

F CUS ONLINE

Bereaved families offering friendship, support and understanding to each other

No 124

July-August-September 2005

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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.

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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
--

TCF BEREAVED PARENT CENTRE

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

Mailing Address:

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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:

CAMPBELLTOWN CHAPTER
*in loving memory of
their sons and daughters*

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**KIND AND LOVING THOUGHTS
TO ALL THE DEAR DADS ON
FATHERS' DAY SUNDAY
4TH SEPTEMBER 2005**

MEMORIES

When you need to ...
Reach deep inside and take one of your precious memories.
Wipe away the cobwebs, lay it out in front of you
And let the sunshine and the sounds engulf you.
Revel in the experience of it
Re-live each precious moment, be overwhelmed by them
And taste the wonderful sweet tears that are their gift.
When your needs have been almost satisfied
Pause for one more second
Then gently fold it back up, give it a big hug and a tender kiss
And return the treasure to where you found it.
Then to make the experience complete,
Find someone special and share the feelings with them ...
For surely something as wonderful as this is meant to be shared.
Don't be afraid of using them – that's what memories are for
You will never lose them ...
For as certain as the sun will rise tomorrow,
Love once attained is never lost.

- By Steve Channing
- Taken from TCF Manhasset New York,
July 2003

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

**WEDNESDAY
12TH OCTOBER 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

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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
5th September, 7th November

Death in Older Children

Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month 11am – 2pm
15th September, 20th October, 17th November
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
14th September, 12th October, 9th November

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
7th September, 5th October, 2nd November
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: Narellan Community Health Centre, Queen Street, Narellan

Meetings: 1st Friday in the month at 7.30 pm
2nd September, 7th October, 4th November

Contact: Cheryl 02 4625 3559

Joy 02 9606 5859

Miranda Chapter

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

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
13th September, 11th October, 8th November

Contact: Valda 02 9520 4921

Guy 02 9569 4461 pm

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

It is with very mixed feelings that I hand the running of Chapter meetings over to Paulette, whom I know will be a very capable facilitator. As Paulette is not available during the day, I will still be available to take phone calls. It is 14 years since I met with 26 other bereaved parents and Miranda Chapter came into being. I look back on those years and recall the many families I have met with and the impact they have made on my life. The sharing with and the caring for one another has been special and will always remain so. I truly value the special friends I have met over this period and know these friendships will continue. Yesterday I visited Hazelhurst and sat by our memorial garden – the garden in memory of the children of Miranda Chapter – I thought of all the children I'd come to know of through the stories told by their parents, who have shared their memories and their love for their children with us. I know the names and faces of so many precious children who will live on in my heart forever. I know I will miss sharing meetings with you all but I am reassured by the fact that I leave the Chapter in good hands and that you will all continue to care for and share with one another. I hope to meet up with you at some time in the near future.

I remain yours as ever, Valda

Silverdale/Warragamba Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre, Warragamba

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
13th September, 11th October,

8th November

Contact: Mary 4774 2994

Theresa 4774 0062

Turrumurra/Ryde Chapter

Venue: Thornleigh Community Centre

Cnr. Phyllis & Central Ave, Thornleigh

Meetings: 1st Tuesday in the month at 7.45 pm
6th September, 4th October, 1st November

Contact: Richard 9427 3133

Lana 9858 1571

COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS

Bowral Chapter

Venue: Lecture Room, Old Bowral Hospital
Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 7.30 pm
19th Sept, 17th October, 21st November
Contacts: Liz 02 4871 3773 Sandra 02 4861 3079

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
28th Sept, 26th October, 30th November
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
10th Sept, 8th October, 12th November
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) 1st Sept, 6th Oct, 3rd Nov
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
27th Sept, 25th October, 29th November
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
18th Sept, 16th October, 20th November
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
21st Sept, 19th October, 16th November
Contact: Joan 02 4232 1642

Kyogle Chapter

Venue: Community Health Centre
Meetings: By arrangement
Contacts: Jean 02 6632 1405

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
15th Sept, 20th October, 17th November
Contacts: Glennys 02 6621 4086 ah
Dianne 02 6621 5558

Macksville Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre,
27 Wallace Street, Macksville
Meetings: Meetings at Neighbourhood Centre by
arrangement
3rd Tuesday in the month 10.00 am at
Short Order Coffee Shop, Princess Street,
Macksville
20th Sept, 18th October, 15th November
Contacts: Joy 02 65 68 1054 Sandra 02 6569 6104
One on one meetings scheduled upon request.
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
8th Sept, 13th October, 10th November
Contact: Lorraine 02 6672 3219 for details
On the 22nd June the Murwillumbah Chapter members
were saddened to lose a long standing member and
friend, Elaine Chilcott. Elaine, who died suddenly, was
a wonderful support to our TCF group. She was always
ready to lend a hand to any project. At the International
Gathering a couple of her knitted rugs were auctioned
to raise money for TCF. Earlier this year Elaine
donated a knitted rug for the 2005 Christmas raffle.
Her love and kindness will live on. We will miss her
very much.

