

F CUS ONLINE

for TCF Members

Bereaved families offering friendship, support and understanding to each other

No 127

April-May-June 2006

Supported by SESIAHS

FOCUS ONLINE is an edited edition of the printed news letter published for TCF Members. Annual subscriptions to the printed news letter are available. FOCUS ONLINE is intended for browsing online and downloading. You are welcome to 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
--

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS NSW 2006 RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND

“Catch a falling star”

Facilitator: Julie Dunsmore

For all bereaved parents, siblings & grandparents, offering love and support. An opportunity for sharing and learning.

**Saturday 9 September to Sunday 10 September 2006
At Rafferty’s Resort, Lake Macquarie.**

Dear Friends,

Our Residential Weekend for 2006. will be held on 9 & 10 September, 2006 at Rafferty’s Resort at Lake Macquarie. We are delighted that Julie Dunsmore has accepted our invitation to facilitate the weekend.

Julie combines a background in psychology, education, health promotion, theatre and the arts in her work as a psychologist, bereavement counsellor, and trauma therapist. Julie travels extensively giving lectures and conducting workshops in the areas of loss, grief and trauma, creative therapies, and recovery after disasters and terrorist acts.

Lake Macquarie is only 90 minutes drive north of Sydney and central to many parts of NSW. The Resort is beautiful and overlooks Lake Macquarie.

Sincerely,

Mary Carroll OAM, President.

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

Emails: *For information:*

info@thecompassionatefriends.org.au

For administration:

admin@thecompassionatefriends.org.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.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Published three monthly, **subscriptions paid annually**

FOCUS EDITORIAL TEAM: Pam Fisher, Evelyn Hague, Judith Tuggle and Robyn Murchie, Council members Mary Carroll and Janis McKenzie.

Mailing List typing: Jean Thomas and Sue Berry.

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.

REMINDER:

SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE FOR FOCUS 2006

This is the last issue of Focus posted on 2005 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.

*In this place
we walk the inner corridors
of peoples' lives.*

*Therefore walk softly with wonder
and awe for no greater privilege
can they give
than to open their hearts
and let another in.*

- Author Unknown

SPECIAL NOTE: Children and babies: In consideration for other bereaved parents we ask you not to bring your children to the Centre. Thank you for understanding.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP AT THE TCF CENTRE We offer one hour, one to one sharing sessions, on a Monday during office hours. This service is free to our members but please remember to phone and book your appointment in advance on 9290 2355.

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

5th June, 3rd July, 7th August

Death in Older Children

Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month

11am – 2pm

15th June, 20th July, 17th 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

14th June, 12th July, 9th August

Craft and Scrapbooking Days

Everyone is welcome to come – bring your knitting, crocheting, quilting, scrapbooking. Tables for scrapbooking will be set up. Bring your own tools, or pay \$5 to use the tools at the Centre. Bring your own supplies or purchase paper, albums, pages, stickers etc at the Centre. Bookings are not necessary, just turn up when you can. If you have any enquiries phone Sue. It can help to share craft projects with others who understand.

Meetings: 1st Thursday of each month at 10.30 am

1st June, 6th July, 3rd August

Contact: Sue

SUBURBAN GROUPS

Campbelltown Chapter

Venue: Narellan Community Health Centre,
Queen Street, Narellan

Meetings: 1st Friday in the month at 7.30 pm
2nd June, 7th July, 4th August

Contact: Cheryl
Joy

Miranda Chapter

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

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
13th June, 11th July, 8th August

Contact: Valda
Guy pm

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

Silverdale/Warragamba Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood Centre, Warragamba

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm
13th June, 11th July, 8th 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
6th June, 4th July, 1st August

Contact: Richard
Lana

*"If I can stop one heart from
breaking,*

I shall not live in vain;

*If I can ease one life the aching,
or cool one pain,*

*Or help one fainting robin
unto his nest again,*

I shall not live in vain."

