

FOCUS ONLINE

Bereaved families offering friendship, support and understanding to each other

No 123

April-May-June 2005

Supported by SESIAHS

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. If you want to contact any one, please go through the TCF Centre (02) 9290 2355 or email TCF@bigpond.com.au. 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

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.

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 on Page 15 of this newsletter.

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:

SINGLETON CHAPTER
in loving memory of
their sons and daughters

And when we have remembered everything
We grow afraid of what we may forget
A face, a voice, a smile?
A birthday? Anniversary?
No need to fear forgetting because
The Heart Remembers, Always
- Sascha Wagner

REMINDER: SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE FOR FOCUS 2005

This is the last issue of Focus posted on 2004 subscription. Focus is complimentary for newly bereaved families for the first six months only. A combined subscription and registration form was included in February Focus. Please remember to sign the form to register as a member of TCF, as registration is very important to our funding. If you have misplaced your form, please phone the Bereaved Parent Centre on 9290 2355.

CARRY ON

We reach within and find resources to carry on when things are roughest. The most devastating of life's experiences often bring out our best qualities. When things get better we look back and wonder how we ever did it, but we did and it proves we have a great strength within us. Courage that has never been tested before, surfaces and sustains us when it is really needed.

- From TCF Sth Africa, Oct 2004

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 JULY 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
6th June, 4th July, 1st August

Death in Older Children

Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month 11am – 2pm
16th June, 21st July 18th August

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
8th June, 13th July, 10th August

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
1st June, 6th July, 3rd August

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

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
3rd June, 1st July, 5th August

Contact: Cheryl & Joy

Eastern Suburbs Chapter

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

Meetings: 3rd Thursday in the month at 7.30pm
16th June, 21st July, 18th August

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
14th June, 12th July, 9th August

Contact: Valda & Guy

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

In July it will be fourteen years since our Chapter came into
being. Many of our original members still participate and
the bond established all those years ago is still strong. We
have "welcomed" many families over this time and they
have joined us in caring for and sharing with one another.
Whilst dads have come along it is a fact that our Chapter is
mainly made up of mums, Guy has kindly offered to become
a contact for fathers – thanks Guy, this is very much
appreciated and I'm sure the fathers out there will be
grateful to have another dad to speak with. Thanks to
Paulette who shares facilitating at meetings.

Take care. Love Valda

Silverdale/Warragamba Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre, Warragamba

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
14th June, 12th July, 9th August

Contact: Mary & Theresa

Turrumurra/Ryde Chapter

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

Meetings: 1st Tuesday in the month at 7.45 pm
7th June, 5th July, 2nd August

Contact: Richard & Lana

**Nothing is ever lost not even the smallest good
deed, whether it is noticed or not.**

***CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES AND
CHAPTER NEWS:***

**WEDNESDAY,
13TH JULY 2005**

COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS

Bowral Chapter

Venue: Lecture Room, Old Bowral Hospital
Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 7.30 pm
20th June, 18th July, 15th August
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
29th June, 27th July, 31st August
Contact: Anne 4328 2940
Lynne 4341 3090 (ah)
Marilyn 4388 3623 (ah)

Cessnock Area

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Gail 02 4990 7540

Cowra Chapter

Contacts: Marina 02 6342 1971
Dell 02 6342 2326

Dubbo Chapter

Venue: The Crest Building, Welchman Street, Dubbo
Meetings: 2nd Saturday in the month at 2 pm
11th June, 9th July, 13th August
Contact: Judy 02 6887 3614
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) 2nd June, 7th July, 4th August
Contact: Gwen 0268521014 Robert 0268511479

Grafton Chapter

Venue: Pullins Centre (next to Crown Hotel),
3-7 Prince Street, Grafton
Meetings: Last Tuesday in the month 10 – 12 noon
28th June, 26th July, 30th August
Contact: Shirley 0266449611
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
19th June, 17th July, 21st August
Contact: Lorna 0269635486

Inverell Chapter

Meetings: Meetings are now by arrangement
Contact: Heather & Graham 02 6721 1319
Wilma 02 6722 1453

Kiama Chapter

Venue: Meeting Room No. 1, Kiama District
Hospital, Bonaira Street, Kiama
Meetings: 3rd Wednesday in the month 9.30 – 12.15
15th June, 20th July, 17th August
Contact: Joan 02 4232 1642

Kyogle Chapter

Venue: Community Health Centre
Meetings: By arrangement
Contacts: Jean 02 6632 1405
Roger and Linda 02 6633 9125

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
16th June, 21st July, 18th August
Contacts: Glennys 02 6621 4086 ah
Dianne 02 6621 5558

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
7th June, 5th July, 2nd August
Contacts: Joy 02 65 68 1054 Sandra 02 6569 6104
We welcome new friends and will be thinking of everyone
on Mothers' Day.
Love to all, Joy and Sandra

