

T.C.F Awareness Week

How many times have we heard bereaved parents say "I wish I'd known about you when my child died"? We probably said it ourselves. To this end we are planning a TCF Awareness Week to raise the profile of TCF, and this will commence on 28th January 2007, the anniversary of the founding of TCF.

Please try to make sure that your local radio stations and newspapers are aware of contacts and groups in your area, and perhaps organise events such as coffee mornings, pub quizzes etc when people can be told of the work we do. If you need any help with the right things to say to the media, please feel free to email us at media@tcf.org.uk

We are also looking for volunteers to deliver our information leaflet and posters to Hospitals, GP surgeries, Coroners, Funeral Directors, etc. In addition we aim to provide a TCF flyer for this occasion, which will be available from our TCF website, www.tcf.org.uk, and the national office. TCF 53 North Street, Bristol, S3 1EN, Tel: 0845 1203785

Photographic exhibition depicting the after-effects of road crashes launches UK tour

A photographic exhibition featuring crash scenes and portraits of people affected by the loss of loved ones is embarking on a seven city UK tour. Entitled "When Lives Collide" the exhibition by award winning photographer Paul Wenham-Clarke, is sponsored by Green Flag and features a collection of images showing the horror of car crashes and the effect they have on people's lives. Thought provoking and often chilling images attempt to cut through the statistics to take a personal and emotional look at this ever-present issue. The tour will visit the following cities: Edinburgh, Dec. 6 - 16, 2006 (The Custard Factory); Swansea, Jan 6 - 17, 2007 (English Speaking Union Gallery); Newcastle, Feb 9 - 24 (The Biscuit Factory); Bristol, March 10 - 21 (Centrespace Gallery); Leeds, April 4 - 28 (Whitehall Gallery); Belfast, May 10 - 29 (Conway Mill).

The exhibition contains some shocking and controversial images of crash scenes, which have been created using actors and make-up. However, the majority of the work features portraits of the bereaved and seriously injured alongside, in their own words, an account of the events and their emotions.

Scottish Forum 2007

4th May – 6th May

The Scottish Forums have taken place each year since 1998 and have proven to be an outstanding success.

Comments from last years Scottish Forum in Perth included:

1. Really appreciate the chance to get together and share thoughts and feelings
2. Free time was ample and very valuable
3. Good programme – stay with it
4. Hotel ideal please use again.
5. Most relaxed and friendly gathering I have attended – don't change anything.
6. Excellent weekend

The Scottish Forums are open to all TCF members, the organising committee would be only too pleased to welcome you to Perthshire, if you are interested and would like more information please contact Hugh McAninch on telephone 01738 631406 or email Hugh.McAninch@blueyonder.co.uk.

Editor's Note: Barbara and I have been to a Scottish Forum and we can confirm everything that is said about it. We loved it! We also made the visit into an opportunity to see some of the glorious Scottish landscape.

Breaking News!!!

We have booked the fabulous Hinxton Hall near Cambridge for our 2007 National Gathering for the weekend of 26 - 28 October. This Conference Centre is an outstanding venue, offering world class facilities...Set in a delightful rural idyll, within easy reach of Cambridge, the M11 and Stansted Airport. A varied selection of rooms, suitable for many purposes, from a 300 seat auditorium to smaller rooms for break-out groups. Award winning chefs, sumptuous surroundings.

HOW MUCH? Well hardly any more than we paid last time, which was £175...and remember that price rises will affect all other venues...standing at £200 per individual currently. Nevertheless, we are hoping to bring this down by obtaining sponsorship and donations from national and local institutions, companies and individuals.

Keep watching for further news...and start saving...we have made a good start by booking so early, we intend improving on areas where we need to improve as far as delegates' expectations are concerned...we will be supported by a first rate and committed team to make all the arrangements...and of course we shall be drawing on the experience and cooperation of members of the TCF Committee and others who have been involved in the organisation of previous gatherings.

Mick and Barbara Wilson - designated organisers of the event.
(Check the venue out yourselves, see some of the facilities, go to www.wtconference.org.uk).