- Emily Dickinson

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

**WEDNESDAY,
12TH JULY 2006**

COUNTRY SUPPORT GROUPS

Bega Chapter

Venue: Red Cross Rooms, Church Street, Bega
Meetings: 8th May 7.00 pm.
Please phone Susan for future dates.
Contacts: Susan Janice
Rodger

Bowral Chapter

Venue: Lecture Room, Old Bowral Hospital
Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 7.30 pm
19th June, 17th July, 21st August
Contacts: Liz Robyn

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 June, 26th July, 30th August
Contact: Anne
Lynne (ah)
Marilyn (ah)

Cessnock Area

Meetings: By arrangement
Contact: Gail

Cowra Chapter

Contacts: Marina
Dell

Dubbo Chapter

Venue: The Crest Building, Welchman Street,
Dubbo
Meetings: 2nd Saturday in the month at 2 pm
10th June, 8th July, 12th August
Contact: Judy
We welcome members to our share and care
group.

Forbes Chapter

Venue: Van on the Park, Court Street, Forbes
Meetings: 1st Thursday in the month at 12.30 pm
(luncheon) 1st June, 6th July, 3rd August
Contact: Gwen Robert

Grafton Chapter

Venue: Pullins Centre (next to Crown Hotel),
3-7 Prince Street, Grafton
Meetings: Last Tuesday in the month 10 – 12 noon
27th June, 25th July, 29th August
Contact: Shirley
Everyone who has lost a child is welcome for a casual
chat and “cuppa” at our care and share group, where
you will find love and compassion in your grief.

Griffith Chapter

Venue: Neighbourhood House, 80 Beneremdah
Street, Griffith
Meetings: 3rd Sunday in the month
18th June, 16th July, 20th August
Contact: Lorna

Inverell Chapter

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

Kiama Chapter

Venue: Meeting Room No. 1, Kiama District
Hospital, Bonaira Street, Kiama
Meetings: 3rd Wednesday in the month 9.30 –
12.15
21st June, 19th July, 16th August
Contact: Joan

Kyogle Chapter

Venue: Community Health Centre
Meetings: By arrangement
Contacts: Jean

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 June, 20th July, 17th August
Contacts: Glennys
Dianne

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 June, 18th July, 15th August
Contacts: Joy Sandra
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

Murwillumbah Chapter

Meetings: 2nd Thursday in the month
8th June, 13th July, 10th August
Contact: Lorraine for details

Muswellbrook Chapter

Meetings: Meetings are now by arrangement

Contact: Jenny
Helen

Nelson Bay Chapter

Venue: Women's Information & Counselling
Services, Stockton Street, Nelson Bay

Meetings: Contact Bev for dates

Contact: Bev

Nowra Chapter

Venue: Meeting Room 2 at the Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 146

Kinghorn

Street, Nowra

Meetings: 4th Friday in the month at 10.30 am
23rd June, 28th July, 25th August

Contact: May

Parkes Chapter

Venue: The Neighbourhood Centre
Currajong Street, Parkes

Meetings: 2nd Saturday every 2 months 2-4 pm
10th June, 12th August

Contacts: Judy and Tony

Come and join us to share our thoughts and feelings – a
friendly chat and a cuppa.

Singleton Chapter

Venue: The Neighbourhood Centre
6 Castlereagh Street, Singleton

Meetings: 3rd Monday in the month at 9.30 am
19th June, 17th July, 21st August
Night meetings by arrangement

Contacts: Pauline
Carol

Tamworth Chapter

Venue: "Vestry" (behind the Uniting
Church), Marius Street, Tamworth

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday in the month at 10am–
12noon
13th June, 11th July, 8th August

Contact: Peg
Helen

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

West Wyalong

Contact: Noela

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**

Bega Valley Chapter

A new Chapter of Compassionate Friends will now
offer help to families in the south east corner of New South
Wales.

The Bega Valley Chapter was formed last month with
nine new members and seven apologies. Previously the
nearest Compassionate Friends were at Nowra – four hours
away or Cooma, one and a half hours travel from the Bega
Valley.

Members came from Wyndham, Merimbula, Pambula,
Tathra and Bega to attend the first official meeting of the
new Chapter, each lighting a candle of remembrance in
honour of their children.

The co-ordinators of the meeting, Sue Whyman and
Janice Gibbons, told of the wonderful warm reception and
help they had received at the Bereaved Parent Centre in
Sydney. Without the Centre's guiding hand of friendship
and much needed advice, our group may not have been
established. We hope we can emulate the caring work of
the volunteers at the Sydney Centre, here on the far South
Coast. We certainly have a high standard to aspire to.