Maclean Chapter

Meetings: By arrangement. Please contact Narelle
for details.
Contact: Narelle 02 6646 1393

Murwillumbah Chapter

Meetings: 2nd Thursday in the month
9th June, 14th July, 11th August
Contact: Lorraine 02 6672 3219 for details

Muswellbrook Chapter

Meetings: Meetings are now by arrangement
Contact: Jenny 02 6543 1694
Helen 02 6543 2319

COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS cont

Nelson Bay Chapter

Venue: Women's Information & Counselling
Services, Stockton Street, Nelson Bay
Meetings: Contact Bev on 02 4984 9607 for dates
Contact: Bev 02 4984 9607

Parkes Chapter

Venue: The Neighbourhood Centre
Currajong Street, Parkes
Meetings: 2nd Saturday every 2 months 2-4 pm
4th June, 13th August
Contacts: Judy and Tony 68623458
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
20th June, 18th July, 15th August
Night meetings by arrangement
Contacts: Pauline 02 6572 1933
Carol 02 6573 2183

Tamworth Chapter

Venue: "Vestry" (behind the Uniting
Church), Marius Street, Tamworth
Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 10am–12noon
14th June, 12th July, 9th August
Contact: Peg 02 6765 5859
Helen 02 6760 8408

Tweed Heads/Southern Gold Coast Chapter

Meetings have been put on hold as Helen and Rodney
are currently travelling.

Wee Waa and District Chapter

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Rhonda 02 6795 5186

West Wyalong

Contact: Noela 02 6975 5122

CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES AND CHAPTER NEWS:

**WEDNESDAY,
13TH JULY 2005**

**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**

Human pain does not let go of its grip at
any one point in time. Rather, it works its
way out of our consciousness over time.

*There is a season of sadness.
A season of anger.
A season of tranquillity.
A season of hope.*

But seasons do not follow one another in
a lock-step manner. At least not for those
in crisis. The winters and springs of one's
life are all jumbled together in a puzzling
array. One day we feel as though the dark
clouds have lifted, but the next day they
have returned.

One moment we can smile but a few
hours later the tears emerge ... it is true
that as we take two steps forward in our
journey, we may take one or more steps
backward.

But when one affirms that the spring
thaw will arrive, the winter winds seem to
lose some of their punch.

*- Robert - "A Gift of Hope : How We
Survive our Tragedies"
- Taken from TCF Newsletter, Melbourne,
Aug/Sept 1992*



**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of
CITY & METROPOLITAN CHAPTER**

MONDAY 8TH AUGUST 2005

to elect Office Bearers for the Bereaved
Parent Centre Committee

11.00am

**The Bereaved Parent Centre
32 York Street, Sydney**

*Included in the programme at the
Residential Weekend:*

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
NEW SOUTH WALES INC.
SATURDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER 2005**

3.15 pm for 3.30 pm meeting

**Doherty Leura Gardens Resort,
Fitzroy Street, Leura**

Attendance for AGM only is permissible.
Further details in a letter under separate
cover.

**Sunday 18th September
Leura Gardens Resort**

Brenda Robilliard, Chaplain of Pastoral
Care, Westmead Children's Hospital, will be
conducting a special session 'Remembering
our Children'. This will replace the
Ecumenical Service for 2005.

Registration for Sunday only, is possible,
commencing at 9.30 am and includes
morning tea and lunch. Further details in a
letter under separate cover.

As is our custom, a **Silent Auction** will be
held on Saturday night at dinner at the
Resort. We would be very grateful for any
donations towards this auction. Phone the
Centre 9290 2355.

*For reference please keep the information you
receive by mail.*

Further details in August Focus

FOCUS AND THE INTERNET

**Planning is now in progress to have
more of Focus Newsletter available
via the Internet. Further details will
be available at a later date.**

TCF 4TH INTERNATIONAL GATHERING

August 17 – 21, 2005

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"

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.

The dates for *Focus* 2005 are as follows:

PREPARED JULY

POSTED AUGUST

PREPARED OCTOBER

POSTED NOVEMBER

CURTAINS FOR SALE: A complete house full
of beautiful as new floral lined curtains and tracks are
for sale at the Sydney Centre. 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.*

MIRANDA CHAPTER

A special thank you to all the members of
Miranda Chapter for their generous donations as
a result of their raffles.

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.

Sharing Thoughts ...

Dear Friends,

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

DR. TOM LUDOWICI'S RETIREMENT

Mary and Tony were honoured to attend a farewell media interview on 22nd February 2005, which was dedicated to Dr. Tom Ludowici on his retirement.

Mary had the pleasure of speaking about Dr. Tom's valued contributions to the community, and to express appreciation for the time he has given to The Compassionate Friends.

Dr. Tom Ludowici has supported members of The Compassionate Friends since 1985. He has given his time most generously as a Guest Speaker and participated in our Eucumenical Services of Remembrance since their inception.