Editor's Note: There were other photos taken on the 'Walk to Remember' and we will try to get them posted on the TCF Website. To contact the editor, phone - 01284 728608; e-mail - mick.wilson11@tiscali.co.uk

TCF News is published by The Compassionate Friends (TCF), a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales, number 4029535. It is a registered charity, number 1082335. TCF gratefully acknowledges all contributions. Opinions expressed in TCF News by individuals are not necessarily those of TCF, the Editor or the editorial team.
53 North Street, Bristol BS3 1EN. Tel: 08451 20 37 85. Fax: 08451 20 37 86 www.tcf.org.uk

TCF News

Issue No 50 Winter 2006

The Compassionate Friends



Special 2006 Gathering Edition

When I first moved away
From the home where he toddled
And grew to manhood
I was afraid of leaving memories
Too precious to lose forever.

That house held all his life,
In its walls were the echoes of his music,
The garden full of his flowers.

I gathered together possessions,
Books, clothes, guitar and photographs,
Yes, most especially, photographs
Marking his progress through life:
The smiling chubby baby,
The school boy with his friends,
The young man windblown on top of a mountain,
Then, brimful of success in cap and gown,
On his wedding day, happy with his bride.

All these I took with me for solace,
In new surroundings which might
Prove to be overwhelming.

I need not have worried,
His love and his presence came with me,
His face is in every new room,
His smiles uplift me every day.

Eileen Whatmough

You always had so much hair,
from the time you were two
it hung right down your back.
I used to snuggle up to you,
Bury my face deep down
and drink in the smell of your curls...
As you grew older
your hair grew longer -
Cascades of ringlets that shone
in the sunshine, like your smile.
So many curls, soft to my touch,
your beautiful hair.
I think of you and remember
how you flicked your curls
over your shoulder
as you leant over, and how
you tied it up into a knot,
constantly loosening it
and tying it up back again.
I think of you and remember
your beautiful hair.

Sally Owen
(poems written by two members of the
Gathering Writing Workshop)

Overheard as the balloons rose:

"I feel as though I'm losing her again."
"No, she's all right, she's having a good time.
Look, she's with her mates and they're going to a party."

The 2006 Gathering A Report by the Editor



The Lord Lieutenant

This year's TCF Gathering at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester started impressively on the Saturday morning with a short introductory speech by the Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire who, in a moment of unexpected drama, revealed that he too was a bereaved parent. He told us that his son, who was returning from university to attend his grandmother's funeral, was killed in a road traffic accident on that very day. In a rhetorical manner, the Lord Lieutenant said to us, "Beat that if you can." Then, after an equally dramatic pause, he continued, "No, that isn't it...of course each and every one of the deaths of our children is a tragedy in its own right." The Lord Lieutenant's shared background and the quiet sympathy he showed towards his audience was much appreciated. This introduction was followed by a speech from Ann Dent, one of our patrons, who provided her own historical account of society's attitude towards children, which then broadened out into a description of the various organisations that have sprung up in modern times to aid the bereaved. Her speech encouraged a lively debate amongst the audience that at times got quite heated.

The usual smaller meetings when delegates attend sessions that appeal to them because of shared interests or circumstances of their children's deaths followed, and your reporter went along to the group discussing "A child's death abroad". This session followed the accepted structure in which each parent describes who they are and the circumstances of their child's death before broadening out into a general discussion. These accounts are always terribly important and moving and will have gone on in all groups at that time. It is an intense time of sharing and understanding. Our group went

on to discuss the incompetence of foreign office staff who invariably show a lack of understanding and an unwillingness to intervene in matters that they are only too willing to pass on to somebody in the country where the tragedy has occurred, and who in turn also usually turn out to be unsympathetic at worst or incompetent. At a time when parents need someone to take charge of the situation they are invariably let down unless they are fortunate enough to come across the very occasional official who out of personal empathy takes control in a situation that, but for them, would spin out of control. The group agreed to pass on each other's addresses in anticipation of possibly putting together something in writing that might be published in a national newspaper.

The Saturday afternoon was bathed in sunshine. The threatening clouds failed to release their rains as we all gathered for our 'Walk to Remember'. This was a smash hit success with everybody, engendering a great feeling of togetherness amongst delegates and inspiring much talk, the sharing of anecdotes and laughter, especially when we had to squeeze through a narrow kissing gate! Then the moment came when, in silence, we released our helium balloons on which we had put the names of our children and in some cases a message. As the balloons rose joyfully into the blue and cloud strewn sky we were overcome by feelings of sadness and elation combined. The disappearing balloons seemed to symbolise both a departing and a moving on to somewhere else. To all of us I think this moment was the highlight of the weekend. We bonded in our terrible loss as the balloons soared ever higher, each of us watching 'our child' rise into the sky. The quote from this ceremony (front page) sums up for me the major purpose of TCF's Gathering: when one member expresses feelings of sorrow and loss another is prompted to comfort her with words that are positive and encouraging.