Our group was heartened to welcome two new men
into the group and Rodger bravely stepped up and offered
to be a contact person for the Focus Contact List in an
effort to extend our help to other men who may be
reluctant to seek our support.

Everyone who attended the meeting was positive and
determined to form a network of friends to help each other
and those who may face the ultimate blow – the loss of a
beloved child.

As well as regular meetings, the members intend to
hold weekend barbecues and outings to allow our families
the opportunity to meet and offer support in a beautiful and
peaceful setting along our outstanding coastline.

The co-ordinators were also asked to distribute some of
our brochures to Community Health Centres, doctors and
supporting services to let them know that Compassionate
Friends is now available in the Bega Valley.

Thanks again for your love and support.

- Susan

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

**WEDNESDAY,
12TH JULY 2006**

**CHANGE OF VENUE: TCF
RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND 2006**

**Due to unforeseen
circumstances, the Tamworth
chapter is unable to host the TCF
Residential Weekend in 2006.**

(See page 1 this issue)

**Hopefully all roads lead to
Tamworth in 2007.**

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

**SATURDAY
9TH SEPTEMBER 2006**

4.00 pm

**Rafferty's Resort,
Lake Macquarie**

Attendance for AGM only is permissible
at the Resort

Further details in August Focus

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

Voluntary Professionals:

Tony, the Information Systems
Manager for Carroll & O'Dea, has most
kindly offered to oversee our computer
system. This is on an honorary basis and
will be most helpful. We thank Tony for
his offer of assistance with our work.
Tony has already met with the Council
Executive to help with formulating plans
for the future.

The NSW Government, the South East
Sydney & Illawarra Health Service, in line
with their new health initiatives, have
decided to subsidise TCF in the acquiring
of a new computer system. This will
enable TCF to be linked to a database
used by all health professionals in NSW
and make our services more easily
accessible and create greater awareness
amongst social workers, GP's and other
professionals who meet bereaved
parents.

This is an indication of the importance
that "mutual support and self help" groups
such as ours are to the community. We
have long known this but it is wonderful to
be more fully recognised by Government
and health professionals.

**All that have meant good work with
their whole hearts have done good
work. Every heart that has beat
strong and cheerfully has left a
hopeful impulse behind it in the world,
and bettered the tradition of
mankind.**

- Robert Louis Stevenson

**The dates for *Focus* 2006 are as
follows:**

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

JULIE DUNSMORE, FACILITATOR, RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND, LAKE MACQUARIE

Julie combines a background in psychology, education, health promotion, theatre and the arts in her work as a psychologist, bereavement counsellor and trauma therapist. Julie travels extensively giving lectures and conducting workshops in the areas of loss, grief and trauma, creative therapies, and recovery after disasters and terrorist acts.

Julie has worked in the area of loss, grief and trauma for over 25 years. She initially trained with Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross. For the past three years Julie has been working with the survivors and bereaved families from the Bali bombings and is a member of a number of National and State expert Committees and Task Forces related to mental health issues pertaining to disasters and terrorism.

Her special interest has been working with people who have experienced traumatic bereavement (eg homicide, MVA, suicide and sudden unexpected death), pregnancy loss and loss of a child, young people with a life threatening illness, bereaved children, and losses after family and relationship break-up. Julie is currently the President of NALAG, National Association for Loss & Grief NSW Inc and is also one of the founders of CanTeen (The Australian Teenage Cancer Patients Society) and SANDS (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support).

Julie is a regular on ABC radio and has made a number of documentaries on loss and grief. She was the initiator and consultant on Andrew Denton's "The Topic of Cancer" and more recently the ABC Compass documentary "Life After Bali".

We are very fortunate to have Julie as facilitator at our Residential Weekend in September 2006. Julie speaks from the heart and her desire to present a programme that will help as many bereaved families as possible is very much appreciated by TCF. Bereaved parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents are welcome.

Following are excerpts from comments made by our members after Julie spoke at the Blacktown Chapter meeting in June 2005:

- The content was very supportive and the presenter was brilliant. Julie was very articulate, knowledgeable and empathetic. 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 ...
- 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.
- An excellent beneficial evening.

Would you like to travel to Lake Macquarie by mini bus?

Expressions of interest from any member who would find this mode of transport convenient can be made to the Bereaved Parent Centre 9290 2355.