Sincerely, Lorraine

COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS cont

Muswellbrook Chapter

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

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
8th October, 10th December
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
19th Sept, 17th October, 21st November
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
13th Sept, 11th October, 8th November
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

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

FOREVER CHERISHED

On a rainy August night
So many miles from home
You were taken away, suddenly and
tragically.
No one was there to comfort you or hold you
close.
No good-bye could be spoken.
The desperate sadness that your young life
was gone.
The helpless feeling that I couldn't change it.
The painful reality that justice would never be
served.
Life had never been easy.
Your trust and compassion for others was
great.
The hurts were deep and the
disappointments many
But your hopes and dreams endured.
For all you wanted was a simple life,
A wife that loved you, and to watch your
children grow.
I hold onto those last words, laughs and hugs
Which were to be forever.
You've taken a part of me with you
My life can never be the same
For I miss you so deeply.
No words or tears could ever tell.
You'll always be my BIG brother
And I your LITTLE sister,
And I pray for the day that you
Again will put your arm around me
And with that gentle squeeze,
Say, "How ya doing little sister?"
Loved and cherished forever.

- *Bonny Curzon (Kramer), TCF/Regina, SK*
In memory of brother, Clarke Lee Adam
Kramer

April 24, 1956 – August 16, 1987
Reflections From the Heart

- *Taken from TCF Winnipeg Chapter,*
July August 2005



**PLEASE NOTE THE
INSERT IN FOCUS REGARDING THE
RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND**

*Included in the programme at the
Residential Weekend:*

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
THE COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS
NEW SOUTH WALES INC.**

**SATURDAY
17TH SEPTEMBER 2005**

4.00 pm

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

Attendance for AGM only is permissible.
Details were sent in a letter under separate
cover to all registered members.

**Sunday 18th September
Leura Gardens Resort**

Brenda Robilliard, Chaplain of Pastoral
Care, Westmead Children's Hospital, will be
conducting a Service of Remembrance. 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. Details were sent in a
letter under separate cover to all registered
members.

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.

SCRAPBOOKING CLASSES are planned
for the first Thursday of the month at the
Bereaved Parent Centre
at 11.00 am
Cost \$5.00
Interested members please telephone
Sue 9712 1605

**CHAPTER LEADERS AND
TELEPHONE CONTACTS**

If you have an email address, would
you kindly notify the Centre by email
of same

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.

THANK YOU FOR DONATIONS

On behalf of New South Wales Council I
wish to thank all those members who have
paid the annual subscription. Thank you
also for the many generous donations,
without your thoughtful gifts it would not be
possible to carry on the work of TCF. Added
to the most welcome grant from the New
South Wales Health Department it makes a
lot of things possible.

Yours sincerely, *Mary Carroll* President

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.*

SHARING THOUGHTS ...

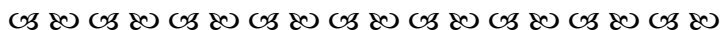
Dear Friends,

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

Sharing Comments

from TCF NSW Grief Support Evening for the Western Suburbs held June 8 2005

- The content was very supportive and the presenter was brilliant. The audience were very good participators and overall a wonderful evening. Julie was very articulate, knowledgeable and empathetic. Those there participated well and overall I learnt a lot of valuable information which will help me in my grief journey.
- I wish my friends who aren't bereaved parents could come along and listen to Julie and maybe they could understand me a little ... We need as much info as we can
- Fabulous – a lot I knew but helped to be told. Julie was compassionate, approachable and wise. Audience participation was good. They listened and then asked questions. Overall was excellent and of great value. Thank you.
- It was very helpful to have a facilitator who put words to many feelings and changes of emotion that one suffers in early bereavement. Helpful in sorting out much of the confusion and overlapping of emotions.
- Excellent information gathered from many areas of grief related work.
- Content covered the group's needs very well. Julie spoke with passion. The audience asked a great number of questions, highlighting the content, reached and created participation. Most beneficial.
- Very much needed and informative forensic information. Much needed. Thank you.
- An excellent beneficial evening.
- Wonderful evening. Thank you.



Reece Glen

Date of death 20.09.03 9 years old

To our darling Reece,

You have been gone 21 months now. Pop and Nan love you so very much.

When you walked into our home you brought so much joy. Your smiling face, your great big hugs and kisses and of course the bag on your shoulder with your music in it that you loved so much. When you got up in the morning our hearts would melt when you said, "Good morning Nan, good morning Pop" with that beautiful face and that fixed smile you had. When you played your music we would all dance around the floor you made us feel so young. When you sang with that beautiful voice of yours we would glow inside out. Especially "On the Road to Gundagai" that Pop taught you.

