

FOCUS ONLINE

Bereaved families offering friendship, support and understanding to each other

No 122

Jan-Feb-March 2005

Supported by SEAHS

FOCUS ONLINE is an edited edition of the printed news letter published for TCF Members. Surnames and personal phone numbers have been removed from this edition to protect members' privacy. Annual subscriptions to the printed news letter are available.

FOCUS ONLINE is intended for browsing online and downloading. You are welcome to print or forward copies of this edition to other people.

A Publication by the City and Metropolitan Chapter on behalf of
The Compassionate Friends NSW Inc.

TCF was founded in England in 1969 by Canon Dr. Simon Stephens OBE RN	NSW Patron Dame Joan Sutherland OM AC DBE
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TCF BEREAVED PARENT CENTRE

Room 404, 4th Floor, 32 York Street, Sydney

Mailing Address:

TCF, GPO BOX 1303, SYDNEY, NSW, 2001

TELEPHONE: 02 9290 2355

Freecall: 1800 671 621

Fax: 02 9290 2445

Email: tcf@bigpond.com.au

Website: www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au

THE CENTRE IS LOCATED AT 32 York Street, Sydney, just around the corner from King Street and is approximately halfway between Town Hall and Wynyard train stations.

THE BEREAVED PARENT CENTRE OFFICE HOURS ARE 10.30 AM TO 3.00 PM MONDAY TO FRIDAY.

Bereaved parent volunteers are available at the Centre during these hours. We welcome your visit or telephone call (freecall for country NSW callers).

AFTER HOURS: Please note you may leave a message on the answering machine at the Centre. You need not feel alone, please contact the telephone friends via the Centre.

If you are planning to visit the Centre it may be wise to telephone first. On occasions at short notice because of illness or family commitments, volunteer staff will not be available to open the Centre.

THIS ISSUE OF FOCUS NEWSLETTER HAS BEEN PARTLY SPONSORED BY:

RENAE and PETER
in loving memory of
T.J.

13.8.86 – 25.9.04

It's the little things we do and say
That mean so much as we go our way.
A kindly deed can lift a load
From weary shoulders on the road.

- Willa Hoey

ANNUAL REGISTRATION AND SUBSCRIPTION NOW DUE FOR 2005

The annual registration of our members is a vital requirement for the funding we receive from the Government. You may still register as a member of The Compassionate Friends, and thereby assist us in our outreach to other bereaved families, even if you no longer wish to receive Focus. Families are asked to pay an annual subscription fee of \$27.00 including GST to continue to receive FOCUS after their first complimentary six months has expired. Please use the combined **MEMBERSHIP** and **SUBSCRIPTION FORM** enclosed with this newsletter, and return it to the Bereaved Parent Centre as soon as possible.

*SPECIAL THOUGHTS AND
WISHES TO ALL PARENTS
AND SIBLINGS FOR A
PLEASANT AND PEACEFUL
2005*

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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FOCUS EDITORIAL TEAM: Pam , Evelyn , Judith , Robyn and Heather (reserve).

Mailing List typing: Jean and Sue .

The Focus Editorial Team reserves the right to edit and publish articles submitted to Focus at its discretion. Material submitted may not always be included in the next Focus to be printed. TCF Newsletter Editors in Australia and Worldwide may reprint material from this newsletter providing credit is given to the author and TCF NSW Inc.

CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES AND CHAPTER NEWS:

**WEDNESDAY
13TH APRIL 2005**

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

'We need not walk alone'

Bereaved parents are warmly invited to come along to The Compassionate Friends grief support groups listed below. At TCF sharing groups, you will meet others who understand and care. There is no pressure to talk if you do not wish to.

The Bereaved Parent Centre is at 32 York Street, Sydney

Death in Younger Children

Please phone the Centre if you wish to attend on the following days:

Sharing: 1st Monday of each month 11am–2pm
7th March, 4th April, 2nd May

Death in Older Children

Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month 11am – 2pm
17th March, 21st April, 19th May

Any parent who has lost a child is welcome to this group.

Suicide Support at the Centre

Any parent whose son or daughter has died by suicide is invited to the 'Survivors of Suicide' Group

Meetings: 2nd Wednesday of each month 11am–2pm
9th March, 13th April, 11th May

SUBURBAN GROUPS

Blacktown – *Survivors of Suicide* S.O.S.

Venue: The Neil Pigram Room, Toongabbie Community Centre, Cnr. Targo & Toongabbie Roads, Toongabbie

Meetings: 1st Wednesday in the month 7.30–9.30 pm
2nd March, 6th April, 4th May

Contacts: Heather and Anne – in the Centre on a Tuesday or leave a message at the Centre

Monday – Friday

**WE ARE SORRY THAT WE CANNOT
ACCEPT CHILDREN AT THIS MEETING**

I do hope that everyone managed to get through the Christmas and New Year season without too much heartbreak. We all understand how devastating it would have been for the newly bereaved families. My love and thoughts are with you all. May I wish you all peace of heart and mind and good health in 2005. - Heather

Campbelltown Chapter

Venue: Campbelltown Community Health Centre

Cnr. Moore Oxley Bypass and Cordeaux Street, Campbelltown

Meetings: 1st Friday in the month at 7.30 pm
4th March, 1st April, 6th May

Contact: Cheryl & Joy

Eastern Suburbs Chapter

Venue: E.J. Ward Centre, 189 Underwood Street,

Paddington

Meetings: 3rd Thursday in the month at 7.30pm
17th March, 21st April, 19th May

Contact: Frances

If the time and venue suits you, please come – you will be very welcome. - Frances

Miranda Chapter

Venue: Endeavour Room, Miranda Community Centre, Karimbla Road, Miranda

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
8th March, 12th April, 10th May

Contact: Valda

Miranda Craft Group: Everyone is welcome, please phone Valda for details.

Wishing all Chapter members and friends the very best for 2005, as we continue sharing and caring together.