JOY AND SORROW

Joy and sorrow
Balanced together
In the ups and downs
Of life
Like a see saw.
And through our sorrow
We glimpse our once known joy.
And vice versa
The depths are also the heights
Counterbalanced.

I would rather have
Lots of pain
To have known the joy
Than nothing
Of either –
An empty life.
Joy and sorrow –
The payment
And the price to pay
For loving
For living.

- From
Once Upon a Shooting Star, Carolyn, TCF Walcha

SHARING THOUGHTS ...

Dear Friends,

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

Dear Friends,

I would like very much to thank Barbara (TCF Western Australia) for sharing her story "Moving Forward Each Day". It was so moving and I admired the strength she had to write it. It has given me the courage to be able to start writing my own story.

Also thank you to Margaret (TCF Tasmania) for her story "Why I Feel 'Bonded' to Sunflowers". It was so lovely. My son loved sunflowers and spoke to me often about them. Her story really connected me to Warren that day. So, here's hoping I will be able to write my story soon.

Thank you so much for our *Focus* magazine. I know it helps me to get through each day.

Rosemarie, loved Mother of Warren, TCF Central Coast, NSW

Dear Compassionate Friends,

Thank you for your continued dedication in producing *Focus*. I very much look forward to receiving my newsletter. It is my only contact with TCF in the area I live. Your efforts, care, love and support are very appreciated.

Kindest regards, Pam, TCF, NSW

Terry John Geoffrey 24.11.64 – 8.4.81

On the 8th April our precious only son, Terry, was accidentally killed 25 years ago. He was 16 at the time and would now be 41. How we would love to see him now instead of remembering as we last saw him. Time is certainly a gentle healer but our hearts still ache every time we think of him which is all the time.

He would love to know his great brother-in-law, Neal, his so loveable nephew, Matthew, who is so much like him and his beautiful niece, Kayla. He is so loved and missed by his wonderful sister Kym.

Forever in our hearts you will stay Tez, missed and loved so much every day. Love you. *Mum and Dad*

I was sitting and reading the paper in April 2005 when my daughter and her partner came over and told us they had decided to get married, sooner, rather than later. I was so happy I jumped up and hugged them both. This was the first time that I felt excited about something. And then the sadness hit. Her husband-to-be would never meet his brother-in-law, Adam. The two young men who both enjoyed the surf, soccer, dry wit and loved this wonderful girl, would never know each other.

They decided to have a small civil ceremony, with his sister as one witness and, we didn't talk about who would be the other witness for a while. We decided to invite her cousin to be the second witness, thereby keeping it all to family. (It didn't happen quite that way, but that is another story!) This wedding took place in our back garden, the marriage celebrant a TCF member. They went on to have a celebration party the following week. The guest list for us was easy – who was there for us and who is still there for us – they were invited. This event was harder for us. What do you say to "oh you must be so happy", how can you answer without tears welling up, "yes, I am 'so' happy, but at the same time 'so' sad". Her younger brother is missing, he isn't here to say the things a sibling says, to be in the photographs and to share in his sister's happiness.

And now we are expecting our first grandchild. New life. New beginnings. New hopes. New dreams. New worries, New fears.

Now I have a purpose for my hobby, scrapbooking. I am creating one with photos and writing to ensure that this child knows Uncle Adam. It isn't easy to sort through photographs of his 25½ years with us. It isn't easy to write stories to go with the photos as my eyes fill with tears and the page becomes blurry. I have a need and a determination to complete this album by November, to finish it for his 30th birthday.

In June I will be seeing and holding a new life, my grandchild. I worry because I don't know how I will feel when I first see and hold this baby. I feel fortunate that through friendships made at TCF, I have been able to talk to others who have travelled this road before me.

Sue, TCF City & Metropolitan Chapter

Like all members of TCF, I am very much into butterflies.

Recently on a rainy morning my 11 year old grandson arrived before school with a broken umbrella. I declared it dangerous, threw it out and produced a brand new black men's type to take its place. Jarrod was very quiet all the way to school. As it was still raining when he alighted from the car he had to raise the new umbrella.

It went up – pure black. The look on his face was great. "Whew Nan, I was worried all the way to school that it would be covered in butterflies."