How you loved helping us in the garden and making things with wood and nails with Pop. What a clever boy you were. How you would give and do anything for anyone. You brightened the lives of anyone who met you.

You were Pop's little "shadow" and Nan's "Little Star". How we miss you so very very much. Not having you in our lives is unbearable. You will be in our hearts forever.

Remembered always. Our life will never be the same without you darling Reece.

Love, Nan and Pop

MY DAUGHTER IS LIKE THE WIND

My daughter is like the summer wind,
Warm and wild,
Always on the move,
A wandering spirit,
Happily floating free,
Sometimes gentle,
Sometimes stormy,

Never still.
She's always whirling around me,
Whispering through the trees,
Dancing about, singing out loud,
Never captured or confined,
The world to roam free,
For eternity.

*- Written by Steven, TCF/Melbourne,
Australia Taken from TCF Winnipeg
Chapter, May/June 2005*

From Lorraine , TCF Murwillumbah Chapter

After nursing my beautiful 20 year old son throughout his final months with Leukaemia, I was taken aback when he asked me, about a week before he died, “Mum, how do you think you will be after I die?” I answered him with “I don’t really know what it will be like, Mick, or how I will be, but I can only say I have my faith and some very good friends, and I hope these will help me get through it somehow.”

That is not what I really wanted to answer. I wanted to cry and scream that I couldn’t stand the thought of him dying. Never to see or touch him again, or caress his brow as he lay ill, (which he loved having done as a small boy when not well); or to feel his comforting hugs, the talks we always had together, the wink he would give me as something special between us and to feel the beautiful bond we shared. I knew all these things were what I was going to miss – his very presence. I knew him so well, my heart knew what he wanted to hear so he would be at peace, that all was well with his parents, before he died. He had been given a special grace that enabled him to embrace his illness and inevitable death, and he was at peace with himself, which in turn I suppose helped us to cope better.

Now 22 years later and looking back in hindsight, I could not have envisaged what my grief journey was going to be like. If Mick asked me now “How did it go Mum?”, this is what I would like to say to him.

Dearest Mick,

I would like to tell you how it was from the very moment you took your last breath, in the home you loved with your family at your side.

I just couldn’t believe that you had died. I have to say your poor old Mum took some time for that moment to become a reality. I actually thought at times I was going mad. The feelings of despair and loss, even fear, of what had happened to you grieved me so. The thought of never seeing you again was more than I could bear. I lost my concentration and motivation. Without you in my life, life seemed so meaningless.

I didn’t know that people would be telling me, that I have a life to live, and at least I knew you were going to die, and how lucky I was to still have four children. I knew all that, but you were my first born son (oh! what a joy!). You were so special to me, just as your two sisters and brothers were. They are still with me thank God. Some asked me how your two younger brothers were going – I’d say “I think they are going all

right.” They missed you so – it was in their eyes and behaviour. But I didn’t really know how to help them. My pain at losing you was so bad, I felt so isolated and alone in my grief.

I couldn’t stop thinking about you and your illness. I kept seeing you having to use your walking stick, to help you walk. It is so hard for people who haven’t lost a child to understand this grief. My sadness would go so deep that I could still hear your gut wrenching vomiting for a long time after you died. When you asked me “how do you think you will be after I die”, and I said “my faith and my friends would hopefully be my help”, well I have to tell you that maybe I wouldn’t have made it through until tomorrow, without my faith and my friends. What I didn’t really know was, when I gave you that answer what strength I would draw from both these things, I could not have survived, I’m sure, without them.

Sometimes though, I have to be honest, I seemed to need something more. But what it was – I didn’t know. Even though good things were happening in our lives, I still couldn’t seem to see that light at the end of the tunnel that people spoke about.

Two and a half years later, I was still struggling over losing you and I have to say I felt reluctant to communicate my feelings of disbelief, pain and anger at having lost you to the people around me, because so much time had passed. Then at about this time I read in our daily newspaper about The Compassionate Friends. I read it was an international organisation of bereaved parents, offering friendship, support and understanding to other bereaved parents. That certainly got my attention, I felt a great sense of relief that there was something out there for bereaved parents.

From this day on Mick, my life took on a different meaning, and yes! even a purpose. All the fear of how I felt and what was happening in my mind was all made clear to me. The Compassionate Friends publish a newsletter for parents who have lost a child. It doesn’t matter the age of the child, 3 months, 3 years or 33 years, it is still a crippling loss. From the time I started receiving the newsletter, a greater understanding of my grief started to evolve. After reading the newsletter your Dad said, “At least we are not on our own and we had Mick in our lives for 20 years.” I know you said to us before you died that you were happy with your 20 years and you felt that some people who died at 60 or 70 years might not have had as much as you had experienced in 20. We wanted you to have more, but you always said God had His

reasons for what He had planned. Hopefully I will see that 'plan' one day and understand.

