

# TCF News

Issue No 68 Summer 2011

## The Compassionate Friends



### EMAIL TO MIKE FOSKETT: FROM HIS JAPANESE FRIEND 'BEAUTIFUL SAIL'



**Date: Thu, 17 Feb 2011, 17:15:01 +0900**  
(22 days before the earthquake and tsunami struck. Editor)

**13:07:48 PM**

- > I was seeing you off until the plane had gone.
- > I enjoyed going here and there with you very much.
- > I really say thank you for coming.
- > You may be tired in no English speaking people country.
- > I regret that I should treat you more considerably.
- > And I wish we could have time to do something together at home.
- > While your stay, I felt you are gentle person and sometimes being like just a boy. It is nice.
- > Today, I talked to my mother that you lost your son 5 years ago. Then she cried .
- > We miss you Mike.



*Beautiful Sail*

### MIKE'S TRAVELS

Dear TCF,

My travels are over for the time being. I stayed two weeks in Montana with my sister, and although the local TCF group were not meeting at that time, a few people took the trouble to meet us and spend an evening together. I learnt a lot about the format of their meetings with people taking turns to introduce themselves and talk about the child they had lost. Adherence to the 'Creed' seemed very important as people can have very different experiences. I liked how the longer time members were able to support the more recently bereaved. I also learnt of the comfort and meaning to be found in annual gatherings and that we need not always be alone with our grief.

In Billings, Montana, part of a local park has been dedicated to The Compassionate Friends;



*Ozawa-sensei:  
Tea Ceremony teacher*

it is called the 'Rose Garden'. By way of a thank you, I have arranged with a friend to dedicate and plant a tree in the National Forest in England for the Billings Chapter, and hope this goes some small way towards the kindness they extended to me.

I then flew to Melbourne and stayed with a brother and his family, my mother had by then been moved into a hospice. It was good to spend some final time with her and see she was comfortable. For me such losses do not quite compare to the loss of my son, and I still find comfort in sharing with someone who 'just knows'.

On the way back I visited a friend in Japan. A more reflective time, spring had begun and the plum trees were in blossom. The blossom helped me remember the symbolism of Cherry blossom, of something very beautiful, but brief. During my brief time with Beautiful Sail there was an earth tremor which she explained were quite common, and that one day there would be a big one, not realising this would be just three weeks later.

Having studied Judo I was mindful of the words of Kyuzo Mifune 10th Dan: "Freedom in continuous change...the heart should be a clear mirror polished a thousand times." My friend performed the 'Tea Ceremony' and in the serenity and grace of the moment my eyes welled with tears.

My friends' parents have a cabinet shrine in their house, where every lost relative has a



*Tomotake Takeishi, the Buddhist monk who runs the Jazz café next to the temple*

small wooden plaque, and there are fresh flowers, some food, and incense, giving testament to the ever various ways to mourn those we have lost.

All of this was before the earthquake and tsunami struck Japan. In the lights of these terrible and tragic events, Beautiful Sail forwarded to me the recent words of her friend, Thich Nhat Hanh:

**"An event such as this reminds us of the impermanent nature of our lives. It helps us remember that what's most important is to love each other...This is the best we can do for those who have died: we can live in such a way they continue, beautifully, in us!"**

**Michael Foskett**  
With thanks to Jessica

*(Photos supplied by Mike Foskett; addresses removed from communications in respect of privacy)*

# RESEARCH INTO COPING AND OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS FOLLOWING THE LOSS OF THEIR CHILD

I WAS GRANTED A SCHOLARSHIP from the Carnegie Trust for carrying out research within the Psychology Department at the University of Stirling in Scotland. The work was carried out between 2007 and 2010 and involved four main studies.

In the first study, I hoped to identify how bereaved mothers deal with the death of their child, by looking at their descriptions, in their own words. I interviewed 13 bereaved mothers, with experiences ranging from one year post-loss up to 40 years post-loss. The mothers spoke about their need to keep an ongoing relationship with the child and this took place in a number of different ways. Some mothers said they visited the grave regularly, others had a special item that reminded them of their child, and some reported a natural thing like a bird, a ladybird or a special type of sunset which reminded them of their child. The mothers also told me that most of them had, at some time, considered wanting to die. Also, the mothers told me that they often had problems at work and that they felt that their marriage or relationship had been troublesome since their bereavement.

In the second study, I looked at what bereaved parents were coping with in early bereavement. Grief and depression were very common, but a key finding was that it was possible to grieve without depression. Ruminating about their loss, where parents would spend a lot of time thinking about the death and how bad it made them feel, was linked to higher levels of grief and depression symptoms. People who were able to find something about their experience that could perhaps have been worse, had less grief symptoms than people who didn't think that way. Keeping the relationship with the child alive, in the ways that the mothers had told me about in

the interviews, was not linked with either more or less grief or depression symptoms.