Dr. Tom will be remembered by many bereaved parents for his gentle manner, his understanding and very special kindness.

The Compassionate Friends wish Dr. Tom good health and happiness in his retirement.

IN APPRECIATION

Our very grateful thanks to **Chris**, ACT and Queanbeyan for all the work he has done on our current Website listing. Without his valuable help we could not have achieved this listing. **Thank you Chris.**

LINDA LILLIAN 8.3.69 – 23.3.2002

"Oh how I love thee, let me count the ways: I love you to the depth and breadth of my soul." But you see, you have gone and my soul is broken. I don't know what to do with the love, my heart is broken. It has been almost three years since you "went away", I don't like the word "dead" - it is too hard to face, but face it I must. Over 1000 mornings I have woken to the stark reality that you are not coming back, I dread opening my eyes to face it.

I go on in particular for your two little girls that you left me to raise. They miss you so and light candles for you. I will make sure you stay alive in their memory, you are too beautiful in every way to forget. They are starting to develop your mannerisms, nuances, even how Amy sneezes is how you used to sneeze and Renee has your laugh, your voice. Your girls, even at the tender ages of 11 and 13 tell me that you would want me to have some joy in my life. They are my joy, along with your brother and sister who miss you so, so much and try to protect me from my grief, but can't.

If what they say is true, I will see you again my darling and my heart will sing again.
Your loving mother.

LAURA LINDA 11.6.03 – 23.6.2003

Dearest baby Laura. You only lived for 12 short days, but in that time, your mother and father fell in love with you, as did I, your grandmother.

Your mother and I are both bereaved parents now, and do careful dances around each other, trying to hold each other up and frightened to pull each other down.

You were one of the most beautiful babies I had ever seen, but your little heart just wasn't strong enough for you to stay with us. You were a blessing, but your passing was a tragedy.

We are united in the hope that you are with your Auntie Linda now and you couldn't be in safer hands or be loved more.

In the arms of the angels darling, until we meet again.
Your loving grandmother

MATTHEW

I believe that the spirit lives on at the point it was first ignited - in the mother's womb. That spirit then joins and flows through the body of its original existence - I feel his energy flowing through me now as he lovingly guides my every word and action. He is guiding my hand as I write and controls my every thought - my thoughts are always focussed on the reality that he is with me at all times as he was before he was born. I can see him from outside my body - sometimes he is in the mirror - he is me and I am he, we are inseparable. He inspires me to achieve, to always see some good in everything and to hold on to my truth - he helps me to affirm everything that confirms my truth every day, knowing we can never, ever be apart. He breathes my breath, sings my songs, reads my poetry, drinks my beauty, holds my heart - this is my truth. I live it, believe it with all my heart and soul.

- Coral,

TCF NSW

GETTING THROUGH THE DARKNESS

Being thrust into the blackest of abysses, that of having our children torn from our parental grasp, it is impossible to envisage a shaft of lightness ahead again. Laughter and joy seem foreign words – no longer having a place in our vocabulary, just memories of a world that once made sense. Well defined and comfortable, the family circle fitted together as neatly as a jigsaw puzzle with no pieces missing ...

But nature it would seem, does want us to continue on this journey of life and sees to it that we get pushed, prodded and helped along the rocky path we are meant to travel, to better, more livable times. These are some of the helpers along the way.

Mixing with our own kind, i.e. others who can only empathise with us by having experienced our experience, can do more than we realise, for knowing we do not crawl, stumble and claw our way along this perilous pathway alone can bring a welcome measure of relief. Being able to be who we are, without the rest of the world trying to mould us back to the person they once knew, is a godsend.

No academy awards have been given out to any of us for acting in the company of 'normal' people ensuring their discomfort with us is minimal. So choosing our company is important. For those who haven't endured such losses, it is sometimes necessary to educate them and not be afraid to tell it like it is. So be brave enough to discard those who don't want to know how we feel, for if they can't take our sorrow in acceptance, perhaps we don't need them around us just yet ...

The term 'time helps' is sometimes a maddening and trite saying, but time is truly one of the biggest contributors to our future well-being and brings huge changes to how we feel, easing us on to a different level of grief. Ever so gradually the benevolence of 'time' brings about new focuses to our day where we find ourselves no longer dwelling on our losses in the same relentless way. It does happen with TIME ...

It is not that our losses ever depart from us, but more that our shell-shocked minds become receptive again, shoving grief more readily aside and letting lightness, love and laughter reside easily with us once more, thankfully still able to recognise them and become their companions again.

The bad news is we don't 'get over' the deaths of our precious children. The good news is we learn to live alongside it as it fades to a more acceptable level with the kindness of time, enabling us all to become the productive, creative, much more 'normal' people we once were ...