I guess our healing started that day. I learned that each one of us is unique, each child (meaning you Mick) is unique (and you were!) and each one of us individual in our grieving. I learnt from the newsletter that husbands and wives do grieve differently. Your Dad and I had a different relationship with you and we grieved differently at different times over different things.

It wasn't easy, but it did make it easier, understanding that it was normal for mums and dads not to be able to help one another. It made me realise even more that my grief at losing you in this life was such an individual thing. No two people grieve the same. A lot of my weird thoughts and feelings were normal, I really had thought there was something wrong with me. Once I had learnt that other bereaved parents felt like I did, I started to be a bit more gentle with myself (and also your Dad!).

I learnt so much through the newsletter, one of these lessons was that people confronted their grief in many different ways. Some people become better golfers, or better at their tapestry, or some become very proficient at gardening. Your Dad did this – he cemented and gardened and built more bird cages in our backyard, (where we held your famous cricket matches). Now I understand that was part of working through his grief. Some people confront their grief by writing. I am so glad you asked me to write a story on your life, before you died, because I not only wrote a story, I wrote a complete book. I never realised how writing could be so cathartic. It took me 7 years to write it all down. On your 10th anniversary I had it published, I called it "Mick – Send Me a butterfly", and 22 years later, people are still reading about your life. I can promise you, you will never be forgotten, and your life my darling was not in vain (and yes! I did get your butterflies).

Did you wonder what I did with the "legacy of love" you left me when you died? Well, once I learnt of The Compassionate Friends, I knew I would like to help people like myself, who were travelling a similar journey to me and a journey I was still travelling. I became a telephone contact for bereaved parents, (yes, you know I've always been a good talker!!). After 19 years I am still a telephone contact for bereaved parents.

I have learnt so much Mick, and have come so far. How can I even tell you? The beautiful friends I have made through my book, astounds me. Thank you for inviting me to write that story about you.

I learn something new every time I meet a newly bereaved parent. So many lovely parents, so many lost beautiful children, so many different deaths, but each one comes down to the one thing, we share the pain and sadness when a precious son or daughter dies. It is because of this that we can come together and share and support one another, because we understand that pain. Sometimes my imaginings tell me that you are friends "up there" with all those beautiful children, just like us parents down here have been drawn together to help each other in The Compassionate Friends.

I am not sure how I would have been and what I would have written in this letter, if I hadn't learnt of The Compassionate Friends. All I know is my life after your death certainly has been enriched through doing this work with other bereaved parents and maybe just by helping others on their grief journey, I can help them attain the wonderful peace I now have. This is not to say I don't still miss you terribly or long for your touch and bodily presence. No!! I can promise you Mickey, that will never change. You are and always will be a part of the tapestry of my life, and I carry you in my heart, just as I do your living brothers and sisters. They too are part of the tapestry of my life and they are in my heart along with you. The five of you, still together with me, in a special place.

As a bereaved parent, I am still on my grief journey. Your once timid, nervous mother is now invited by different organisations to speak at their meetings about The Compassionate Friends. I speak with enthusiasm and confidence of the work of The Compassionate Friends and of the pain of losing a child.

I know you would be happy with what I have done with your "legacy of love" and it is that love that strengthens me every day since you left us.

I have so much more to tell you, but it will have to keep until another time. Did I hear you say – "Maybe there's another story Mum?" Who knows Mick – there could be another book in me yet??!!

Cheerio for now. Until I see you again.

All my love, Mum. XXOO

P.S. Mick, send me a butterfly (thanks darling).

*This is an edited extract from an article by
Lorraine _____*

*Grief never ends, but it changes.
It is a passage, not a place to stay.
The sense of loss must give way –
If we are to value the life that was lived.*

- Lifted from Reflections, TCF WA, Dec 1996

- Originally taken from UK Women's Weekly, Aug 1996

WHY DO I COME HERE?

Why do I come to these meetings? Maybe my need is simply to cry it all out for a while without hurting or embarrassing anyone. Maybe I come to ask questions. So how come I can't talk when I get there? Why do I sit there like a zombie and drink tea until I can't hold any more? Why do I want to leave as soon as I get there? Why do I pack tissues even as I tell myself, "This time I'm not going to dissolve in tears"? I yearn to talk, yet I cringe when anyone looks my way. I lose my tongue and composure when anyone speaks softly and openly to me the way I wish my mother and my sister could. I want to speak but the conversation seems too fast for me to get on. Yet when everyone's talking with each other and I feel I'm not about to be asked to contribute, I relax so completely I feel as though I could fall asleep.

Maybe that's why I go. I feel confused there and exhausted when I get home. Yet my everyday mask just falls away with my make-up at these meetings. I have to tell myself over and over that everyone there has plummeted the depths of utter despair, where I am. When these compassionate people ask, "How are you really?", they truly want to hear an answer. So many others are too frightened to ask and so alarmed to hear the answer. Maybe that's why I go to these meetings.