Take care. Love, Valda

Silverdale/Warragamba Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre, Warragamba

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
8th March, 12th April, 10th May

Contact: Mary
Theresa

Thank you to all the parents who attended the meetings in 2004, it meant so much being supportive to one another in our grief. We look forward to seeing you again in 2005 for our sharing and caring evening meetings. Special thoughts to everyone. Love, Mary and Theresa

Turrumurra/Ryde Chapter

Venue: Thornleigh Community Centre
Cnr. Phyllis & Central Ave, Thornleigh

Meetings: 1st Tuesday in the month at 7.45 pm
1st March, 5th April, 3rd May

Contact: Richard & Lana

A gift to be cherished,

*True friendship is a treasure
beyond compare.*

**CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES
AND CHAPTER NEWS:
WEDNESDAY,
13TH APRIL 2005
COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS**

Bowral Chapter

Venue: Lecture Room, Old Bowral Hospital
Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 7.30 pm
21st March, 18th April, 16th May
Contacts: Liz Sandra

Central Coast Chapter

Venue: Our Lady of the Rosary Parish Centre
(non denominational), Cnr. Glennie St
and Henry Parry Drive, Wyoming
(parking available)
Meetings: Last Wednesday in the month at 7.00
pm
30th March, 27th April, 25th May
Contact: Anne
Lynne
Marilyn

Cessnock Area

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Gail

Cowra Chapter

Contacts: Marina
Dell

Dubbo Chapter

Venue: The Crest Building, Welchman Street,
Dubbo
Meetings: 2nd Saturday in the month at 2 pm
12th March, 9th April, 14th May
Contact: Judy
*We welcome members to our share and care
group.*

Forbes Chapter

Venue: Van on the Park, Court Street, Forbes
Meetings: 1st Thursday in the month at 12.30 pm
(luncheon) 3rd March, 7th April, 5th May
Contact: Gwen Robert

Grafton Chapter

Venue: Pullins Centre (next to Crown Hotel),
3-7 Prince Street, Grafton
Meetings: Last Tuesday in the month 10 – 12 noon
29th March, 26th April, 31st May
Contact: Shirley
*Everyone who has lost a child is welcome for a casual
chat and “cuppa” at our care and share group, where
you will find love and compassion in your grief.*

Griffith Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood House, 80 Beneremdah
Street, Griffith
Meetings: 3rd Sunday in the month
20th March, 17th April, 15th May
Contact: Lorna

Inverell Chapter

Meetings: Meetings are now by arrangement
Contact: Heather & Graham
Wilma

Kiama Chapter

Venue: Meeting Room No. 1, Kiama District
Hospital, Bonaira Street, Kiama
Meetings: 3rd Wednesday in the month 9.30 –
12.15
16th March, 20th April, 18th May
Contact: Joan

*My thanks to our members for their support throughout
the year. We had our Christmas lunch and a nice day
together. This year is the first one without their child
for some of our new members – we can only be with
them in love and support and understanding and
knowing there is always loving arms to hold them
through Christmas. My thanks to our members for the
lovely flowers given to me at our lunch, to Edna for her
kind thoughts and to Christine for the beautiful gift of
an embroidered book. We will be supportive in 2005.
– Joan*

Kyogle Chapter

Venue: Community Health Centre
Meetings: By arrangement
Contacts: Jean
Roger and Linda

Lismore Chapter

Venue: Activities Centre, Lismore Baptist
Church
Cnr. Rotary Drive and Uralba St,
Lismore
Meetings: 3rd Thursday in the month at 7.30 pm
17th March, 21st April, 19th May
Contacts: Glennys
Dianne

*Lismore Chapter held its annual Candlelight Memorial
Service at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Bexhill on
Sunday 12th December 2004. It was a moving
experience for all those who attended, and as always, it
was especially meaningful for local members to be able
to welcome old friends and new from other Chapters in*

the region. A very special thanks to the members from Lismore Chapter who so ably took over the organisation and conduct of the service when I couldn't be there.
Love, Glennys

Macksville Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre,
27 Wallace Street, Macksville
Meetings: 3rd Tuesday in the month 10.00 am at
Short Order Coffee Shop, Princess
Street,
Macksville
1st Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
1st March, 5th April, 3rd May
Contacts: Joy Sandra
We welcome members to the share and care group.
Love to all, Joy and Sandra

Maclean Chapter

Meetings: By arrangement. Please contact
Narelle
for details.
Contact: Narelle

Murwillumbah Chapter

Meetings: 2nd Thursday in the month
10th March, 14th April, 12th May
Contact: Lorraine for details

Muswellbrook Chapter

Meetings: Meetings are now by arrangement
Contact: Jenny
Helen

Nelson Bay Chapter

Venue: Women's Information & Counselling
Services, Stockton Street, Nelson Bay
Meetings: Contact Bev on for dates
Contact: Bev

Newcastle Chapter

Venue: SIDS Drop-in Centre Tel: 02 4969
3171
78 Stewart Avenue, Hamilton South
Meetings: 3rd Tuesday in each month at 10.30 am
15th March, 19th April, 17th May
Contact: Debra
The SIDS Drop-in Centre is open each working
day from 9 am to 5 pm for our members for chats
and to borrow or return books etc.

Parkes Chapter

Venue: The Neighbourhood Centre
Currajong Street, Parkes
Meetings: 2nd Saturday every 2 months 2-4 pm
9th April, 4th June
Contacts: Judy and Tony
Come and join us to share our thoughts and feelings – a
friendly chat and a cuppa.

Singleton Chapter

Venue: The Neighbourhood Centre

6 Castlereagh Street, Singleton
Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 9.30 am
21st March, 18th April, 16th May
Night meetings by arrangement
Contacts: Pauline
Carol

Tamworth Chapter

Venue: "Vestry" (behind the Uniting Church),
Marius Street, Tamworth
Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 10am–
12noon
8th March, 12th April, 10th May
Contact: Peg
Helen

Taree Chapter

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Patricia

Tweed Heads/Southern Gold Coast Chapter

Meetings have been put on hold as Helen and
Rodney are currently travelling. "We would like
to thank everyone who has given us love and
support in the running of the Chapter and the loss
of our Michelle.