- Lesley, Bereaved Parent Centre

THE HEALING PATH

Many people question what life will be like as the years go by and to what degree they can expect to heal after the loss of a child. I, too, asked those questions and searched for seasoned bereaved parents to give me answers. There are no clear answers because each person's experience is different with various time frames for healing. Grief doesn't heal overnight, especially when it's the loss of a child. It moves slowly back and forth along a path where you often stumble over the boulders in the midst of the path or get caught in the deep ruts along the way. One way to look at the grief journey is to imagine that path with percentage markers. When you initially step on the healing path, you are at the 0 percent marker experiencing overwhelming emotional distress and looking down this seemingly insurmountable road.

Over time, you inch your way along the path, often taking a few steps forward and a few steps back but continue to make progress as you reach the 30, 40, and on up to the 80 or 90 percent of your healing. The healing journey is anything but a steady and linear process, sometimes taking two steps forward and perhaps even falling back into the deep, dark pit you visited before and come to know so well. Sometimes it may even seem deeper and darker than before and you may feel as if you are getting nowhere with your healing. Other times you feel a subtle shift in your healing and find yourself at a new place along the path. The process is similar to climbing a mountain and as you make your way up the trail, you find yourself at a new height, which allows for a different perspective than if you had looked down on your grief journey from a lower elevation of the mountain. You may wonder if you will ever make it to 100%. The answer is no. Most people can expect to reach about the 80 – 90% marker on the path. The last 10 – 20% of the healing path represents your sacred grief where you hold your loving memories and the tender part of your remaining sadness and sorrow. It's also the part that tugs gently on your heart on holidays, birthdays, anniversary days and the like or feels the sadness and lump in your throat when you hear a favourite song on the radio or you see a child that reminds you of your child. That last 10 – 20% is the part to hold dear and to be cherished.

Knowing that grief is never truly over, it can give you a sense of freedom that there is a piece of your grief which you will carry throughout the rest of your life but realise it's that part which you can now comfortably manage. What's different at the 80 – 90% marker on the path is that it's more like a gentle tug rather than a stabbing pain in your heart. It's also the place where you learn to integrate the loss into your life; transform the grief and develop a new spiritual connection with your child. It would be unrealistic to fully "get over", completely "resolve" or "let go" of your child. We are only humans who have suffered a traumatic loss of a child with whom we had a physical connection and now search for ways to continue that attachment in a spiritual sense. I still live with my own 10 – 20% of my grief. I cherish that part which periodically brings me closer to my son but doesn't completely knock me off my feet or leave me emotionally paralysed.

*- Pamela, PsyD, is a Psychologist in private practice in Boulder and bereaved mother to Angel Child, Michael (12.2.76 – 7.14.98)
- Taken from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter, July/August 2005*

PUTTING IT INTO PERSPECTIVE

It was so tempting when we first lost you to idealise and to make you into some sort of perfect, angelic child. My pain was too intense to remember bad times, like when I yelled at you. I thought only of your good points, and you did have so many. Trust in myself and time have made me realise I'm cheating myself by not seeing you realistically.

I have twenty-eight years of memories and they must include good and bad. Boys can be naughty and you did fight with your brother and sisters and talk out of turn at school. You often had arguments with your friends.

I did yell at you and punish you because I am human and so were you, and because I am your mother and I loved you. Knowing all this does not desecrate your memory. Seeing you as some faultless saint would do that. Knowing you were a whole person makes your memory more complete.

I know you were special. Your warm affection, your sense of openness and your concern for fairness are not inventive of an idolistic mother. They were there for everyone to see.

I am growing. I can begin to put things into perspective now. I can truly be thankful for the twenty-eight years I had you and hopefully some day I won't be bitter about all the years I do not have you.

*- Patricia, Mother of Anthony Dorrien, 15.6.54 – 18.12.82
- Taken from Words of Sorrow Words of Love, edited by Eva Lager*

THE MYTH OF CLOSURE

“When will I begin to feel better? When will I return to normal? When will I achieve some closure?” grievors often ask. Closure, our culture tells us, will bring about a tidy ending, a sense of completion. Some grievors hope that the desired magical closure will occur after the funeral or memorial service. Others are confident it will come once they have cleared out their loved one’s room. Or maybe after a special personal ritual.

Or perhaps after the first anniversary comes and goes – *“surely then, we will have closure,”* we think. We pray.