I go. - Joy, *Mother of Michelle Joy*, 24.3.68 – 2.2.87

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

A MARITAL LESSON ON GRIEF

When our son was killed, I remember thinking through the haze of pain that this most horrifying of life experiences would somehow bring us closer. Sharing the loss of a child created and loved by both of us for twenty years would surely deepen the bond between us. I was in for a surprise.

We clung almost blindly to each other until the shock began to give way to ugly reality. As we each moved to our individual pattern of grieving, differences began to emerge. I felt like a time bomb about to explode. I needed desperately to talk about our son. My husband refused to verbalise his feelings and became angry at my overtures. I stopped trying to communicate.

This was beyond my comprehension. Where was my helpmate, my best friend? I felt rejected, unloved and terribly alone. Anger overwhelmed me as I bitterly realised that I wasn't going to be able to share my grieving with the person who meant the most to me in the world. I knew that many marriages fail after the death of a child. Dear God, how could we possibly survive an additional tragedy.

We attended a few Compassionate Friends meetings and then continued alone. The gentle acceptance of others who had lost a child permitted me to talk or cry without guilt. Our problem was definitely not unique, many other parents expressed similar frustrations. So many couples experience marital difficulty after the death of a child that it is now considered the norm.

We weren't going crazy, just because our grieving styles were different didn't mean that our whole marriage would fall apart. My anger began to dissipate as I slowly faced the fact that I had been placing unrealistic expectations on my husband. Hurting at least as much as I, he simply could not meet my needs for support.

We began to have some honest discussions, agreeing that we needed each other's nurturing in order to survive and find meaning in life. We learned to respect each other's feelings. We tried to please each other in little ways, a hug, a special meal, anything that expressed caring. Patience with each other soothed over many rough moments. Time spent alone together was very healing. It took a conscious decision from both of us to try harder. Some days we didn't have any energy left when grief was particularly painful. It wasn't easy for we still couldn't talk about our son for a long time.

Much later, the knowledge that support had been there all along from my friends, if I had only asked for it saddened me. I had to admit that I simply had been too proud to reveal myself as a suffering person in need of help. I will be forever grateful to The Compassionate Friends for being there with loving, open arms.

As I look back, ignorance of grief and the impact it can have on a marriage was the basis for our problems. But, in retrospect, how could we possibly have been prepared for the onslaught of paralysing emotions that overwhelmed us.

Anguish of this intensity can reveal a spouse you've never seen before. Deeply wounded, you will both be inevitably changed from the experience of losing a child. Understanding these simple facts would have helped immeasurably.

- Pay Retzloff – TCF Oshkosh WI

- Taken from TCF Johannesburg Chapter, May 2005

SUNRISES AND SUNSETS

Each life is lived in neat and tidy segments of time ... weeks, months, years, sunrises and sunsets, births and death. There is nothing which happens to us that cannot be placed in a specific framework of organised time. Spring, summer, winter and fall not only measure the seasons of the year but the ages of our lives as well. The very young are in the springtime of their life, the very old are in the winter of their years. Sunrises are beginnings. Sunsets are endings. During the progression of time, we keep mental ledgers where we record the passing of time by our successes, mistakes made, love given and received and if we are lucky, we live long and our sunsets are bright and beautiful and welcome when we are full of time and memories.

But there are sunsets which are not so fulfilled ... when the evening comes prematurely to a child of ours, and we are plunged into darkness in the middle of our day. Then there is only night, pain and confusion to measure and only what-might-have-beens to tally. Every scrap of memory is salvaged to bring a spark of warmth to the coldness of the night to come. Each failure in our ledger is magnified and mixed with guilts and unanswerable questions. When memories are painful, we may even replace them with a more acceptable unreality to armour our hearts and minds until the time when we can accept the harshness of what has been, and we're again strong enough to begin again – never the same, but sustained by our faith and the healing of time.

But when the child's sunrise and sunset have been compressed into a few minutes or hours, the lack of memories can be equally hurtful. There are no memories of a beloved face, no remembered firsts or lasts, not even a remembrance of some irritating habit to tuck into our battered hearts – only the vacuum created when the mind has been geared to expect so much and is rewarded with only empty arms and blank pages in a baby book.

And so if you should find yourself measuring your pain against another's, remember this: if you have memories and if your memories are beautiful, you have a gift that is the most worthy of all. For when your morning finally comes after the darkness has lifted, you can look back and see that the darkness was not as complete as you had thought. For there in the darkness will wink and glimmer the light of your memories – like fireflies on a summer night.