- Shirley , From TCF Victoria Inc, June July 2003



THANK GOD FOR THE MEMORIES

Thank God for memories – thank God for you!

Memories are like the warm, comforting afghan with which I surround myself as a buffer against cold, damp, dreary weather. Memories are my buffer against the heartache that could literally destroy me were I inclined to allow it full reign in my spirit and in my life. As I cuddled you in my arms and sang your favourite lullabies, the thought of a delightful, charming, handsome son dying at the age of twenty was certainly not included in my long-range plans. (Being biased is one of a mother's special privileges).

Memories are my most precious, most valuable possession! There are days when I recall memories of you with a heart that is light with joy and gratitude at the thought of all we shared together, and I am filled with laughter.

On the other hand, however, there are always days when I cling desperately to my memories of you as I struggle to hold on to my sanity in my world of pain, emptiness and loss. I sense that if these memories did not rush to my rescue to lift me up and restore my strength, I would fall prey to the sadness and depression that lie waiting for a vulnerable moment to take control of me.

Memories are my transportation to whenever and wherever I choose to be. I can go back to the time I was a new, young mother trying to juggle a myriad of chores and duties along with quiet playful times with my babies – delightful, special moments of significance in our lives. How soothing, how comforting it is to relive the celebrations and the joy.

Once again, I can be driving cross country with two small children either arguing or sleeping in the back of the car, or visiting “fun places” such as San Diego, Disneyland or Hawaii. It was in Hawaii that I finally recognised the healing process had begun in my battered and bruised heart in ever-so-subtle ways.

Memories are like a rainbow on a gray, rainy day – an encouraging ‘re-remembering’ that can transform bitter tears of sorrow into tears of joy and delight along with the smile that accompanies them.

Memories can be recycled and revisited with no deteriorative effects in their ability to work miracles in our lives.

At first, I found myself wondering at the coincidence and timing of the manifestation of my memories. Each somehow has seemed to know just the right moment to step in and do battle with my grief.

I wonder no longer, for I have discovered that your hand, your spirit, your love are still at work in my life. I know beyond any shadow of doubt that my heart and my spirit are still connected with your own and that you will always be there when I need you most. What can I do but smile and allow my heart to re-discover its wings as it once again soars in freedom and delight when you gently (sometimes mischievously) draw a long forgotten memory from somewhere in the depths of my being and set it dancing through my mind!

Thank God for you. Thank God for memories.

- By Peggy , Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Taken from TCF Sth Africa, October 2004

THE FABRIC OF LIFE *by Steven*

The impending death of a child is a blow to any parent. Treasuring their companionship, we yearn for more time and the pleasure of seeing their potential unfold. Yet, as I learned from my daughter Naomi, when death threatens to take a child, unexpected capacities can blaze forth with remarkable brilliance and rapidity. Like a piece of coal subjected to extreme heat and force, she transformed into a gleaming diamond and, in the process, became my teacher. As I stood in her light, I awakened to a series of lessons culminating in a radically changed view of life.

In 1997, at age 17, Naomi was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a deadly childhood cancer. She had been such a healthy child and vigorous athlete that it seemed impossible her life might be cut short. So intertwined were our lives that when the doctor pronounced the diagnosis, it felt as if an arrow went straight through my heart. Holding his hands in the shape of a grapefruit, he said the tumour was big and that treatments needed to begin immediately. I panicked. Naomi, however, resolved to be strong and fight. She told me to keep my chin up, to take deep breaths.

I followed her instructions as best I could, unaware that Naomi was about to become my wisest teacher and I would barely be able to keep up with her lessons. The high-dose chemotherapy treatments prescribed by the doctor held me captive on the physical plane. The drugs were so potent that the nurses handling them wore heavy rubber gloves. Moreover, Naomi was isolated in her hospital room to prevent "outside germs" from debilitating her already compromised immune system; not even flowers from well-wishers were allowed in. Surely any weakness in her will be severely tested, I told myself. As if hearing my thoughts, she said, "Hardships can make us stronger. Every situation has good in it."

To me, her fight appeared as gruesome and terrible as any that had been waged by grown men at war. The battlefield was littered with the bodies of those who had tried for victory and failed. Disfigurement was everywhere: arms and legs, skin, feet, and organs had been cut off and thrown away. The vicious chemicals used to thwart the enemy also hurt the friendly troops at times, a casualty deemed necessary in the course of killing the ravenous foe. Doctors, like veteran generals, issued commands, often shaking their heads at the enemy's tenacity. The groaning of the wounded was loud on all sides as was the wailing of families. Naomi persevered with the strength of a warrior.

One evening as I stood transfixed by corporal images of my daughter facing overwhelming odds, she went deep into her soul for courage, saying, "I don't have

to worry. God is with me no matter what." I realised that for her this pitched battle was not only a physical experience but a spiritual one. Certainly, I told myself, lifting my chin back up, the angels are lending their assistance.