The next study looked at parents bereaved slightly longer, and these parents were found from public death registration information. Again, high levels of grief and depression were found, but not as high as the number in early bereavement. Rumination, as before, was linked with higher levels of grief and depression. Other things that were linked with higher grief symptoms were blaming themselves for the death of their child, the child normally living at home at the time of the death, visiting the grave more than once a week and having problems such as money worries, difficulties at work and concerns about their relationships. We were able to predict how much grief people would report at the second assessment from their level of depression and blaming themselves for their child's death at the first assessment.

To find out how bereaved parents fare in the longer term, I accessed the census records for Scotland, England and Wales to find out what happened to bereaved parents up to 35 years after the loss of their child under one year old. We found that there was no difference in relationship breakdown rates between bereaved mothers and non-bereaved mothers at any of the time points, but there was evidence of problems at work in the first ten years of bereavement.

### Conclusions

The PhD research told us more about the experience of losing a child, what parents are coping with and what might makes their experience even more distressing. These findings are being submitted to health and medical scientific journals where they will reach a wide audience of people interested in finding out

more about supporting bereaved parents.

Most of the research findings that I have would not have been possible without the help of the parents who courageously agreed to take part. Although many said they found the experience very emotional, most felt it was good to be able to help others in this way. My sincere thanks are offered to all of these parents for their time, honesty and trust.

I am now working at the Social Policy Research Unit in York, where research with bereaved parents has been conducted for many years. The PhD research highlighted that parents often experience problems at work, financial difficulties and relationship concerns following the loss of their child, and I hope that my work in this unit highlights these issues to employers, government, health boards and other organisations, who will then be in a position to consider how they might update their policies to reflect the specific needs of bereaved parents in the future.

If you would like more information about the research, please contact me at [mairi.harper@york.ac.uk](mailto:mairi.harper@york.ac.uk)

**Mairi Harper**

**SIBLING RETREAT**  
27/8 August 2011

TCF will be facilitating a weekend retreat for adult bereaved siblings from late morning on Saturday 27th August until after lunch on Sunday 28th August at Woodbrooke (just south of Birmingham).

Woodbrooke is a beautiful, peaceful place in lush grounds, with comfortable accommodation, lots of good food, and is easily accessible by train and bus.

The programme will be fairly informal and relaxed, with some discussion groups and creative workshops, as well as plenty of time to just wander and relax in the lovely grounds amongst new friends.

The cost of the retreat will be £79.00 per person, which includes accommodation and all meals.

**For further information please contact our national office:**  
TCF, 53 North Street, Bristol, BS3 1EN  
Tel: 0845 120 3785 • Email: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

It is an ideal opportunity to meet other bereaved siblings in a peaceful environment and spend time together.

**"It's good to talk, cry, listen, and laugh together"**

## BARONESS SUE MILLER: NEW PATRON FOR TCF

Sue Miller was born in Hampshire in 1954 and went to a Quaker school in Somerset.



She has lived in Somerset most of her life working in publishing, bookselling and becoming involved in local politics. She was elected in 1987 to her local council where her radical reforming leadership led to

her nomination to the House of Lords in 1998. In her time in the Lords she has been spokesperson on the Environment and Rural Affairs (1999-2007) and Home Affairs (2007-2010).

Her elder daughter Charlotte died in 2001 due to the negligence of an electricity company in Ecuador. She has founded a charity in her memory [www.cmap.org.uk](http://www.cmap.org.uk)

When not in Parliament she helps her husband on their vineyard.

*Editor's note: We shall be including more details of other patrons in later issues.*

# GATHERING COMMITTEE AT HORWOOD HOUSE HOTEL

ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH OF MARCH the committee set up specially to organise the next National Gathering of TCF met at the venue, Horwood House Hotel, to consider matters in connection with the organisation of the event. Our intention was to discuss these matters in the actual context of the hotel itself so that any recommendations we might make and resolutions arrived at would be influenced by the proximity of the venue itself.

We were not disappointed: in fact we were delighted with the accommodation on offer, the service provided by the friendly staff, and the delightful grounds which form such a magnificent setting. What impressed us most was the feeling of intimacy and comfort created by the close proximity of the rooms we shall be using: the restaurant, bar, seminar rooms, accommodation, and several areas where small groups and even twos and threes can sit and talk together.



National Gathering Committee at Horwood

At the same time, the hotel is expansive and offers wonderful opportunities for walks through acres of lawned and wooded landscape. There is also an excellent swimming pool, a well provided exercise room, and even a tennis court for the brave (November) players!



The pool at Horwood House

Two of us (Mick and Barbara Wilson) stayed the night and we can report that the bedrooms are pleasant and warm and that the evening meal was excellent!

