

TCF News

Issue No 51 Spring 2007

The Compassionate Friends



TCF at Westminster

In response to an invitation from David Wilshire, M.P. for Bristol, a number of TCF members attended Westminster to argue our case to any Member of Parliament who made their way to a room in Portcullis House, specially set aside for this purpose. Our preparations beforehand included the publication of an illustrated brochure entitled "A Year in the Life of The Compassionate Friends" (see front page reproduced below) containing a selection of stories, articles and illustrations from the past five issues of the TCF Newsletter. The brochure included a chairman's address (also reproduced below) by Diana Youdale. We combined the brochure with a letter explaining our aims and achievements and requesting funding from government. Diana also brought along further information in specially prepared packs together with a number of TCF's leaflets. Those attending from TCF were Diana Youdale, Joe and Iris Lawley (founders), Marian Venn, Nora Riordan and Mick Wilson. The first MP to call in was, appropriately for TCF, Jim Cunningham MP for Coventry, followed by two more Warwickshire MPs, Mike O'Brien, Solicitor General for the Law Officers' Department and Bill Olner, MP for Nuneaton and Bedworth, who is Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Group on Funeral Services. All three members were sympathetic to our cause. Other MPs called in throughout the afternoon and some, including David Cameron, sent members of their office along to collect information about us. We all felt that the occasion had been very worthwhile. Anne Palmer, a secretary from David Wilshire's office, was particularly helpful and informative. She agreed to distribute the 200 brochures and letters to MPs and provided Mick Wilson with several official Westminster envelopes in which he was able to send a

further 400 copies of the brochure and letter so that every MP in Parliament would receive a copy.

From conversations with the MPs it became clear to us that they need TCF, especially when recently bereaved parents call on their local MP for help. As a result of our discussions, and following on from the distribution of our brochure to all MPs, we hope that they will put those parents in touch with us. We also hope that, as a result of the letter accompanying our brochure, funding for TCF might be forthcoming from Parliament itself. It should be a two-way process: we can help

them and they can help us. As a result of our efforts, this should become abundantly clear to all MPs in the House. Your editor has to admit here that on the one occasion when photographs mattered more than any other, he forgot to bring his camera. This was put right to some extent when he rushed out of Westminster and found a camera shop where he bought one of those temporary, one-off cameras. Joe and Iris had also brought along a camera and so had Diana. Marian was trying to use her mobile phone. There was quite a bit of frustration as we were all trying to get each other's cameras to work and meeting with little success. Fortunately, Mike O'Brien came to our rescue by calmly showing us how to get pictures. On their way home Iris and Joe

experienced further difficulties. When they rolled up at Euston to catch the 19.17 to Liverpool, stopping at Nuneaton, they found that it was delayed. Joe writes: "When finally it was available for boarding it seemed as if half of Liverpool was anxious to get on this train. Carried forward with the surge, I said these famous last words, 'You press on and get us a couple of seats, I'll look for you on the train! After wearily marching up and down three times inside the train and when it finally pulled away I began to realise that my beloved was not on the train, so I sat down and awaited developments. (and 'no' I didn't have a mobile). Iris meanwhile, who had not boarded and stood watching every last passenger get aboard, concluded that I had either collapsed in the rush or that I was on board. A sympathetic ticket clerk sold her a single ticket to Nuneaton (I had our return tickets!) and then directed her to another department who contacted the train and I was tannoyed 'Is there a Joseph Lawley on the train and if so would he make himself known to the Train Manager' (ticket collector) which I did and learned that Iris was O.K.

They had sat her down and given her a cup of tea, let her phone our elder daughter Angela, gave her her money back and a warrant to travel on the next train. We were re-united an hour later. (with a story to tell) "