The lessons continued. Naomi eventually recovered well enough to finish high school, work a summer job, and gain admittance to college, all the while unfurling astounding talent in art and writing. With relief, I evacuated the battlefield in my mind, allowed the tightness inside me to relax, and felt my heart opening. Never one to cry, I wept often with a deepening sense that existence is both light and dark. My heart brimmed with compassion for others who bore hardship, humbling me before their glory. Also, I was struck by the awesome importance of every person. Just as every fingerprint is unique, I concluded, so does every person make an imprint in this world that is entirely their own. I came to see the place they hold as a special thread woven into the fabric of humanity. Upon hearing of a life threatened or lost, I grieved, knowing it could not be replaced.

Months before Naomi was to begin college, the cancer came back. The prognosis was grim: there was no hope for a cure. Now she blazed through the atmosphere of my newly expanded universe like a meteor shedding its light as she delivered ever more accelerated lessons on the meaning of life.

Despite considerable pain, Naomi continued to find virtue in each day and to express gratitude, her heart ever hopeful. During a particularly dark hour she wrote in her journal, "Show up and be lovingly present, no matter what it looks like out there or inside yourself. Always speak the truth of your heart."

Embracing beauty everywhere, as if at any moment it could produce a miracle, she reveled in chances to visit a park for a few hours or go for a swim, even if it meant being carried back to the car and sleeping all the way home. Fearless of death as it rapidly encroached, she confided, "My life is in God's hands. If He decides it is my time to leave, well then, that is His choice. What I want God to know is that I truly love this earth."

One Sunday a little more than two years after Naomi's initial diagnosis, a friend of the family's came to massage her. He rubbed her back while she sat in a wheelchair, her lungs struggling for air. "I love my body," she told him. "It has been so good to me." Naomi died the next day, having woven her strong, beautiful thread into what I now beheld as the fabric of life.

Steven, an artist based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is the author of 'A Heart Traced in Sand; Reflections on a Daughter's Struggle for Life' (\$14.95), available by calling toll-free 888-604-5728 or by logging on to www.Heartsand.com

*- Taken from We Need Not Walk Alone,
TCF USA Winter 2002/2003*

**We cannot, after all, judge a biography by it's length, by the number of pages in it:
We must judge by the richness of the contents.
Sometimes the "unfinished" are among the most beautiful symphonies.**

- Viktor Frankl, THE DOCTOR AND THE SOUL

LIFE IS A SIMPLE WALK IN THE WOODS

I was always told that the 'first year' would be the hardest. I set my sights on surviving through the first anniversary of Ross' death, telling myself that it would be all downhill from there. If I could just keep going long enough to scale that summit!

Everyone talked about that 'path of grief' being full of ups and downs, hills and valleys. "You can't go around it, you have to go through it!" I was surprised to find that my path was occasionally littered with small remains of Ross' life – a Power Ranger, the Lion King, a box of Raisin Bran. It hurt when I stumbled upon them, but I picked them up and cherished them, carrying them on my way. I was also told that my husband and I would not walk the same path. We started out fine, trudging through the woods, holding hands, telling ourselves that we'd spent 16 years together, we'd be just fine. His path slowly led away from mine, but seemed to run parallel for a time – I'd catch a glimpse of him in the woods every once in a while.

Then came that fateful First Anniversary. I scaled that mountain! I sat on top of the enormous peak, congratulating myself on a job well-done. I sat there all alone with my pile of Mickey Mouse clothes, little carts and well-meaning friends. I had done it! It was incredibly hard work, insurmountable at times, but here I was, still alive, without my child!

Without my child. I felt my heart grow cold as I surveyed the path ahead – the rest of my life. The terrain was just as treacherous as the past 12 months! I guess I'd expected it to be sunlit fields of flowers from then on. After all, everyone had said, 'Just get through that first year.' I didn't know I had to do this forever. I sat on that peak for quite some time. I yelled at God for a while. I hugged all my son's treasures that I'd carried with me – his precious memory warming my cold heart, and I searched for any other movement in the valley below. In the distance I could see other peaks along my path and some perhaps as tall as the one upon which I sat. I also began to see tiny clearings where the sun was shining. As my tears slowed, I noticed other paths winding through the landscape – hundreds of them – each belonging to a different parent.

I carefully packed my treasures in my heart, storing them with care so none would break, and started running down the hill, headlong into the second year of forever.

- Peg , Babylon, NY

- Taken from TCF Victoria Newsletter, Feb-Mar 2004



RAINBOWS

As the sunlight streaming in the window passes through a prism, the colours of life are reflected in the beautiful rainbows that appear.

Violet: Spring's first flowers sparkling with dew so lovingly picked by little hands treasured by the receiver far more than the florist's most expensive bouquet.

Blue: Skies washed clear by a summer rain; small eyes sparkling with wonder at life's mysteries; the softness of a girl's first prom dress.