- Judy Dickey, *TCF Greenwood*
- Taken from *TCF Johannesburg Chapter*,
Sth Africa, May 2005

THIS (VALUABLE) LIFE

It's easy to measure a person's worth by their achievements and life experience. But what is the value of a life when it only lasts seven weeks? Our daughter, Mieke Jinian, was born with a congenital heart condition, diagnosed when she was only 24 hours old. The first of the many operations she needed happened when she was six weeks old. She survived it – she really was a fighter. But underlying problems were identified as she was recovering, and we were told they were inoperable. She died the same day.

Her life was hardly lived, and devoid of milestones. But we value her life for who she was, and how much she gave to so many people. She taught us so very, very much.

Mieke taught us to live in the moment. She definitely did, and given the circumstances, it was all that we could do as well. But we learned to appreciate each moment – you have to be living in the now to fully appreciate a look, a touch, an emotion, and just how precious life is. Mieke could bend time, like babies do – some moments lasted forever, and others went far too quickly. An hour could disappear if we were having a cuddle. Just watching her sleep was a moment out of time.

Mieke also made us realise how precious life is, and helped us appreciate a lot of things we normally take for granted. She brought into focus the truly important things in life – the people and the relationships we have with them, rather than materialistic goals and grandiose future plans.

Her life had value because she brought out the best in us. She unearthed in us a capacity to love that was completely beyond any of our prior experiences. A new kind of love – unconditional, boundless, trusting. With her, we knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that we wanted to be parents, and that we would be great ones. She made us a family and brought new meaning into our lives.

Mieke won the hearts of everyone she came in contact with, and brought out the best in others too. She seemed to reach out to people. Family and friends rallied to her cause, looking after the minutiae of daily life for us, so we could spend as much time with her in hospital as possible.

She never got old enough to learn how to smile, but she still seemed to convey a huge range of emotions that defined her personality. She was cheeky and impish, thoughtful and serious, and most of all, content. She loved hugs and cuddles, and wound herself up for the most hilarious sneezes. She had the cutest hiccups – that went on for ages. In spite of our anti-gender-stereotyping efforts, she looked best in pink. She had a full head of hair that you just wanted to touch, and eyes you could lose yourself in. Our little girl was everything we never knew we wanted.

Mieke took us on a journey – we're now quite different people, but hopefully richer, wiser, more compassionate and more caring. She touched so many people's lives, even though her time with us was brief. Her life had value – her life was priceless. She deserves to be remembered.

- Kitty , 2004, TCF Western Australia

Mieke Jinian

b 19.08.04 d 6.10.04 Congenital Heart Condition

- Taken from "Reflections" TCF Western Australia, June 2005

MY TEARS FOR LINDSEY

The tears you see do not represent weakness.
They are tears for my child I will always love.
They are tears of sadness; I miss her so much.
I have to believe she is in Heaven above.

There are many reasons for the tears I shed.
For the love I will always have for her in my heart.
For the joy I felt the day she was born,
For the sorrow I feel now that we are apart.

The way that the sight of her face brought me happiness.
The sound of her little voice talking to me.
Her laughter that brought a smile to my face.
These things I can no longer hear or see.

Now I'm here in our home, it's so quiet, I'm alone.
Her toys are not scattered on the living room floor.
Her laughter no longer fills the room and the air.
My arms are empty; they can hold her no more.

These are not signs of weakness,
They are signs of the deepest eternal love,
For my child I used to hold in my arms, now empty,
She is no longer with me; she has to be in Heaven above.

In loving Memory of Lindsey
From her Daddy

www.groww.org

- Taken from TCF Winnipeg, Nov/Dec 2004

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.

Heidi Catherine

Died from suicide – aged 22 years

As that wintery August day approaches, the dreadful dark cloud that hovers above seems to descend to consume me. Oh why did you leave us? I am still searching for reasons but now I realise that I will never know. I miss you so much. There is no future to watch unfold, just the past memories of you. I will love you forever although I am still empty and sad.

My unconditional love, Mum

Jannette Margaret

11.12.60 – 2.9.85

Twenty years have passed as if in a flash. It seems like only yesterday the dreadful news came to us. Loved and always remembered, deeply missed.

Love Mum and Elizabeth

I WILL WAIT FOR YOU

I will wait for you ...

Though we never had a chance to say goodbye,
Remember me ...

When winter snows are falling through a quiet sky
I'll remember you

When, in our darkest hour,
You held my hand and prayed I wouldn't go –
But a silent voice called out to me:
My time had come, and I had to travel Home ...

Since then, I know your life has never been the same,

For I visit you each day:
So many times I've felt your pain;
I've watched you cry;
And I've heard you call my name ...

But now, further along life's road I stand
In a timeless world, just beyond your sight.
Waiting for the day when I can take your hand
And bring you across to this Land of Golden Light

Till then, remember me, you understand – and try not to cry.

But if you do:

Let your tears fall
For the happiness and the joy we knew.
And for the special Love we shared –
For Love can never die.