That night the formal dinner took place and as usual this was a most enjoyable event. At the start we were treated to just one song from Suzy before she had to dash off to

her band's gig some distance away. Marian Venn had the good sense to label each table by indicating the required presence of two 'old hands, who then ensured that at least some newcomers sat at their table. This encouraged free expression and much lively talk, especially as this was helped by the liberal distribution of some very acceptable wines donated by Nora Riordan and Martin Cox (many, many thanks!).

A well attended session on Sunday morning was the 'Music of Grief' when delegates played pieces of music that reminded them of their lost child. Most brought songs that their children had loved and this gave the whole session a young and at times may I say 'groovy' atmosphere. It seemed right that these songs were played on a ghetto blaster! Many tears were shed by all and it was conceded that there was no such thing as 'high' and 'low' brow when it comes to the power of music in relation to loss.

It was sensible to hold the AGM on Sunday morning, which proceeded smoothly with Diana Youdale chairing the meeting in good form. Your reporter heard a group of newcomers sharing their appreciation of Diana's competence and also commenting on the fact that she is so obviously on the same wavelength as themselves. Mike Brown also did a good job in presenting the Treasurer's Report and it was comforting to learn from him that TCF is building up its financial resources. Although he didn't say so, this healthy state is due in great part to Mike's own commitment and energy, and also to the many charity organisers he encourages and to whom he expressed his own gratitude on behalf of TCF.

The main event on Sunday was, as always, the candle lighting ceremony, which was held in the impressive college chapel. Because there were so many 'first timers' (over 50 per cent of delegates), the intensity of feeling was almost unbearable as time approached for the lighting of candles. Any 'outsider' observing this extraordinary scene would have been almost shocked at the visible and audible expressions of grief.

I know that the singing group 'Kite' who were due to end the ceremony and who were waiting in the wings had to keep saying to themselves that they were 'warriors' in order to perform at all! In fact their performance was quite beautiful and acted as a fitting end to the ceremony, creating a calming atmosphere in which the art of song acted as a balm for the intense emotions felt earlier. Finally, when the singers (all mothers themselves) returned to the porchway of the chapel, and out of sight of their audience, they burst into tears as they released their own pent up emotions! Later they told your reporter how honoured they felt at being able to witness one of TCF's most important ceremonies.

As is always the case, the Gathering would not have taken place if there had not been much hard work carried out by volunteers who usually remain nameless, so I am going to name just some of them who were brought to my attention. For example, John Baldock organised all the bookings and Irene Baldock used her considerable artistic skills in the preparation of the 'memory tree', the T light candleholders, and the contents of the delegate folders. Irene also did patchwork quilting. Barry and Eve supervised the registration, Mike Brown and Julia Barter ran the shop, Jerry once again organised, taught and directed the choir (again most successfully and much appreciated). Diana Youdale ran her art workshop, much enjoyed by delegates (see report below) and organised the Candlelight Service with the help of Irene. Peter and Dennis took on the considerable task of meeting delegates from the station and ferrying them to the college. Chris Weaver gave some beneficial massage sessions. There are a number of others including all the discussion group leaders whose names are not known to your reporter, so thanks and apologies to all of those I have not mentioned! Finally, I must single out Marian Venn who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the event. Her energies were employed in many directions, too numerous to list here but as the all important Event Organiser she deserves our special thanks.



Anne Dent



Keith & Suzanne Parker in front



Diana Youdale in command



Not quite out of sight, never out of mind



Peter Austin with Blonde Bombshell



The moment of release



The Kite Singers



"I don't think we need to kiss!"



Jean Austin with dark stranger

The Kissing Gate

Remembering Our Children

By Suzanne and Keith Parker (two first timers)

This time last year we would never have envisaged being at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. Our world fell apart when we heard those haunting words that every parent dreads, that our daughter was dead. Just 14 years old, Natalie was killed in a horrific R.T.A.