The reason we long for closure, of course, is because we would like to neatly seal away all of this pain. We would like to close all of the sad, confused, desperate, angry feelings out of our life. We would like to put all of this behind us. Closure. What an odd concept really, as if we could truly close the door on pain – turn the lock and throw away the key. The truth is far more complex, of course. Closure is for business deals. Closure is for real estate transactions. Closure is not for feelings or for people we love.

Closure simply does not exist emotionally, not in a pure sense. We cannot close the door on the past as if it didn’t exist because, after losing someone dear to us, we never forget that person or the love we shared. And in some ways, we never entirely get over the loss.

We learn to live with the loss, to integrate it into our new identity.

Imagine if we really could end this chapter in our life, completely. It would mean losing our memories, our connections to those we love. If we really found closure, it would ironically hurt even more because the attachment would be severed. And this attachment is vital to us – the memories are treasures to be held close, not closed out.

Perhaps it is better to think in terms of healing. Yes, we can process our pain and move to deeper and deeper levels of healing. Yes, we can find ways to move on and channel our pain into productive activities. Yes, we can even learn to smile again and laugh again and love again.

But let’s not ever think that we’ll close the door completely on what this loss means, for if we did that, we would unwittingly close the door on all the love that we shared. And that would truly be a loss too terrible to bear.

Ashley David

Lovingly lifted from TCF/Mid-Hudson Valley, NY

- Taken from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter, Sept/Oct 2005

TELEPHONE CONTACTS

Please telephone any of the following if you would like to talk to another bereaved parent. Remember, we are not here to advise or counsel, but we are there to offer comfort and strength, to share your sorrow and lighten your load.

The telephone numbers are available only to TCF Members

Please contact the Bereaved Parent Centre 02 9290 2355

WORLDWIDE FAMILY OF COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Belgium (email tcf.belgium@skynet.be),

Bolivia, Brazil,

Canada (www.geocities.com/paris/parc/5171/),

East Africa, France,

Germany, Kenya,

Hong Kong, Israel,

Jerusalem, Mexico,

Netherlands (www.vook.nl),

New Zealand (email tcfotago@deepsouth.co.nz)

Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka,

South Africa,

Johannesburg,

Switzerland,

United Kingdom (www.tcf.org.uk),

United States of America (www.compassionatefriends.org).

Contact names with Full postal addresses are available for all these countries at the Bereaved Parent Centre

SIBLING PAGE

April/May 2006

No. 91

John

20.9.83 - 28.5.99

Johnny, a brother, a special friend
Only fifteen years you shared with us
How I cherish the memories
Never forgetting the happy times
Now you watch over us as we remember
Your love, your laughter, the way you cared
Love your sister, Heidi



REMEMBRANCE

*In the light of day
I awake with thoughts of you
In the dark of night
I sleep with thoughts of you.
Is it grief or disbelief?
Grieving the Death
Of a Brother or Sister*

Somehow we take for granted that our brothers and sisters will always be there as companions and friends. When a sibling dies, it feels wrong, out of sync, confusing. This may help you to begin to explore and resolve some of the unique aspects of your grief.

Honour your own grief. Grief is different for each person, depending on past experiences with loss, coping skills, age and sex, mental and physical health, the circumstances of the death, and perhaps most significantly, the nature of the relationship with the deceased person. Only you truly know how deeply you feel the loss of this person who shared your history and knew you so well.

Respect your feelings. You might have to resume your normal daily routine soon after the funeral. But inside you may be feeling anything but normal, with many of the mixed emotions that grief can bring. Talk about such feelings to a grief support group or write a letter to the deceased person or to God so that you can express your feelings safely.

Find healthy ways to keep your sibling's memory alive. One of the most important steps in the healing process is to find ways to memorialize the person who has died. Sometimes passing on special mementos, such as a piece of jewellery or other personal belongings, can help people feel connected to the deceased person.

Acknowledge your own mortality. Coping with the death of a beloved sibling startles us with a reminder of our own mortality and often stirs up unfinished spiritual business. You may feel a need to assess what your life has been about, evaluate your life goals, and prioritize your commitments and relationships in a new way. Saying goodbye to a loved one is never easy. But these thoughts from playwright Robert Anderson may help: "Death ends a life, not a relationship. Let go of the pain and allow the memories to remain."