Also thank you to all those in Head Office,
Sydney, and to all other TCF facilitators – keep up
the good work. From TCF Tweed Heads, Rodney
and myself, we wish you all peace and love as we
all face another year together." -
Helen and Rodney

Wee Waa and District Chapter

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Rhonda

West Wyalong

Contact: Noela

A NEW YEAR

*A time for looking ahead and not behind;
a time for faith and not despair;
a time for long, great gulps
of hopeful expectation.
Drink deeply my friend,
so that fortified with promises it brings.
This year will keep you near fresh springs
of healing love
where you may come to weave
old and loving memories
with new understandings and acceptances and find
peace.*

By Shirley , TCF Oakbrook

USA

Dear Mums and Dads,
Please encourage your sons and daughters to contribute to the Sibling Page, articles or sharing thoughts etc. This would be very much appreciated.
Thank you.
Focus Team

MURWILLUMBAH CHAPTER

A special thank you to all the members of Murwillumbah Chapter for the very generous donation as a result of their raffle.



For many years the members of this Chapter have worked hard to make a success of their fundraising and it is always appreciated by all at TCF New South Wales.

Thank you again to everyone who supported this fundraising.

CURTAINS FOR SALE

A complete house full of beautiful as new floral lined curtains and tracks are for sale at the Bereaved Parent Centre, Sydney.

Make an offer to buy a set – a great opportunity for someone wanting to furnish a new home or redecorate a room.

Come to the Centre with your measurements – no reasonable offer refused!!

TCF is very grateful to Rosemary and Harry for their generous donation.

2005 PROPOSED DIARY DATES

We hope to hold a Residential Weekend (venue to be decided) and a Grief Support Evening in the outer Western Suburbs during 2005.

CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES AND CHAPTER NEWS:

WEDNESDAY,
13TH APRIL 2005

TCF News

RESULTS OF RAFFLE: Woolen Rug

Winner: JUNE

Ticket Orange D30

TCF 4TH INTERNATIONAL GATHERING

The Compassionate Friends of Canada is hosting the 4th International Gathering of The Compassionate Friends, and Grief Works, BC, brings you “**Connecting the Threads of Hope**”

August 17 – 21, 2005

Bayshore Hotel, Vancouver, BC

Registration Fees and Room Rates are yet to be determined.

Platform Speakers arranged by Darcie Sims, will be the best in the world of Grief
70 plus Workshops to choose from
An exclusive TCF Format will include Sharing Meetings, Butterfly Boutique, Quiet Room, Burden Basket, Hospitality Suite, and a “TCF Memory Walk” to name a few.

4th International Gathering Conference Co-chairs: Cathy Sosnowsky – TCF North Shore/Vancouver – Chapter Leader
Richard Lepinsky – TCF Canada/Victoria - President

The dates for *Focus* 2005 are as follows:

**PREPARED JANUARY
POSTED FEBRUARY
PREPARED APRIL
POSTED MAY
PREPARED JULY
POSTED AUGUST
PREPARED OCTOBER
POSTED NOVEMBER**

Ah, this beautiful world! Indeed, I know not what to think of it. Sometimes it is all gladness and sunshine, and Heaven itself lies not far off, and then it suddenly changes and is dark and sorrowful, and the clouds shut out the day. In the lives of the saddest of us there are bright days when we feel as if we could take the great world in our arms, then comes the gloomy hours, when all without or within is dismal, cold and dark. Believe me, every hurt has its secret sorrows, which the world knows not, and oftentimes we call a man cold when he is only sad.

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Dear Friends,

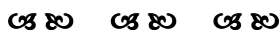
We have had a busy year with new members, having anything from 9 to 14 members attending each month.

Our Christmas luncheon was well attended, and we held it once again at "Greenhills on Tweed Receptions". We enjoyed our time together, hung butterflies on the Christmas tree, had our candle lighting and enjoyed a lovely meal as always. Once again in the most tranquil and peaceful setting on the Tweed River, with Mount Warning majestically overlooking it all, we released biodegradable helium balloons, with our messages attached, and an emotional but satisfying day was had by all. It is a special time of year and by having this day, it gives bereaved parents the opportunity to acknowledge the difficulty they experience, facing Christmas, and also the opportunity to dedicate some very special time to the memory of their child or children. I think this is why it is still so successful and well attended every year.

I am sending a cheque as a donation to TCF Sydney from the results of a raffle held on the day.

We wish you all at the Bereaved Parent Centre a very peaceful New Year.

Sincerely, Lorraine, Chapter Leader, TCF Murwillumbah NSW



From the Chapter Leader at Blacktown "Survivors of Suicide",

My group has been growing this year and now has some siblings too. Our speakers have really helped us. They have been from "Life Line", "Beyond Blue" and "Speranza". Brenda Robilliard, the Baptist Chaplain at Westmead Hospital, has met with my group and helped us in many ways. The evening Brenda spoke to us was very rewarding. Brenda deals with grief every day and is so approachable and understanding, she does so much for so many.

I have arranged with Brenda for a Mothers' Day service to be held in the Westmead Chapel within Westmead Hospital, on the Wednesday evening before Mothers' Day at 7pm, May 4th.

Thank you Nellie for the delicious suppers that you supply at every meeting and for all the kind donations from the group. You are all so supportive! A big thank you to Anne for her help

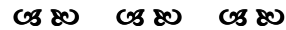
Sharing Thoughts ...

Dear Friends,

Please continue submitting articles and shared thoughts for Focus. We need your input - it is much appreciated by other members.

and support all year, and last but not least thank you to Evelyn and all the workers in the Centre for "Focus" and other information and support.

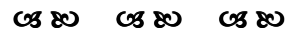
May I wish you all peace of heart and mind and good health in 2005. - Heather, SOS Chapter, Toongabbie



Thoughts from a dear TCF friend,

2004 wasn't by any means a perfect year for any of us, and of course fate doesn't touch the forelock to any mere date. But re-re-reading the front page of the last copy of "Focus" last night (as a means of settling down to sleep) I highlighted the word "safe" on the front page. Basically with each other (barring the personality problems that exist in ANY walk of life) we really ARE safe with each other. Many situations are more painful than others - some, to us, are filled with stark horror, while there are others who see OUR situation thus. But togetherness is everything, and the privilege of being able to let our hair down in safety is one of the greatest consolations of all.