Green: The colour of springtime when life and hope are renewed; giggling children running barefoot through the grass; a world awakening after the icy sleep of winter.

Yellow: Sunlight glinting on tousled hair; bouquets of dandelions; soft yellow ducklings, the delicious warmth of the morning sun after evening's coolness.

Orange: Crisp leaves saying goodbye to summer; harvest moons; carved pumpkins, balloons; little things which fill a child with delight.

Red: Cheeks rosy from a romp in the snow; crayon valentine hearts on homemade cards; lips that whisper life's sweetest words, "I love YOU."

The slightest breeze sends rainbow's shimmering and dancing about the room like children so full of life's excitement and anticipation they can't hold still. Our children who have died dance in the rainbows of our memories.

May we never forget to look for the rainbows.

- By Judith – TCF, Central Iowa Chapter

- Taken from West Kentucky Chapter Newsletter, July 2003



And So Together

I saw a garden the other day,
Each flower special in its own way.
For while they bloomed each on their own,
It was together their beauty shone.

If one would need more light or air,
The others would kneel and so would share.
If one would wither for lack of rain,
The tears of the others would stem the pain.

And so together the flowers grew,
In strength and love their lifetime through.

- Margie

- From TCF Manhasset NY

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.

John David

20.9.83 – 28.5.99

Six years since you were taken away,
Thinking of you each and every day.
Of your love, the way you care,
The laughter and the times we shared.
Your memory and love will always remain,
Wishing you were here with us again.
We miss you, we hold you near,
Loving you always Johnny dear.
Love from Mum and Dad and all your family
and friends

H H H H

Michael Frederick

14.5.70 – 28.5.99

Hi Mike, It's six years since you left but it seems like yesterday. Nothing has changed - the pain, the hurt and heartache are still there. What you achieved in your life I was very proud of, and you will live in my heart forever and thank you for being with me in spirit. Love you Mike
Mum

H H H H H

Samuel David

3.10.94 – 5.10.94

It's taken a while to write this Sam – 10 years now, so hard to believe.
We knew you for such a short time, but you are still remembered, not just by your mum and dad and big brother Tom, but also by your little sister Frances (who never knew you, but always includes you in the family list, and often wishes you were around to play with).
And by so many other family members and friends.
The tears still come at unexpected times – remembering and loving you always.
"Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep". In the arms of your nana at present – one day, I'm sure, in mine.
Your Mum

H H H H H

Scott Collin

10.5.66 – 6.6.94 28 years

A million happy memories cannot ease our broken heart,
The day that you were taken our whole world fell apart.
Life goes on we found that's true
And so does the heartache and longing for you.
Forever in our hearts. Mum, Neil, Darren, Louise, Leanne, Ian and their families

Suzanne Jeannette

7.1.70 – 16.4.97 Aged 27 years

Suz "Rain"
On this Rainbow
Colours did shine
Reaching out to me
Saying: "You're MINE!"
Though now, gone away
I'll never forget
My Beautiful Rainbow
Gave me, THE BEST yet ...
© Sandra 2005

H H H H H

Sandy

29.10.70 – 1.1.00

YESTERDAY

Yesterday I met with my friends.
And we laughed.
We laughed uproariously.
We laughed quietly.
But we all laughed –
At things which others could not understand.
And we cried.
Because we have all suffered the loss no one should bear.
Because our lives have been changed.
Because we will never be the same again.
So how could we laugh?
Because here we can say what we think.
Here we can say the things we don't dare say outside.
Things that the world would find alarming or strange.
Because here we feel safe.
With our friends.
Our Compassionate Friends.
- By Jenny, TCF City & Metropolitan Chapter

H H H H H

Kay Emma

2 June 1995

Time heals, they say – maybe it does,
But memories last and so does love.
Down in our hearts she is living yet
We love too dearly to forget.
Some may think we forget
When at times they see us smile,
But they little know the heartache
That is hidden all the while.
- Taken from "This England",
Britain's Loveliest Magazine 1997
From Noelle, mother of Kay

STORM ANCHORS

It's now eight years since our elder son Ruairidh was killed in a car crash, and I feel I can now look back calmly over this extraordinary time in my life and give proper recognition to the young people who helped me keep my sanity, who offered us their tolerance and understanding and who, in the midst of unbearable pain and confusion in their own lives, found time to show us over and over again that they loved us and needed us.

Our daughter Lisa is now 22 and her adolescent years were, I think, lonely and difficult at a school that paid very little attention to her grief. Things improved immeasurably when she changed schools for her VI Form years, but there is no doubt that she suffered those early months in silence because she didn't wish to burden us with anxiety about her own welfare. And we were too wrapped up in our misery to take on board the pointers to her state of mind that would have been obvious in normal circumstances. We found out later that she and our younger son Sandy decided early on that they would do or say nothing to distress us more than necessary, and this for us was the first indication of how the parent/child relationship can turn topsy-turvy, with even quite young children cherishing their parents and hiding their own anguish and confusion.