- Stephen O'Brien, 1995

- TCF UK Summer 2002

Michael Alan

13.1.69 – 20.9.97 28 years

After eight long years we are finally coming to terms with your sudden death Micca. Like the book title – "Knowing Why Changes Nothing". Finally your ashes are back together as one, and ready to be placed to rest. Now you can rest in peace and your soul and spirit can have the freedom they deserve. Still love you and miss you.

Mum and Dad, Tania and Jake

Michael (Mick) Stewart

20 years

We treasure the time we were blessed with your love and presence darling Mick, and we hold your memory deep in our hearts.

Mum, Dad, Cathie, Michelle, Chris, Peter and families

Dean Alexander

24.12.71 – 19.10.95 Aged 23 years

Deano, It has been ten years since you left us without saying goodbye. Your brother is now happily married and has a beautiful baby girl and your sister has moved to Perth. You will always be loved and missed by all of us.

Mum, Dad, Alisha, Craig, Mandy and Ashleigh

*Now that your life
Knows every darkness and sorrow,
Now that your time
Trembles with mourning and pain,
Now that your eyes
See only empty horizons,
Now that your hand
Touches the centre of grief:*

*Leave yourself open
To comfort and caring,
Leave yourself open
To softness and friendship,
Leave yourself open
To kindness and blessing,
And try to listen for the still music of hope.*

- Sascha Wagner

SPRING IS COMING

If you are newly bereaved and looking toward your "first" spring, you may be surprised by some of the feelings you may experience during the next few weeks. We hear so much about the beauty of spring - the new life and the feelings of renewal that are supposed to accompany this lovely time of year. During my "first" year, I expected that spring would cheer me up, and make me feel lots better. How surprised and frustrated I was when, on one of those truly magnificent spring days as life seems to burst forth everywhere, I was "in the pits". When a friend said to me, "Doesn't a day like this really lift your spirits and make you feel better?" I had to reply honestly that I was having a really bad day - that the sense of loss and emptiness was greatly intensified.

Gradually, I began to realise that my expectations for spring were unrealistically high. I had looked forward to spring with the wrong kind of hope. When we are newly bereaved, we are constantly looking for something to take away the pain and make our lives all right again. Unfortunately, there is no magical event or moment when this takes place. It does happen, but only with time and the grief work which we all must do before we can be healed.

The coming of spring cannot make everything okay again. What we can do, however, is remind ourselves that regardless of what happens in our lives, nature's process will continue, and that can offer us hope.

I am looking forward to spring this year. I welcome the sun's warmth, the return of the birds from their winter in the south, and forsythia, the daffodils and the greening of the world. Know that someday you will once again welcome spring. Be gentle and patient with yourself and with nature. Don't expect too much. Be ready to let a little of the hope that spring can offer into your heart.

- Evelyn Billings, TCF/Springfield, MA

- Taken from TCF Winnipeg Inc, March/April 2005

THE CORD

We are connected,
My child and I,
By an invisible cord
Not seen by the eye.
It's not like the cord
That connects us 'til birth;
This cord can't be seen
By any on Earth.
This cord does its work
Right from the start.
It binds us together
Attached to my heart.
I know that it's there,
Though no one can see
The invisible cord
From my child to me.
The strength of this cord
is hard to describe.
It can't be destroyed
It can't be denied.

It's stronger than any cord
Man could create.
It withstands the test,
Can hold any weight.
And though you are gone,
though you're not here with me,
The cord is still there,
but no one can see.
It pulls at my heart;
I am bruised, I am sore,
But this cord is my lifeline
As never before.
I am thankful that God
Connects us this way,
A mother and child
Death can't take it away!

- Author Unknown

- Taken from TCF Compassion

UK Summer Edition 2005

*Don't ask the sun to always shine.
It can't, the clouds exist.*

Don't ask the leaves not to fall.

They can't, the wind exists.

Don't ask me to forget my child ...

I can't, because she did exist

and she will always be a part of me.

- From TCF Winnipeg 2003

MASK

I have a mask; I wear it and hide behind it.

Society provided this mask for me.

It does wonderful things!

My mask smiles, laughs, carries on.

It shows no pain, no tragedies,

No tears and no loss.

I hide behind it; I live inside it.

Nobody knows what's really inside it.

Nobody knows what's really behind it,

For I try not to remove it, and let people see.

Only you,, you know it's me.

When I'm all alone, I'll remove my mask.

It's not a pretty thing – no wonder society
gave it to me.

Behind, is the real me, a frightened child –
crying, shaking.

There are many scars – too deep for any
repair

There are many memories that will not go
away.

My eyes are heavy and tired from all the
pain.

So much sadness, confusion and wandering
around so lost.

So much fear and shock ... terrified of what
else the future will bring.

I cannot let anyone see, because no one
wants to see

What death can be!

