't like, and we shared stories of him. With tears we said thanks for having been given the chance to love him while we could, and thanks that we were together to face the heartache of losing him, but it was not exactly the best of turkey days. And of course looming after Thanksgiving was the mother of all holidays, Christmas, and there was decorating, and singing, and gift buying and giving to be done.

It never occurred to us not to go forward with Christmas full steam ahead. As I said, we were living for Abby now, doing all we could to make sure David's death was not going to destroy her life as well. Dragging the boxes of Christmas gear out of storage was rough. It seemed every figurine, every "Ho Ho Ho", and every sleigh bell rang "David" when it made a noise. We shared a lot of stories as we decorated. Every time we would think of David, we would share it, and that meant we talked about him constantly. But the stories were full of laughter and smiles, even though they more often than not also brought tears. We put up the tree, and this year with every ornament that went up, we shared the story behind it. Some were very old and had been in the family for years, and we spoke of where it came from, and the newer ones we recounted when and where we had purchased them. That night after Abby had gone to bed, I lay on the landing overlooking our tree, the same spot I had laid the year before with David when I had shared what Christmas had meant to me as a child. I spoke to him again, and told him how hard it was to not have him there. It was excruciating and comforting at the same time. What was happening, though I didn't consciously realize it at the time, was that I was indoctrinating the stories of David into my stories of Christmas.

As the years have passed I realize that David is now part of our golden memories of Christmas. These memories shine every year, and bring smiles to our faces. There is always a feeling of melancholy to these memories, but they warm our hearts and remind us of love shared that goes way back, generations deep, and which never dies. Christmas memories are the folklore of a family, and that only becomes dearer as every year passes. It goes without saying that having David be a part of that tradition so soon is unnatural, but it makes perfect sense that within those dreamy memories of love, fun, and family he lives forever young and happy.



continued.....



Many people facing their first holiday season tell me they don't know how they can possibly do it this year. They say they can't put up the tree, or sing the songs, because it will make them sad. Of course it will make you sad. I guess my experience was that even though we cried a lot of tears that Christmas, but they were tears of love. They were the tears we all must go through to move forward. Leaving Christmas in the boxes would have just been another way to try and avoid the heartache, which is something we can't do if we hope to keep living. I know it's hard, but if you can muster the incredible courage to try and go through the motions, you may discover that though Christmas morning will never be the same again, it can still be rewarding. Don't let the death you've had to accept take away your life and joys. Give yourself the gift of choosing to move forward. No one finds a way through grief without the conscious decision to keep living. It's one of the hardest things we must face when grieving, but essential to finding tomorrow again.

As I said, this is what worked for us, and I know it will not work for everyone. We were fortunate to have each other, and many of you reading this may not have others around to lean on as we did. Perhaps finding a way to give to others at church, or a homeless shelter, or simply dropping a few coins in the Salvation Army's red pot will help. Reach out to others. For those that have lost children, find a World Wide Candle Lighting Event with the Compassionate Friends or a similar memorial event, and share your love and stories. It's the season of giving, and nothing can help you find the love more than helping others, even when you feel you need the help most. Know that I wish nothing but good will and hope for a brighter tomorrow for all of you. I hope that this season, you hold tightly to the love and warm memories of the past, and reach forward to your own future. Peace, Light, and Laughter to you and yours.

**Dear Friend**



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

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

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

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

Renee Duvall  
Lakes Area Chapter, MI

## *A Candle for Your Child*

Today you will light a little white candle  
and say aloud your child's name.  
For one fateful day, your life was changed.  
The holidays will never be the same.

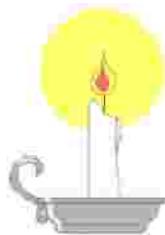
Today you will light a little white candle  
and hang an ornament on a special tree.  
Who would have thought you would be in this place?  
Sharing your child as a memory.

Today you will light a little white candle,  
a small gesture to some others.  
Here we share the pain of our loss,  
with Mothers, Fathers, Sisters & Brothers.

Today you will light a little white candle,  
and as you gaze into the flame,  
may comforting memories flood your mind,  
as you proudly say your child's name.

Today you will light a little white candle,  
With us your compassionate friends...  
For all of us know that though they're not here,  
our Love for Them NEVER ends.

Tammy Tobac for TCF service 1996  
in memory of my brother Tommy Dolby



## A SIBLING DIES ~ For Don

by Nicole Dean

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

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

Well, I'm entitled. I'm a survivor after all. One doesn't get there on a water slide, if you know what I mean.