Sandy is now 15, and he lost the carefree days of his boyhood in the muddle and disorganisation of a grief-stricken family. The house should have been filled with laughter and friends, games and noise – as it had been for his brother at the same age – and instead he had parents who were distracted and sad and unable to enter wholeheartedly into his interests and concerns. Ever since he was a baby he had known permanent companionship, fun, attention and conversation, and overnight he lost all this. Never did

either child complain about our failures in parenting, and their full contribution to the survival of the family unit didn't dawn on me for a long time.

What I did know was that whatever steps I managed to take in those early days and months were for them. I knew they needed me, and this really deep maternal pull brought me back many times from despair and yearning for my lost son. They learnt so much about human behaviour at an age when most children are still only discovering about themselves, and they are now emotionally mature far beyond their years. They are both extremely sensitive and considerate about the thoughts and feelings of others, and their friends naturally turn to them in times of trouble.

I wish so much that they didn't have to carry this knowledge about human frailty at such an early age, and yet I know that they now have extra special gifts to help others, and that in spite of having been impoverished by the loss of their brother and a light-hearted childhood they have been enriched too in their deeper understanding of the value of love.

It was certainly love of them that brought me back into the land of the living. I now know that we must 'go for it' for Ruairidh's sake too, because his chances came to an end on 3rd April 1987, and his lost opportunities for life must now be *our* challenges. I shall be forever grateful to Lisa and Sandy for showing me the way with such gentleness and understanding; I am amazed at their forbearance with parents who should have been caring for them, instead of *vice versa*, and I honour their courage in coming through this family tragedy with hearts intact and with all flags flying. It's been some achievement.

- Pat

- Taken from TCF UK Newsletter, Autumn 1995

TURNING TIDE

As the days pass by, it becomes easier to remember the joy, and the agony fades a little more.

Part of me still hurts but now I have made the ache in my heart work positively. Life is like a beautiful river. I have learned to swim with the tide rather than battling the current which was dragging me into the depths.

Two years of indescribable misery, groping through the days, my body a leaden lump, and my mind a swirling mass of unanswerable questions. Nights were even worse. I would stare into the darkness and the little faces would appear. Then nightmares. I didn't know if I was dreaming or every thought flashing through my mind was real. Were they frightened? Did they feel any pain? Why them, Lord? They were such good kids.

My home became a fortress. I hardly ever opened the door, and I seldom went anywhere, preferring to wrap myself in a blanket of grief. I was happy that way. My kids and I, and the alcohol which was becoming my crutch. It deadened my pain, but it also accentuated the depression I was suffering, to the extent that I often thought of taking my own life.

Today the tide is turning, flowing strongly, carrying me forward on my journey through life. For every good thing that comes my way I will be truly grateful. The past I will reflect upon occasionally and know that there can be no joy unless you have experienced pain. My children brought so much joy into my life that the grief I was drowning in began to dry up but beautiful memories will now carry me on.

- Sue , Mother

- Taken from *Words of Sorrow, Words of Love*, edited by Eva Lager

Nine months later my thoughts began to turn. I had read a lot and begun to see that life always has a purpose, each life a unique purpose of its own. Gradually, slowly, I began to emerge with the feeling of hope. Without ripples in our life there would be no character, no change. But this was a huge, gigantic tidal wave: the loss of a child! This was going to have the most dramatic effect of all, this was going to change me lock, stock and barrel!

I looked at life, I faced the fact that I was changing. I reflected on my life and the changes that were taking place. I could never ever be the same person again! Too much had happened! I lived in another world! I see my daughter as having been the lock to open my door of life. Before this a different person existed. I feel now, four years on, that life has a purpose. The grieving is a process we all have to go through to find the door on the other side. Change is inevitable. We grow with faith and trust in life itself.

I still miss my daughter. But the sadness is different somehow. I will never forget her, and while even now I have some really 'down' days, the times of despair are shorter.

The most precious life we could ever lose is the life of our children. But as long as we love them, surely we carry them forever with us in our hearts.

- Chris , Mother of Andrea Susan , 3.12.71 – 24.11.90

- Taken from *Words of Sorrow, Words of Love*, edited by Eva Lager

Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person having
neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words.

- George Eliot

John David

20.9.83 – 28.5.99

***Not a day goes by,
That I don't ask why.
Why you were taken away,
Why you couldn't stay?***

I think of you, of the happy times, when you were here. the times we shared memories together, times I will always treasure forever. The way you look, your smile, your presence, your very essence.

That is what helps me carry on, the wonderful times we had with you, the precious person in you. And although I cry and I am sad that you were taken, that you're not here, I know your love for life must still remain through the pain, that you're watching over us along the way, with us everyday.