- Freda, TCF Dorset UK, County Telephone Contact



Dear Friends,

Thank you to all for the love and support you give to so many families at the most painful time in their lives - without you there would be nowhere to go. From the bottom of my heart thank you.

Love, Annie, TCF NSW



EVERYONE NEEDS SOMEONE

People need people, and friends need friends
And we all need love, for a full life depends
Not on vast riches or great acclaim
Nor success or a worldly fame.
But just in knowing that someone cares,
And holds us close in their thoughts and prayers
For only the knowledge that we are understood
Makes every day feel wonderful and good.
We rob ourselves of life's greatest need
When we lock up our heart and fail to heed
The outstretched hand reaching to find
A kind spirit whose heart and mind
Are lonely and longing to somehow share
Our joys and sorrows and to make us aware
That life's completeness and richness depends
On the things we share with our loved ones and
friends.

Paul Webb

Taken from Pallicom

THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

The death of a child – any child anywhere – is an event so unacceptable and unnatural that the mind recoils in horror. When that death has happened to one's own child, the mind cannot grasp it, and the tongue refuses to say the words. It is as though we somehow feel if the word "death" is not spoken, it won't really have happened. So for weeks, sometimes months, we can't say the word "death". Instead we say we "lost" our child, or we seek some other euphemism to soften the reality and finality of what has happened.

Even now, four years after the death of my daughter Amanda, I sometimes feel like a toddler who is having a temper tantrum: if I scream loudly enough and long enough that this terrible reality is unacceptable, I can get my life back the way it was before the unthinkable happened. But, gradually, I have been able to identify another struggle going on in my thoughts: the feeling that if I could just get my mind around this terrible reality, if I could measure it and comprehend it, analyse it and catalogue its parts, then perhaps I could subdue this monster called "grief" and learn to live with it instead of being daily consumed by it.

The word, the unthinkable word, which I have learned to speak and now must learn to live with, is "death". And the problem with death is absence. The home which contained the noisy laughter of you and your friends, the hustle and bustle of your young life with all its overpowering, demanding presence – that

home is a void composed of emptiness and silence. And so, I play the music you loved on my stereo. I watch the TV shows we used to enjoy together. I take your dog for walks and even let him sleep beside me. I try to stay in touch with the people you loved, to know what is going on in their lives, and share memories of you whenever we get a chance. Somehow, I try to get my mind around the unthinkable reality of your absence.

But then – the problem with death is uncertainty. Like every mother through the ages, I always knew (or thought I did) where you were. When you spent the night with a friend, it was only with someone I knew and whose parents I trusted to be as vigilant as I. Even after you went away to college, in those pre-mobile phone days, I bought you a pager so I could always make contact with you and verify, to my anxious mother's heart, that you were safe when out of sight. But now I don't know where you are. The only thing I can be certain of is that you – the indomitable and vibrant spirit that is you – you are not in that lonely cemetery where we lovingly placed your physical body. But I can also be certain of this one thing: that where you are, someday I will also be. With this certain knowledge that I one day will join you, I try to get my mind around the unthinkable reality that today, for just this 24 hour period, I don't know how to reach you. Someday, my child, I certainly will.

Yet, when I have absorbed and dealt with the reality of your absence, I realise that another problem with death is finality. Death is a period at the end of an unfinished sentence. Each morning when I awake I feel once more the unacceptable fact that you are still dead, that the life which held so much promise has truly ended forever. I will try to get my mind around this unfathomable permanence by remembering something I learned from you. I used to call you my "child of what's happening now" because you seemed to have been born with the ability to live in the present moment. When my mind will not stretch around the thought of living year after year without you, I will focus instead on getting through just one day. And if this one day proves to be too much, I will deal with one hour, or even one moment. And, because you lived each moment with such joy, I will try to find the beauty of each moment, in honour of your memory.

- Judith C, TCF City & Metropolitan Chapter

THE GIFT OF SOMEONE WHO LISTENS

Those of us who have travelled a
while
Along this path called grief
Need to stop and remember that
mile
The first mile of no relief.

It wasn't the person with the
answers
Who told us of ways to deal
It wasn't the one who talked and
talked
That helped us start to heal.

Think of friends who quietly sat
And held our hands in theirs
The ones who let us talk
And hugged away the tears.

We need to always remember
That more than the words we speak
It's the gift of someone who listens
That most of us desperately seek.

- Nancy , TCF Waterville Toledo USA
- Taken from TCF Johannesburg Chapter, Sept 2004

REFLECTIONS OF MY SON AND GRANDSON

Two generations of beloved boys, each succumbing to an individual extremely rare illness. But when a very dear friend reminded me of the likelihood that the two would meet in the afterlife, I was suffused by a warmth that has taken over and is carrying me through.

We bleed for Matthew's parents in the pain with which they must learn to live, wishing he had been closer to us and that we had had the opportunity to know him still better.

As his illness progressed, and he learned he must spend time in a wheelchair, his immediate demand was for "a red one – because red goes faster"! So he battled into his teens, his vivid blue eyes and black lashes wreaking havoc amongst his female contemporaries!

The funeral service was held in the chapel of his school – his grandfather's alma mater – and conducted by the school chaplain. The former headmaster, two years retired, returned for the service, obviously having been beguiled by the mischief that never directed hurt at another.

Softly coloured photographs of Matthew were projected on to the walls throughout the service, and so many of the masters and senior pupils attempted to speak of him, but found themselves moved to tears. A long time friend laid a single red rose on the coffin, and in a gesture that will live in our hearts forever one of the speakers, unable to continue, simply removed his school tie and laid it beside the rose.

Please know, our little Matthew, how this wealth of such love accompanies you forever on the greatest journey of all.

Roderick My Son

You left us oh, so long ago –
Or was it yesterday?
The warp and weft of memory
In mixing fact with fantasy
Can hasten or delay.