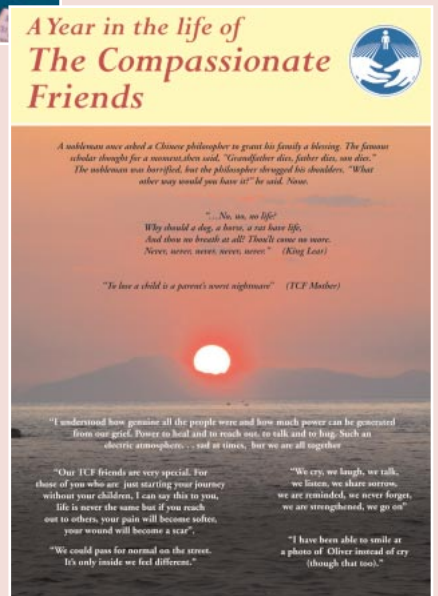
Iris and Joe Lawley with Mike O'Brien



Bill Olner with Mike O'Brien



Marian Venn with member of David Cameron's office



Margaret MacDonald

Local Contact for The Edinburgh Branch of
The Compassionate Friends
1990 - 2006

There is no rule book for dealing with grief, perhaps most especially when it concerns the death of a child. So when, two years after the death of their beloved daughter, Marie, in 1988, Margaret was asked if she would become the Local Contact for TCF, she had to draw on her own experience in order to cope with the many bereaved parents that would get in touch with her over the next 15 years. "Margaret never suggested that she was anything special. She never pretended that she was an expert or a professional." (Patricia). "What do I know?", she would often exclaim. Margaret didn't need a rule book: she offered herself and that was the most and the best that any bereaved parent could have received. For many of us she was the first "other" bereaved parent that we met. In itself that encounter would often be the first step towards healing the deep wound of grief and relieving the intense experience of isolation. "Margaret readily offered her home as a sanctuary where we could speak freely and openly and in confidence. For those unable to come to her home she always offered to meet in town for a coffee." (Christine). "She never failed to remember our important anniversaries and made difficult days easier with flowers, cards or hugs." (Morag).

Margaret was a great talker, but she could also listen. "Margaret always had time to listen and she never said –phone back later – she understood all the agonies we were going through and helped us to talk about our despair, self doubts and feelings in a safe environment" (Cathy). "The first time I phoned Margaret we spoke for about an hour and a half and at the end she asked me what more could she do for me. I felt so touched by her generosity and compassion. She never failed to make me feel comforted". (Margaret O'). "What she undoubtedly was to each of the many people she spoke to or met over the years was a patient listener who never judged. Margaret didn't mind how often we went over our experiences, she never shrank from how raw our emotions often became and somehow along the way she became a very trusted and dear friend" (Patricia).

To newly bereaved parents Margaret represented hope. She was the one who had been there before us and was living proof that it is possible to live without your child. She never forgot what the early years of grief were like, never tried to explain away pain. The truth is she still felt it herself, but somehow she lived with it and found the courage to reach out to others. "When I was at the lowest point of despair I stumbled into Margaret. She caught



Margaret MacDonald and husband Ronald

hold of me and held on." (Norma). She gave us hope and the capacity to feel more than simply grief and sadness. In Margaret's house you had permission to let go and laugh without guilt.

A great and lasting gift from Margaret was to introduce bereaved parents to each other. The monthly meetings in her house were a haven and refuge from a world outside which many of us no longer felt or wanted to feel part of. "Margaret and Ronnie's home was so welcoming that in the 'early days' it was the only place I could truly feel calm and used to sit on her comfy sofa and drink tea and eat her amazing home baking and not want to leave." (Morag).

"If Margaret thought you were a bit quiet at one of the meetings she would lift the phone the next day and ask if anything was troubling you, she just had that special caring touch." (Isobel). We were part of the club that none of us wanted to belong to, yet meeting others helped to normalise our grief and the friendships we have made through Margaret will sustain us for the rest of our lives.

We acknowledge and give thanks to all of Margaret's family, especially her husband, Ronnie, for their support of Margaret in her work for TCF. We know that Margaret was able to reach so many because she had the support and backing of a loving husband and family and we appreciate her being shared with us. Not every bereaved parent will have "a Margaret" in their lives to help them through – we were the lucky ones.

Margaret died on 23rd December 2006 after a courageous and inspiring battle against her lung cancer, diagnosed 18 months previously. She kept a positive spirit to the end and expressed her wish that we would continue the work of TCF, offering support and comfort to locally bereaved parents.

From the Edinburgh Branch of TCF

The photo shows Margaret and her husband Ronnie, receiving the gift of a crystal vase from the group, at the 2005 Candlelight Service, in recognition of all her work for TCF.

The Role of Chairman

(One of the contributions in the brochure)

The role of Chairman in any charity can be challenging, but even more so when the charity is one where we have all paid the ultimate price of the loss of our child, sibling, or grandchild. Life becomes even more complex in a society that does not openly acknowledge death and the overall devastating impact that it can have on both the individual and the family as a whole.

Each year a minimum of 20,000 parents experience the heartache of losing a child and invariably social isolation. When your child dies you quickly learn that some of the most valuable support you receive is from those who have suffered as you are suffering. Their insight and experience creates an instinctive bond of mutual understanding, which enables you to talk freely and see for yourself that although there is no cure there is hope of a return to some sort of worthwhile future.

TCF is unique as a charity, in that the service users are also the providers, and we rely heavily on the generosity and goodwill of our volunteers. However, whilst the work of a volunteer within TCF is rewarding, it can also be emotionally draining. Nevertheless, they continue to amaze me with their strength and commitment to helping others, which represents the very heart of TCF.

We cannot change the fact that our services will always be needed, as we cannot change the fact that one day we will all die and sadly for our child that day came sooner rather than later. But we can help change how we are treated and how we eventually learn to cope and reinvest in life.