- Evan, TCF/Huntington, UT

- Taken from TCF Winnipeg Chapter Newsletter Nov/Dec 2004

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.

MY STORY

When my brother died, I stood beside him as he lay in the bed. He was motionless. I had never imagined that I would watch my brother die and I remember the feeling of absolute numbing disbelief. It was like time was suspended and any moment he would move just to show he was fooling around. But he just lay there, no movement, no life.

I remember in the hours that followed, thinking, how would I ever explain this to people because this wasn't the way it was supposed to happen. My brother was supposed to be my best friend, my eternal confidant, my money lender, my teaser, my frustration. When we both had kids someday he was supposed to be the cool uncle my kids would adore and laugh at. We were supposed to argue about whose turn it was to have Christmas dinner and we were supposed to grow old always knowing the other was there. Now, I only have memories and an eternal gap in my life.

The funeral was beautiful and a really appropriate send-off. There were more people than I imagined and the support was amazing. But somehow I just couldn't say goodbye. I didn't want this to be the end for my brother and me. I didn't want to call it a day, put him in the past and 'recover'. How could I honour my brother's memory if I 'recovered' because I thought that if I recovered, I might forget.

I found it hard to go to work and function in the same way that I had, when everything had changed. Work was good to me. They were kind and understanding but after a while as time passes, it wears off and for others life keeps moving forwards. No matter how time passed for me, I just didn't see it the same way as others. I felt like I would never get over the hump.

My friends were okay for a while. As much as I know they care about me, I felt that there was a certain amount of time, a period of grace where I was allowed to grieve, and then I was supposed to be over it. I realized that my friends were uncomfortable when I mentioned Michael's name or tried to talk about him and so I became careful about what I said and to whom. I drifted from my friends for a while.

Naturally, my family were grieving just as I was but each one of us grieved in our own way. I felt awkward turning to them for fear of upsetting them more than they already were. Especially when we all seemed to be 'doing so well'.

So, rather than bore people at work, drive my friends away, or upset my family, I kept my grief to myself. I started to see a grief counsellor who introduced me to The Compassionate Friends. I went to a TCF siblings support group session one evening and was amazed and touched

that there were others sharing a room with me who were hurting just as I was and didn't mind if I talked about my brother. We all shared our stories and I knew from then that I was only one sister and that there were plenty of other brothers and sisters feeling exactly the same way as me.

For a few years I continued this way. I continued feeling desperate, lonely, misunderstood, needy and helpless. I felt like I could never do enough to preserve and honour my brother and his life. I had decided when my brother died that he would always be the most important person in my life - and that's the way it stayed.

Earlier this year I took a trip abroad. A really peaceful trip with nothing planned but rest and relaxation. I was going to be away for exactly seven days. On the first evening I was thinking about my brother. I didn't realize it at the time, but my whole trip from that moment on became about my brother. Before anything and anyone else, including me, I thought about my brother. At this time, after five years, I realized that I was carrying around an unhealthy memory and that I wasn't honouring my brother the way he would want me to. I came to the realization that for five years I have been carrying this unbearable burden of grief in such a way that my whole life had become about him, about Michael.

Once I realized this, I began to understand the impacts it has been having on me to carry my grief around in such a way for so long. I knew at this point that I had to do something about it. I made some resolutions for myself and reconnected with some old friends. I read books, continued with my yoga, talked with people in an open way about my experience and how it has affected me and slowly I began to feel like myself again.

It has only been months since my trip away but in that short time, I have had the realization that 'recovery' is just that - being okay. I realized that I don't need to be perpetually broken to honour my brother's memory. I now feel confident that I can let him go and move on in my own life while still holding dear to me the treasure that is and will always be my dear little brother.

I hope this story inspires other siblings and helps others to come to the same realization. It's different for everybody, some realize sooner, some realize later. But I guess my point is that staying in the same spot, in continuous grief, is not the way my brother would have liked me to remember him. I am trying now to replace my grief and instead remember him with love.

*Yours, Joanne. Sister of Michael 25.1.75 - 28.10.98
- Taken from TCF Compassion UK, Autumn 2004*

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT SIBLING PAGE: WEDNESDAY 12TH JULY 2006



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

Send to: TCF SIBLING PAGE GPO BOX 1303 SYDNEY 2001