Your innate generosity
Must still be part of you,
As evergreen as that wry smile,
Impulsive as the singing soul
That flourished as you grew.

So now we have a gift for you

— — — — —
Instinctively to take –
The nephew whom you never saw
Is reaching for your guiding hand
Bewildered, but awake.

Just like you, he has suffered much
And so you know his need.
Should time stand still your namesake will
Be starting in your company
But trusting you to lead.

Our treasured boys, our hearts are sore
But feel you side by side,
And in return please feel our love
Surrounding you forever more
With interwoven pride.

So long awaited, Roderick,
You were a dream come true
And still that dream enfolds us now
As generations pass through time
To lead us back to you.

Matthew Rod, My Grandson

We knew your days were limited
Yet still you left too soon.
Your spirit was unquenchable,
Defying all the pain you bore
Until that afternoon.

Your sudden, accidental death
Seized people by the throat –
A mischief-loving, teenage scamp
Beloved, admired at every turn
As, typically, you wrote:

"Don't let misfortune get you down;
Be what you want to be".
The world ground to a halt that day
As those recorded words were read

Within your eulogy.

We hold so dear those photographs
In which your elfin smile
Inspired our love and tenderness,
Our longing just to be with you
And make you ours a while.

A God of Mercy saw your pain
Increasing year by year,
And ere you reached the ultimate
That even you could tolerate
His love released you, dear.

The Uncle Rod whose name you bore
Perhaps was there to say,
"At last we meet, those lives complete.
Now, hand in hand, let's make our way
Into eternal day".

- Freda TCF Dorset UK
County Telephone Contact

THIS (SON-LESS) LIFE

I hear his car pull in and park. The sound of his footsteps. The door opens and, as usual, he says: "Hi, Dad. Sorry I'm late." He came to have a meal with me three times a week and he was always late. He has gone now, he will not be with me for dinner ever again.

It's four weeks since my son Stephen died, and I am struggling to come to terms with his death and the circumstances. He did not show up to meet my flight from Melbourne. There was no answer to my calls or text messages.

Thirty-six hours later, on Wednesday at 6.30am, the police told me his car had been found. As soon as I heard the location I prepared for the worst. The rest of that day is a blur of activity and shock. I went to see his mother at 8am to break the news. There was a continuous flow of calls to and from the police.

At 9am the Polair helicopter crew reported a body on the rocks at cliff bottom. Was my son wearing a blue top and white track pants? At 1pm they retrieved the body. Identification was made from my son's drivers licence. Unusual, because he never carried his licence in his pocket. He kept it in the car.

People began arriving at my ex-partner's house almost immediately. Streams of young people. Endless telephone calls in and out.

I don't remember much of Thursday. More calls to family and friends. Repeated details, tears and anguish. No parent should ever have to visit a mortuary to see their child. We could see only his face because of his injuries. My beautiful boy, dead on a slab, wrapped in blankets to hold his damaged body together.

Private prayer and farewells with his mother. Prayers for the dead by the priest. Some friends taking an hour to summon the courage to see their mate in death.

On Sunday night in my son's room an old friend of mine was given the task of showing me photos taken by my son of the area of his death. They had been taken several weeks earlier. My

reaction was stunned disbelief; anger, too. Then a sense of relief. It is better to know the truth. My lovely boy, with no obvious warning, had taken his life. He left photos instead of a note.

His funeral on the Monday was large. More than 250 people at the church and 350 at the crematorium chapel. So many young people. He was so well loved. And now for the hard part. We will never know why. What pain led him to leave us. He was an only child with a close relationship with both parents.

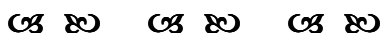
I'm told that young people who decide to take their lives believe their parents and friends will get over the loss. There will be no escape from this loss. When I am 70 he will still be 22. He will always be young, strong, handsome. There will be no milestones to celebrate. No graduation, no marriage, no children.

We can only try to go forward. To honour his short life by making positive decisions about our own. Still, I cannot imagine my life without him. I will continue to shed tears; it is too soon to stop. I need to believe in a greater power; to feel my boy is in safe hands and at peace.

I will be thankful for the 22 years I had with him. Of seeing him born and holding him. I will be thankful for the years I had looking after him. I have had more time than most fathers get with their sons.

- Frank

- First published by *The Weekend Australian Review* section,
This Life column on Saturday 4th December 2004
- Permission to publish given to TCF December 2004



SOON A YEAR

(WRITTEN 2ND JULY 2001)

Sometimes I'm carried to a place
To a place deep down inside
Here the feelings rage and groan
A song, a memory takes me there

Just a thought away from you
The suffering, the agony, the love
A heat rises throughout my body
My heart reacts and beats distraught

Each day blurs into the past
Reside there now, my boy, my man
Time carries me forward, reluctantly
Soon a year's distance between us, soon.

Mark Father of ADAM, who
suicided at home on 15.10.2000
- The Compassionate Friends
Western Australia, (Perth) 2004
- Taken from Reflections WA,
September 2004

CLOSURE: IS IT A REALITY?

By Carole J. Dyck, R.N.

The use of the word “closure” is often heard in public circles or in the media especially after a tragedy and implies finality. The word comes with the sense that there will be a time, day, or event like a funeral that marks when a grieving person will be “healed” or “over it”, as though it were a disease and you could magically take a pill to be cured. There is an expectation that when the eulogies are said and the casseroles are gone, the grief somehow magically goes away. *The truth is that those of us who are in TCF realise that the death of a child or sibling changes our lives forever, and we will never truly “be over it”.* Yes, we will not have the intensity of the pain and sorrow we had at the beginning of our grief. We will go on with life and find a new normal for us, but life will never be as it was before the death, and we will never be fully “healed”. Sometimes those around us have attempted to comfort us by pointing to deadlines, replacements, or “at leasts”. We have heard it said, “At least you have other kids”, or “You can have another baby”, or “Hasn’t it been 6 months?”. Many see “comfort giving” as a short-term support effort, and soon we will be “over it” as we are kept busy returning to the tasks of daily living and focusing on our blessings. These comments hurt rather than provide the comfort they are meant to provide. Grief follows no plan, no stages, timetable, formula, or schedule. There are no road maps; there are no absolutes.