Love from your sister, Heidi

The following article was written in 1983 as a Year 12 assignment by Nick :

Title: Chris, my brother, my friend

Style: Personal

Audience: To those who have experienced the loss of a loved one.
Also to those special people who knew our Chris.

Author's Comments: Coming to terms with the fact that my brother had contracted an incurable disease and his subsequent death often left me confused. I predicted the difficulties which I encountered while writing this piece but after its completion I found that within myself, I have now come to clear terms of what Chris' death meant to me.

My elder brother Chris died when he was twelve. Two years older than me, he was my companion and friend. The years following his death have brought some acceptance but the memories remain clear and stark.

The day of Chris' private funeral dawned calm and peaceful and the empty house seemed to reflect the morning. I observed the expressions of my uncles and aunts as they were greeted by Mum and Dad at the door. Few words were spoken but grieved emotions broke the silence. As the room filled I became tense and felt a need to be on my own. I made my way to the back of the garden to my cubby house, where I snuggled into a beanbag.

The choking lump in my throat began to subside as I let my emotions run free. I began to relate to God what had happened during the night. Somewhere, someone had made a big mistake and now Chris had been taken away. I pleaded with the Lord to bring Chris back to life as he had done to others long ago in the "Bible" times.

As Chris was just under two years my senior, he and I shared a close brotherly relationship. As the fatal disease Chris had slowly took its toll, our relationship slowly weakened because we could not talk to each other as we once did. Also Chris was in a big hospital down in Melbourne. Each time I went down to visit him I could distinctly notice signs of physical and mental deterioration, which at first distressed me because of the speed at which he had deteriorated over the first five or six weeks. After this period he seemed to slowly fade until the time of his death. I remember feeling so useless because

my brother seemed to be slipping through my fingers and I could not tighten my grip on the will I had for him to live, but only stand back and pray so hard that God would allow Chris to live.

During Chris' illness, it seemed very comforting to have close friends and loved ones nearby. My younger brother and sister were staying with their cousins. Mum stayed with a friend in Melbourne just near the hospital and Dad and I remained at home. It was only on a rare occasion that we were together as a family group. I often dreaded the time that I would be left alone to try and cope with the burden of my dying brother, however, this never happened because Mum and Dad were always there within my call to help, soothe my anxiety and my feeling of insecurity. My close friends and their parents made me feel very welcome at their homes when both Mum and Dad were away. Often they took me out somewhere to take my mind off worrying about Chris and the family. I worked hard at keeping my mind occupied, which I found easier to do whilst being with my friends, out fishing or kicking the footy and other activities which pleasantly filled in time.

Maybe keeping my mind off Chris was a way to confine my true feelings and emotions at that time. Often, I truly denied that Chris was dying. Many times I psyched myself into a frame of mind that there was no way known that Chris could die and it was within Dr. Henderson's power to cure him.

Everything I seemed to do was related to Chris. So many elements in the environment reminded me of my brother. Each evening when I retired to bed, the room seemed so empty without Chris with whom I had shared it all my life. It seemed a comforting idea when, after my prayers, I stuffed pillows and blankets under the sheets on Chris' bed in the shape of a body so I could wake and look over and see him cuddled in bed. This idea never worked because the truth was always awaiting me each morning.

Another notion which I had of a similar nature was when Chris was brought back to Kyabram from Melbourne. I felt the very real need to go back in time before the illness and go on with life again pretending that Chris had never contracted encephalitis. I did not have much faith in this concept but I knew that it would work temporarily if only I could take him from hospital and bring him home with me. Even though he couldn't talk or walk, I could still dress him in his old familiar clothes and sit him down beside me so I could impend my anxieties, momentarily go back in time and relive the carefree kind of life that I was used to.

What Chris means to us is probably best summed up in a poem which was written following Chris' death, by a close friend of the family.

*"We had the happiness of knowing
A chosen boy called Chris.
And we treasure precious memories
Of those few years of his.
We loved him for his gentle ways,
Brown eyes and friendly smile.
We never guessed we had him
Just for a little while.
We watched him grow from babyhood
To a gentle, humble boy.
The simple joys of family life
Were things he most enjoyed*

*As the oldest in the family
His mother placed her trust
In this son, and elder brother
So gentle, good and just.
It seems that God had lent him
To do his work down here,
And when 'twas done He called him
For He chose to have him near.
His going caused us sadness
But we know that in God's love
He's gone ahead – and waits for us
In our true home above"*

A Solitary Journey

Grief is a solitary journey. No-one but you know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you know has died. And no-one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way. Comfort comes from knowing that people have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

- Helen

- From Reflections TCF WA December 1998

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 JULY 2005



We welcome letters, poetry and drawings from siblings of any age.

Send to: TCF SIBLING PAGE GPO BOX 1303 SYDNEY 2001