- Sandy Nguyen, Brantford, Ontario

(adapted) Bereavement Magazine Sept/Oct 2002

www.bereavementmag.com

Submitted by Chris Wronski

- Taken from TCF Act and Queanbeyan

THE ROOM

I stepped into your bedroom and tiptoed by
your bed.

Remembering the many times

I tousled your blond head.

Remembering the smiling glances

we exchanged when our eyes met.

Without words ever spoken – these
memories I'll never forget.

It's harder now to step into your room

Won't see that smile anymore.

I turn around with tear-stained eyes

and gently close your door.

- Cathy R Seaver

TCF Worcester, Ma

BEREAVED YOUNG ADULTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

Have you suffered the death of a sibling, or siblings?

Would you be prepared to be interviewed (or alternately answer an email questionnaire) for a postgraduate research project examining the social experiences of bereaved young adults?

Andrew (bereaved brother of Jeremy) is studying the levels and types of social isolation bereaved young adults can experience, as part of a PhD. Andrew is a student at Deakin University in Geelong, Victoria.

The criteria for participation is –

- a) you were between the ages of 18 and 30 when the sibling's death occurred, and
- b) no less than 1 year and no more than 10 years has passed since the bereavement occurred.

If you are interested in participating in a phone interview (lasting approximately 45 minutes), or alternately you would like to answer the questions in an email questionnaire format, please contact:

Andrew email mcness@deakin.edu.au

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

A man walks home alone, on a cold and chilly night,
A presence he feels behind him giving him a fright.
Spinning quickly, to see what was there
He sees a fading image, a vision so fair.

A guardian that protects his immortal soul,
Gifted with wings, its existence untold.
And a fraction of a second, it's all he is granted,
To see the next world, so bright and enchanted.

He knows it is an angel, that watches so close,
To guide him on his journey, loves him most.
The angel does just one thing, to keep the man
from causing sins.

*Written by Tim , age 16, 4 years after the death of his brother Christopher 16.1.71 – 13.2.95,
TCF WA 1999*

- Taken from TCF West Aust Siblings Newsletter, June 1999

The man will surely know, many years from now,
That the paths he had chosen without any bias
By an angel that knew, he'd sing with the choirs.

Coming to his senses alone and in the cold
The man begins to realise, a message he was told.
"If you are sick or full of fear, do not worry for I am near."

The man is still a victim, in a cruel world,
Fighting devils, evil, often thrown and hurled
Into his mind, trying to lead him astray.
But Heaven is where he will always stay.

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 .

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

A group of students were asked to list what they thought were the present "Seven Wonders of the World". Though there were some disagreements, the following received the most votes:

1. Egypt's Great Pyramids
2. Taj Mahal
3. Grand Canyon
4. Panama Canal
5. Empire State Building
6. St. Peter's Basilica
7. China's Great Wall

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student had not finished her paper yet. So she asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The girl replied, "Yes a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many." The teacher said, "Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help." The girl hesitated, then read, "I think the 'Seven Wonders of the World' are:

1. To See
2. To Hear
3. To Touch
4. To Taste
5. To Feel
6. To Laugh, and
7. To Love"

The room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

The things we overlook as simple and ordinary and that we take for granted are truly wondrous! A gentle reminder that the most precious things in life cannot be built by hand or bought by man. Don't be too busy to pass this along.

Anonymous

CONGRATULATIONS! Why is she congratulating me, you ask? Well I'll tell you. I congratulate you on surviving without your link to the past. The day death visited us, we lost our link. We have very few, if any, memories that do not include our sister or brother. Our lives were intertwined throughout childhood.

Our conspiring ways of painting the dog or keeping that secret (shh! Don't tell mum or dad), those days are over. We long to take back the mean words spoken or say I love you one more time.

I congratulate you for surviving the present. Everyday you wake up and take a breath. It may not seem like much, but it is enough. Maybe you are living without a purpose. As an older child, your job was to teach and protect. As a younger child, your job was to adore and annoy.

You endure people asking you, "How are your parents?" without a care for you. You are now living everyday without a person you thought you would always be with. You are going to school, moving into a new place, maybe even having a baby – all without the jokes, arguments and advice of your sibling. Everyday you live with the shrine. I congratulate you on surviving the future. Eventually the public will not recognise that your loss is significant. Yet it still will be. As children we did not plan our futures to just include ourselves. Our future always included our brother or sister. Now, you will have to take care of your parents. You will need to create a world in which your sibling has never been a part. I have confidence in you. You will remember, with love, and tell your children how great your brother or sister is. You will live in the future because of all the great and wonderful memories you have. You will live not only for your sibling but also for you.

- Sarah Ryan, St. Louis MO

- Taken from TCF Johannesburg Chapter, May 2005

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT SIBLING PAGE WEDNESDAY 12TH OCTOBER 2005



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

Send to: TCF SIBLING PAGE GPO BOX 1303 SYDNEY 2001