We learn in TCF that everyone grieves differently. Grief is like being lost. The familiar things we relied on to live each day are gone. We must find new anchors or stabilisers along the way and learn a new way of relating to the world and people around us. We are forced to learn to live without our child or sibling. The reality of our loss often far outweighs what we have remaining. Grief is all consuming, distorts reality, and we begin to mark time in “before or after our loved one died”. No one can hurry the process of grief; no one can do it for us. Not even our spouses, parents, or other children can help us in those early days. The truth is that when our grief is new, we feel exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We barely have enough energy to breathe. We feel as though we have no control over our lives anymore, nor do we care. We realise on some level we are helpless. We might even feel hopeless or purposeless. Some of us feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. Some feel like everything is trivia compared to the loss we have experienced. Some feel as if the world is spinning on around us, and nobody really cares that our child, sibling, or grandchild died. All of

these feelings are normal and part of the grieving process. *And yes, we also need to realise it is a process – a very long, gradual, and difficult process.* Time does not heal all wounds, but time softens the intensity of the grief. What helps is finding those who will listen with their hearts and give us hope and understanding. Those who will spend hours, days, and months with us as we tell our story over and over so we can somehow believe it ourselves. What helps is to surround ourselves with those patient people and meaningful activities that comfort and support.

Gradually, the cold darkness of grief begins to give way to the warmth of the memories, acceptance, purpose, and reinvestment in life. We learn to speak of our loved one without crying, and we begin to accept that whatever time we had with him or her, we would have taken even if just but a moment. We learn that grief is the price we pay for loving our child or sibling so much, and we wouldn’t want it any other way. Our relationships with family, friends, and yes, even God can be strengthened or challenged as we look for new ways to connect with them. We may lose old friends who don’t really understand. We learn that problems in life are not overwhelming. We are handling the worst thing that can happen to us; what else can happen? We learn to more deeply cherish those we love. We help others in grief without batting an eye. Sometimes we pick up “gifts” along the way by becoming more caring, compassionate toward others, and appreciative for what is important in life. New strengths can develop as we find our new selves along the way. Life will be different as we learn to cope, but still have meaning.

For those of you who are new in your loss, we hope that you will continue to share your sorrow with us and learn from those further ahead on the path of grief. Someday it won’t hurt as much as it does now, and you won’t always feel “this elephant on your chest”. We encourage you to ask the family and friends around you for what you need and tell them when their expectations for you are too high. We hope you will explain to them that your grief is not on a timetable and will probably not ever reach what society calls “closure”. Explain to them that you will always miss your child or sibling, but you will learn to live with a broken heart. We hope you will inform them that the mention of your child’s name is music to your ears and it’s okay to talk about him or her. Your TCF friends will be with you and hold your hand every step of the way.

Carole J. , RN is Co-Leader of the Verdugo Hills TCF Chapter, Glendale, CA, and National Board Member of The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

*- Taken from We Need Not Walk Alone, TCF USA
Summer 2003*

*Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak,
Knits up the o'erwrought heart and bids it break.*

– William Shakespeare

Memory corner

We ask that your Memory Corner contributions are no more than 10 lines as we are receiving many more each issue with our growing membership.

Amanda Lee

24.2.80 – 17.7.00

Whatever I am doing, I am remembering you at whatever hour, awake or in my dreams, always and ever, my memory is completely framed in my forever love for my forever daughter.

H H H H H

Scott Gerald

21.3.72 – 18.3.96

Scottie, my darling son, so perfect in my eyes. I adore and miss you so much mate. With deepest and truest feelings I am so proud to be your mum and thank you for being my beautiful son. You will never be alone my darling. Your precious memories will be treasured in my heart forever and ever. Eternal love

Scottie, till we are together forever and ever.

Your Mum

H H H H H

SUZANNE'S LIGHT

Suzanne Jeannette

Aged 27 years 7.1.70 – 16.4.97

*So sweet and gentle
And soft and kind
No wonder YOU
Always, come to mind*

*Your laughter and joy
Your smiling eyes
Your friends came to YOU
To them, you are wise.*

*Always THERE
You really did care
Crying away despair
You knew, how to share ...*

*What a wonderful love
God gave from above
A blossoming flower
Raining love without power*

*Now limp without fire
"THE LIGHT" is umpire
In the garden of youth
You live with "THE TRUTH" ...*

© Sandra 2005

Dean James

Birthday 14.10.70

Wayne Bruce

Died 11.11.74, aged 17 yrs

Dean James

Died 5.12.80, aged 10 yrs

Many years have passed since you both left us. Always I think, "What would you look like and be doing now, as two grown men?" You have your Dad to look after you now.

My comfort is knowing he holds you in his arms.

Always remembered and loved.

Mum, brothers Dallas and Brian, sister Debbie

H H H H H

SOMETIMES MEMORIES AREN'T ENOUGH

*Sometimes memories aren't enough
To hold the pain at bay.*

*Sometimes memories aren't enough
And tears get in the way.
Sometimes memories aren't all good;
Then I feel hurt and misunderstood.*

*I feel lonely, sad, and bereft –
It's not enough – only memories are left
In times when memories aren't enough
No need pretending I am so tough –
My grief can show for some to see
When memories aren't enough for me.*

*But I can hold on,
Perhaps even smile,
Knowing memories will again become enough –
For awhile.*

- Shirley TCF Central AR

- Taken from TCF Manhasset USA Oct 2003

***“Compassion is not pity that looks down;
it is love that shares and divides the poignancy of pain.”***

THE GOOD OLD SUMMERTIME??

The good old summertime has arrived. The time when we usually plan vacations, family reunions, picnics, etc. There are many activities going on, such as ball games, golf, swimming, though for some of us a float trip on an Ozark stream is more enticing. Vacation Bible Schools and ice cream socials are held at churches. We usually adopt a more casual lifestyle, cook outdoors, and free ourselves of rigid schedules. Whatever our interests may be, this is the time for family togetherness. When our family is still intact it can be a wonderful time ... if not, it can be a very painful time.