(External photos of Horwood by Vivienne Watt.)

## UPDATE ON NORTHERN IRELAND

**M**Y NAME IS ANITA MURRAY – Regional Co-ordinator in N.I. I am also a Trustee on the National Committee.

In Northern Ireland we launched our regional helpline on 22nd June 2009. We have 14 trained helpline. At present we have 11 active on the helpline each month on a rota basis. We hope to have a training day soon to recruit new helpline and an update refresher course for existing volunteers. We have now five support groups running in N.I. Belfast our latest, was opened on Tuesday 15th March 2011, others are in Carrickfergus, Cookstown, Enniskillen and Lisburn. All meet on a monthly basis and are well attended.

In June last year we ventured to make our first Remembrance Quilt. To date we have many completed squares and the quilt is being joined together. Squares can still be obtained as the quilt will be added to when necessary.

We have a small committee of seven who oversees all the running of N.I. business and Bristol is updated on this when I attend National Committee meetings. We have had numerous fundraising events over this past year.

As we fund ourselves in N.I., Bereaved Parents took part in the following - a parachute jump, Belfast marathon, door collections, T.C.F. presentation talks, and currently we have smartie boxes being filled with 10p's. In the not too distant future we will be selling our recipe book (recipes have been sent in by bereaved parents). Donations came in from different local events. We can access small ongoing community grants, which can only be spent in the local area from which the application has been made. The above have helped in keeping our funds in a healthy position. Thank you to all who have helped in any way to achieve this.

The annual Remembrance Service was held in December on one of the coldest days and on leaving it was snowing heavily. Our service was very well attended and is a very important date in our year, when we can all come together from different parts to remember our beloved children.

A big thank you to all our volunteers for their ongoing support.

**In N.I. our helpline number is 028-87788016 should you require any information on any of the above.**

Yours with Compassion  
**Anita Murray**



### The TCF Library is growing

Gil and Patrick Roberts welcome books to add to the TCF Library in their home.

Please note that photographs submitted to TCF Newsletter must be of sufficient quality that they can be reprinted satisfactorily. Digital photos are best, particularly if they are forwarded to us via email.

We warmly invite our members to attend the next residential  
**TCF Gathering**  
 5-6th November 2011 at Horwood House - MK17 0PH



Horwood House sits conveniently on the outskirts of Milton Keynes amid beautiful Buckinghamshire countryside. 38 acres of landscaped grounds form a beautiful backdrop to this early 20th century manor house, restored and extended to combine historic charm with modern facilities. The hotel is perfectly placed, just a short drive from the M1 and M40 motorways and central Milton Keynes.

*Join us for a supportive weekend where you can safely share experiences and feelings amongst TCF friends old and new. Relax and reflect with others who understand in comfortable surroundings.*

Further details and a booking form will be available shortly  
 from the National Office: **08451 203785** - or visit our website: **www.tcf.org.uk**



**LATEST NEWS:**

Subject to her professional engagements,  
**Ruthie Henshall** has agreed to sing at  
 the Gathering in November.



**Revised Programme for the Gathering**

(subject to further discussion)

**Friday 4th November**

from 4.00pm Registration  
 Tea/Coffee  
 6.00pm Welcome Meeting for Newly Bereaved & First Timers  
 6.30pm Welcome Meeting for Childless Parents  
 7.45pm Welcome Drinks  
 8.00pm Dinner  
 9.15pm Comfort from Words & Music  
 Bar

**Saturday 5th November**

from 7.30am Breakfast  
 9.30am Keynote Speech  
 10.00am Discussion Groups

11.15am Trip to Bletchley Park  
 Tea/Coffee  
 11.45am Creative Writing Workshop  
 Art as a Therapeutic Experience  
 1.00pm Lunch  
 2.00pm Trip to Bletchley Park  
 Relaxation Therapies  
 Open Discussion Group  
 Film  
 Tennis  
 Tea/Coffee  
 4.00pm Discussion Groups  
 4.30pm Lantern Release (weather permitting)  
 6.30pm Dinner in Cook Suite  
 7.30pm

9.00pm (Speech) & Raffle  
 9.30pm Bar

**Sunday 6th November**

8.00am Breakfast  
 9.30am Walk to Remember & Balloon Release  
 10.30am Tea/coffee  
 11.30am Candle Lighting Ceremony  
 12.30noon Closing Ceremony  
 1.00pm Lunch  
 2.00pm Farewells

*Please note: For delegates who wish to buy the TCF rose (£8) please send your orders with booking form so that the plants can be ready for you to collect at the Gathering.*

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**53 North Street, Bristol BS3 1EN • Tel: 08451 20 37 85 • Fax: 08451 20 37 86 • www.tcf.org.uk**