Our journey to Cirencester for the annual gathering was not without nervous anticipation. Once we arrived however, we were greeted with such warmth and compassion, and soon discovered how many first timers were travelling alongside us on the painful, lonely journey which lies ahead. Although in a room full of strangers we were hugged and embraced; a unique bond that perhaps only belongs to those who 'really know'.

Over the weekend we sampled a variety of different workshops. We wrote poetry, found we had creative talents in the art room, and listened to a varied selection of music which represented a special time with our children. The tissues came in very handy!

The Walk of Remembrance through Cirencester Park gave us time for quiet contemplation and reminded us all again

just why we were there. We gathered round at the park gates and sent helium balloons to the heavens; each with a special message; each for a life cut short. With our heads upturned we waited for the dots to disappear as our children did. So poignant and significant.

That evening we were invited by two 'old hands' to sit at the table they were hosting at the formal dinner. The food was delicious, the wine flowed, and special relationships formed across the table as we each exchanged our tragic stories. We realised just what a unique club we were actually part of.

At the close of the weekend we gathered in the college chapel for a candle lighting service of remembrance. Never before had we experienced such an emotional atmosphere amongst a sea of faces and teardrops, all there for one purpose, all with a candle to burn, all for a child's life.

Thank you to everyone who has given us strength to face another day by your example. We hope we can do the same next year for those who don't yet know that they will become members of a very special club, TCF.

Comments on The Gathering from our website forum

Many of us had your children's names on our balloons, so they were not missed out, they flew high and strong and...all in the same direction...they knew where they were going.

I understood how genuine all the people were and how much power can be generated from our grief. Power to heal and to reach out, to talk and to hug. Such an electric atmosphere...sad at times, but we were all together. (Frog)

I have come home feeling my load is a bit lighter than it was last week. I have taken a good few strides along the path. I know I will go backwards again at some time but hopefully not as far back as last week. I have been able to smile at a photo of Oliver instead of cry (though that too). (Shaun)

Diana Youdale, the Chairperson, is also a warm, loving bereaved parent, and her commitment is so obvious...she too made me feel 'humble' to be there and be part of something very special. She helped me make a memory 'vase' and I forgot to pick it up... (Frog)

I would like to thank all the organisers for the hard work which enabled the event to be such an overwhelming success. Mostly I would like to thank the wonderful friends that laughed, cried and

supported us on the rollercoaster ride of the Gathering. (Yvonne)

Everyone kind of looked normal (whatever that is). I'm not sure what I was expecting...weird eh...but just helped in some way to see faces of others in the same situation so thank you for that and hopefully I will be able to make it next year. (Melanie)

I understand what you say about us looking 'normal'. Soon after Oliver left us I went to a TCF meeting (very nervously) and for some reason I expected people to look 'different'. Like Mrs. Haversham perhaps and Scrooge for the men. But no, we could pass for normal on the street. It's only inside we are different. (Shaun)

Editor's Note: I can thoroughly recommend visiting the TCF Website Forum. I learned a lot about how younger parents communicate and I enjoyed reading their spirited comments. They made me think about the differences in outlook of younger and older members and I am beginning to realise that we must strive to improve what we offer newcomers. This will be particularly important when we come to organise the next National Gathering (see below). On the matter of helping newcomers to TCF, please see the message from one of our co-founders (also below).

Signed Mick Wilson (or Scrooge if you like!)

"Starting your journey without your children"

A message to new members of TCF from one of our co-founders

-Iris Lawley, MBE

"My son Kenneth will be 50 on 7th August 2006. How can this be, he is still 12 years old? I can dream of how he would be with a wife and children when our daughters

Angela and Lisa and their children, are all together. It is still too painful when I think these thoughts and the tears still come, but I have learned over these thirty eight years that he is still with me and because of his death, TCF was born. He has given me the strength to help so many people and his gift to me is meeting and becoming friends with so many wonderful people all over the world and our TCF friends are very special friends. For those of but is different and if you reach out to others, your pain will become softer, your wound will become a scar.

Kenneth is with me every day and each day and each year that passes I am getting closer to being with him.

I hope you too can find this hope and be at peace".

with much love to you all,

Ken's Mum

That their light may always shine...

Light a candle for all children who have died. **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2006, 7p.m.** Around the Globe Please light a candle in memory of our children, grandchildren, siblings. As the candles are lit in the various time zones around the world a circle of light will spread around the globe as Compassionate Friends worldwide remember their loved ones.