If this is the first summer following the death of your child, you may not have much inclination or energy for the usual activities, although many parents find that doing something physically demanding helps release the tension and anger associated with grief. Some have found a measure of healing and peace working in their yard or garden, or planting a flower garden in memory of their child. Others may feel obligated to attend family activities, and then they find that it does help to get involved.

If you don't feel able to get out and get involved in your usual activities, don't be concerned, just do what you feel like you can do now.

Most of us think going away on a vacation or short trip somewhere will help us get away from the painful reminders of our child's death, and though it may be less painful than it was at home, we soon learn that we take our memories and emotions with us wherever we go. However, a vacation can be an incentive for doing something relaxing and enjoyable, though most of us feel guilty if we enjoy ourselves very soon after our child has died.

When we made vacation plans for the summer following our son's death in February, I was a little apprehensive. We were going to visit our daughter, who had recently moved to Michigan, and invited our daughter-in-law (our son's widow) and her daughters, ages three and five, to accompany us on the vacation. From there, all our group travelled upstate to stay a few days at a lake resort. Our little granddaughters kept the trip upbeat and lively, and we were able to enjoy ourselves for the first time that summer. It was helpful for all of us, even though there were several intense emotional moments. Now we realise that

everyone in our family was still grieving, each in their own way, and it would have been helpful to have allowed each one some private time to rest every day.

As newly bereaved parents, we are like pioneers, charting our way through an unknown area to our new destination. We've been told that it is peaceful there, but we can't feel that peace until we arrive. Those who have already made the trip report that life is different, yet good, in that new place. But we find that difficult to believe, because we are still travelling that long, rugged trail, and the end is not yet in sight. "Don't be afraid," we are told, "we made it, and you will make it too. Just take your time, and you will find your way." Those who have made the journey encourage us to believe that we'll make it through the wilderness of grief and find peace.

As one who has found peace at the end of the journey, I'm thankful to those who encouraged me during those dark days when I could not see the way. Their loving support, and my faith, gave me hope that life could be good and meaningful again, and now it truly is.

If you are still struggling along, unable to see a future without pain and confusion, please reach out to those of us who have been there. We are here to take your hand and help you find the way to healing. Be kind to yourself and others, and take time to relax and remember. Your child would want you to try to find some ways to enjoy life once again, without feeling guilty. This summer you may find the road to renewed hope and recovery.

- Lenora , TCF/Atlanta, GA

NO VACATION

***There is no vacation from your absence.
Every morning when I awake, I am a bereaved
parent.***

***Every noon I feel the hole in my heart.
Every evening my arms are empty.***

***My life is busy now, but not quite full.
My heart is mended, but not quite healed.***

***For the rest of my life every moment will be lived
without you.***

There is no vacation from your absence.

- Kathy TCF/MS Gulf Coast Chapter

OUR CHILDREN

When the sun breaks through the clouds on the darkest, bleakest of days, for whom does it shine? It shines for our children.

When the blackbird sings his magnificent song as daylight begins to fade, for whom does he sing? He sings for our children.

As the seasons change and Nature re-paints the landscapes of our lives, what colours does she use?

The Spring of our children's lives is depicted by the fresh, green buds of promise upon the tree of life, representing the hopes we have, as parents, of seeing our little ones grow and flourish. But our children will always remain saplings, they will never become trees though they will blossom gloriously in our hearts and minds for ever.

The Summer of our children's lives is depicted by the brightest, boldest colours of all: the poppies in the meadows, the beauty of the butterfly, streams and sandcastles, birdsong and sunshine. These represent the days in the lives of our children when everything was the brightest it could ever be.

The Autumn of our children's lives is depicted by the spread of her golden brown cloak, which covers up the bright brash colours of Summer, painting it in other calmer, softer shades; it is quieter now as the copper leaves float gently down and lie softly at the feet of the naked trees. Many creatures are in hibernation; this is the time to reflect upon what has already been and what is yet to come.

The Winter of our children's lives is depicted by the cold winds of change, an end to all we have known; he brings a shiver to the spine of us all and yet his colour represents purity, the dazzling white purity of our children's hearts and the sudden chill in ours when they leave us.

But we have not lost our children, nor have they lost us – for they live on in everything around us, in every birdsong, every flower, every rainbow in the sky and in each and every colour that fills our everyday lives.

Our children will always be those precious little buds of promise and we, as their parents, must always remember that we had been chosen to nurture them here on earth, for however short a time that might have been.

Of one thing we can all be certain. In the summerland garden where all our children play there will be the brightest, most fragrant and beautiful blossoms we could ever imagine ...

- Yvonne

- Taken from TCF UK Newsletter, Spring 1999

FLASHING BEAUTY

I grew up around graveyards. They do not frighten me. They make me nostalgic. When I was a girl, my mother would make the journey from our home in Alabama to visit my grandparents in Mississippi, where my father was buried in the family cemetery. The cemetery was small, secluded, and very old. Almost every headstone bore the name Lindsay (my great-grandmother's maiden name) or Tuggle, because it was, as I said, a family cemetery. Thus, on these excursions, I was surrounded by gravestones bearing my name. As a child, this irony was lost on me. These days I think foreshadowing may be something the gods invented long ago.

My sister and I devised intricate games to while away the hours on cemetery afternoons. Mostly, we spent our time collecting abandoned flowers that had been piled, along with other debris, for the caretaker's removal. We fashioned bouquets for our father's grave. These flowers were not real, but made from plastic and fabric. While new, they were garish – the colours too vivid. They were designed that way because the sun faded them so quickly. Despite their permanence, they lacked the ephemeral beauty of real flowers, which always withered within a few hours in the Mississippi heat. The flowers my sister and I procured for our bouquets came from this pile of immortal, faded flowers. My mother bought only fresh flowers for our father's grave. They had always withered before we left.