When Christmas rolls around, I do my dance with grief once again. Some years, it's a waltz; other years a tango. It doesn't seem to matter if it's two, twenty or thirty years since my brother died, I get out my dancing shoes. I don't go looking for pain like some wacky masochist. It finds me.

Some years I announce—around November 25th, "I'm over this." I act accordingly. I shop for Christmas cards and don't go near my dancing shoes. It doesn't matter. They find me.

It's not like I didn't have therapy. I've had dance therapy, art therapy, regular therapy, travel therapy, friendship therapy, biofeedback/hypnosis therapy, creampuff therapy, swimming therapy, forgiveness therapy, spiritual community therapy, law school therapy...Law School therapy? The fun had to end somewhere.

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

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

We never spoke of Don after his death. The community ostracized us; my father took a trip down devil's lane, and my mother mourned by brother until the day she died. I'm sad to say that we never had Don's picture in our home again, because the pain was too severe. It seems we could not get past it. We went to our separate corners and quietly mourned. It was different years ago; so much remained hidden. Self-healing groups were non-existent, shrinks were stigmas, and the Catholic Church unforgiving.

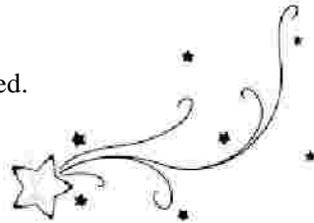
I couldn't save him. I was the last person he talked with on Christmas Eve. For months, I barely spoke and relived the shock daily. I ate a lot. Death by mashed potatoes. That was sure to bring him back. I retreated into a private world for several years where if I wasn't dead, I'd sure like to be. This is grief. And it does soften over time. It softens like water softens rock, in it's flowing, gentle, rushing, mysterious way. It softens like a sweet whisper of a memory that lulls you to sleep, knowing that love knits the bones of despair together, tighter, stronger, more curious, more delicious than ever before. Knowing that the fires of your being burn the dross of despair. Knowing that the chamber of the heart is strong beyond measure and can take it and transform the pain into joy.

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



## *Blessing At The End Of The Year*

As this year draws to its end,  
We give thanks for the gifts it brought,  
And how they became inlaid within  
Where neither time nor tide can touch them.  
The days when the veil lifted  
And the soul could see delight;  
When a quiver caressed the heart  
In the sheer exuberance of being here.  
Surprises that came awake  
In forgotten corners of old fields  
Where expectation seems to have quenched.  
The slow, brooding times  
When all was awkward  
And the wave in the mind



Pierced every sore with salt.  
The darkened days that stopped  
The confidence of the dawn.  
Days when beloved faces shone brighter  
With light from beyond themselves;  
And from the granite of some secret sorrow  
A stream of buried tears loosened.  
We bless this year for all we learned,  
For all we loved and lost  
And for the quiet way it brought us  
Nearer to our invisible destinations.

And So It Is  
—**John O'Donohue**

## *So What Does a New Year Mean?*

In simplistic terms, when life was uncomplicated by grief it meant starting over...a clean slate, making resolutions to clean up our act. Some of us like the feeling of getting a fresh start and forgetting the past. We like believing that, during this next year, things will be better.

But when we are grieving, our tendency is to stand at the threshold of a new year looking back rather than forward. We fear that to walk through that door into a new year means leaving our lost loved one behind. To move on seems like an act of betrayal of, or abandonment of, the one we love. There may also be a fear of forgetting, or maybe a fear of letting go. We experience a contradiction: we want to feel better, but at what cost?

Remember, January 1st is just another day. It has no meaning or power except the meaning we choose to give to it. Acknowledging our special needs as grieving persons, we can choose to make softer resolutions for the new year— resolutions that can still be challenging, yet are not unrealistic. Why not frame your New Year's resolutions in terms of hope for a gentler year; for gaining control of your emotions; for better understanding of the grief process and what we can learn about ourselves as we journey through it? Why not resolve to enter into a future that can be good, even though it lacks all that we might desire, and offers a hope that we will be at peace with sorrow and enjoy life even though we grieve.

We've learned a lot this past year. We have experienced corporate, public grief, following the September 11 attacks. And we have experienced personal grief. We know we are not the only ones who grieve, though sometimes we have felt all alone. And still we survive, even though at times we questioned if the struggle was worth it. We have tasted the bitterness of loss but have not allowed it to destroy us. And together we will rise out of the ashes of grief and say YES to life. None of us can do it alone. We need each other to lean on and celebrate our newness.

Our hope for those in the throes of fresh grief is that someday your days will again bring you more joy... more mu-sic...more laughter...more gratitude...more friends...more surprises...more memories.

—**Pat Schwiebert, R.N., [www.griefwatch.com](http://www.griefwatch.com),**