My mother was adamant that we collect only flowers that had been allocated for removal. Yet, when she was distracted we sometimes stole new flowers for our bouquets – just a few brightly coloured blossoms to liven up the almost-grey petals of the abandoned flowers we were allowed. When I remember those afternoons now, I remember the stolen flowers most of all. Amanda and I canvassing the cemetery for bright fabric flowers that would not be missed. When I think of that place, the cemetery, I do not think that she is buried there. No, I think of our childhood afternoons: Mississippi heat, red dirt trailing through the dusky air, and two girls sifting through discarded flowers.

My sister was beautiful like that story is beautiful: harrowing, intense, flashing. She was so beautiful; sometimes you could not look at her for too long. She was blinding. When she walked into a room, everything shifted ever so slightly. If you have never been in a room when someone like my sister entered, you may not understand what I mean, but if you have then you know people perceive, even before they steal a sidelong glance, that something ethereal has slipped in, and now walks amongst them. Amanda had a way of making her presence known, sometimes subtly, sometimes not. My Nana calls it a "commanding presence". I call it amazing grace. Amanda was just that, she was amazing grace.

I cannot remember a time before Amanda. Our childhood now seems like a beautiful faded quilt, with a few patches missing because my memory is not what it used to be. My shrink calls it post-traumatic stress disorder. He says it makes you forget things, even when you don't want to. I don't know if I believe that or not. Sometimes, I think there is so much beauty, and it flashes so brightly that you can't remember it all at once. Amanda comes back to me like that. I have a memory so fresh and poignant that I can't do anything else for a while. Then I realise that memory was always there, I just wasn't ready for the brightness of it till that exact moment.

I had my sister for 20 years. My first memory is not of my mother or father, but my sister. I remember her toddling along, then crashing right into the castle I had built from wooden blocks. She crashed into my life when I was two, and she crashed out again when I was 22. Like I said, she knew how to make an entrance. And, she was an actress, so she knew the importance of a grand exit. At least, that's what I tell myself when I am strong enough to believe that there's a meaning behind these things.

As children, we were inseparable, interspersed with intense and vicious fights, which terrified my mother. We were allowed little television, so we mostly invented games for ourselves. We were mermaids, fairies, knights, dragons and witches ... We were invincible.

As teenagers, we were best friends (interspersed with bitter, tearful, and sometimes violent arguments over matters of great import, such as who should use the curling iron first, or who ate all the Black Jack Cherry ice cream). Our boyfriends were close friends, and played in a band together. Amanda and I had a communal wardrobe (which was the source of more than a few screaming matches), and getting ready to go out was a production that required several hours and a sister as companion. Amanda would rather be late than bathe and make-up alone. She would interrupt whatever I was doing and cajole me into sitting with her while she bathed. Later, when we both lived in our own apartments, she would phone me and invent some reason why I should come over. I would arrive to find her drawing her bath. She would look at me, head tilted slightly to her left, and implore me to talk to her while she shaved her legs. Eventually, she dispensed with pretence. I would answer the phone to hear her petulantly announce, "I am taking a bath. Where are you?" as though I were late for some important engagement.

Amanda died when she was 20. I was 22. I think of that day as the day the sky fell down. I will never be as intimate with another person as I was with my sister. Our collective history could be deconstructed over pitchers of beer at our local watering hole, over coffee on a lazy afternoon, or while sharing cigarettes on one of our long, aimless drives through the back roads of our hometown. There was nothing we could not say to each other. Sometimes, we did not have to say anything at all. I could look at my sister, when I was in a dark place, and she would know exactly where I was and why. I will never have that again, with anyone, because there will never again be someone who has grown up beside me all of my days.

I call the hollow place the Amandache. It is the place in my soul that waits for her. I will never stop waiting for her. When I go to the cemetery, now, I leave a bouquet of discarded flowers for her. I do not leave them because I believe others passing by will find them beautiful, as I did when I was a child. I know that they are tattered and worn. I leave them because I know tattered, worn things are somehow more beautiful than new things with bright colours. My sister taught me about that kind of beauty. She knew not everything could flash like her.

By Lindsay

- Lindsay is the daughter of Judy , a volunteer at the Bereaved Parent Centre. This article was written in memory of Amanda Lee , who died 17.7.2000 in an automobile accident

JANE THERESE (5.7.67 – 22.7.91)

Over three years have passed since my younger sister, Janey, died suddenly in Newcastle. The first 18 months after Janey's death I spent in Sydney – still close enough to feel the much needed love and support from my family and friends. It was also during this time that I had the good fortune to meet Lynne and the siblings from The Compassionate Friends and feel their support in the common bond we shared.

The following year I spent in Bangkok. While this was an exciting and interesting year for me, it was also a lonely year, made more difficult by two facts. Firstly, the knowledge that my sister would not be on the end of the phone when I rang home, and secondly, that my family and friends were so far away. It was then that I realised the true value of those special loved ones who, with a hug, a laugh or a shared tear, give so much strength to a hurting heart.

Now I'm living back in Newcastle, sleeping in the room that Janey and I shared as children. She seems even more present to me now and a lot of the physical memories of her short life surround me. This is both comforting and sad at the same time. I love the feeling of closeness that I have with my sister now, but I still cannot understand or accept the concept of "never" seeing her again (at least in this lifetime) ... and this tears at my heart.

Last weekend I spent a wonderful weekend in Gosford with some TCF siblings and parents (thanks Nick and Tracey). Once again I realised how important it is to have special people around who understand. I drove home with a little more strength in my heart.

I'll always have the pain of losing Janey, but I know that when I surround myself with my wonderful family and friends I gain some strength which makes the pain somehow easier to bear. I also strongly believe that Janey is beside me helping me bear this pain and to her I say ... thank you and I love you.

- Louise

SIBLING MEETINGS & SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

If you would like to meet with others who understand and care, please join us for our meetings which are held every second month. In addition we also regularly have social functions. These provide wonderful opportunities to meet and socialise with others in a 'safe environment'. To join us for either our social functions or meetings, please call Lynne on .

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT SIBLING PAGE WEDNESDAY 13TH APRIL 2005



We welcome letters, poetry and drawings from siblings of any age.
**Send them to: TCF SIBLING PAGE GPO BOX 1303 SYDNEY
2001**