Diana Youdale

IS THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY?
HAVE YOU BOOKED YOUR PLACE?

TCF Gathering 2007 Hinxtton Hall, Cambridgeshire 26th - 28th October

"A time and a place for sharing and healing"



Hinxtton Hall

Spend a lovely weekend in a rural idyll where you will be given a warm welcome, feel safe amongst other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings, make new friends and renew old friendships.

A full programme of workshops, discussion groups, speakers, and therapies are arranged. *You can participate as much or as little as you like.*

Our **keynote speaker** on Saturday morning is **Peter Barham**, author of "**The Invisible Girl**" the story of his daughter, who was a brilliant gag writer for some of Britain's top comics, and who died from anorexia. On Saturday afternoon '**A Walk to Remember**' is being organised. It will be a gentle stroll through the countryside to the village of Hinxtton where we will release balloons in memory of our children. You may get friends and family to sponsor your walk in memory of your child to support TCF. In the evening we all meet together for **The Gathering Dinner**. On Sunday we have our **Candlelighting Service**, before a final **Closing Ceremony**

There really is something for everyone including Music, Poetry, and Craft workshops. (Please bring along a favourite piece of music to play in remembrance of your child).

The cost for full board and all meals is as follows: **double occupancy - £170 per person; single occupancy - £185 per person; day rate - £69 per person (plus dinner @ £30 and other meals to be arranged).**

What do you get for your money? (1) An elegant grade II listed country house, offering world class facilities for networking; (2) a centre set in 85 acres of parkland on the banks of the river Cam, which includes 15 acres of Wetlands Nature Reserve; (3) an array of meeting rooms to meet your needs within the purpose-built Conference Centre and Hinxtton Hall; (4) 72 en suite bedrooms (5-star level in the estimation of TCF members who have seen them) with direct incoming telephone lines and internet connections); fine dining, award winning chefs, excellent wine selection (extra payment), fully licensed bar, a relaxing retreat environment, scenic walks and jogging paths.

SECURE A PLACE TODAY WITH A £50 DEPOSIT - DETAILS BELOW

A **£50 Deposit** secures your place. **Booking forms** are supplied with this issue. Further copies can be obtained from Marian Venn (see below) or TCF Office 0845 1203785, or downloaded from the TCF website www.tcf.org.uk. **Cheques should be payable to "TCF Gathering 2007"** and posted with **booking forms to Marian Venn at: 3 Church Road, St. Marks, Cheltenham GL51 7AL**

There is a limit of 130 persons on accommodation and full board at the hall itself. If we are oversubscribed there are bed and breakfasts in the immediate area that the centre can supply.

In order to make the weekend a success we need help from a number of volunteers in the following areas:-

- 1.Registration & welcome
- 2 Discussion Group Leaders
- 3 Quiet Room
- 4.Gathering Dinner Table hosts
- 5.Candle Lighting service

If you feel you could help in these areas or others please contact:

Mick and Barbara Wilson on 01284 728608 or email mick.wilson11@tiscali.co.uk

Booking information and forms: **Marian Venn on 01242238745 or email mvbr31413@blueyonder.co.uk**

We look forward to meeting you at the Gathering.

Checking out Hinxtton Hall

Four of us went along to Hinxtton Hall to check out its facilities and were very impressed with what the centre has to offer! They served us with a delicious



Mick and Barbara Wilson, Dennis and Diana Youdale

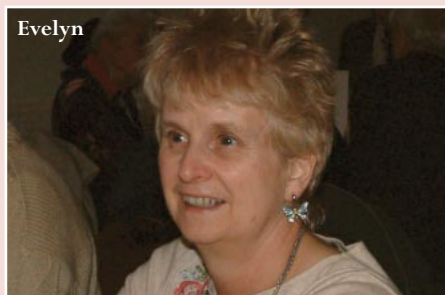
lunch, 'on the house' and even included our own printed TCF Menu! The meeting rooms are splendid, the dining room excellent, and the bedrooms have that wow factor! The picture shows Mick and Barbara Wilson, Dennis and Diana Youdale, at the main entrance to Hinxtton Hall.

Evelyn Phillips

Evelyn is retiring from her work as Editor of our journal "Compassion". Her final edition is that which accompanies this issue of the TCF Newsletter. All of us are agreed that the journal is exceedingly important to all members of TCF and has continued to give us much hope and inspiration. Copies of the journal provide a truly remarkable record of our society's history and help to bond us all in the sharing of grief, sorrow and joy as expressed by numerous mothers, fathers, grandparents and siblings. The quality of writing at times is quite astonishing and is a witness to the fact that the profoundest of sorrows can bring out inspirational expressions of human love. Editing and assembling contributions must be extremely difficult, calling upon extraordinary efforts and skills that Eve has managed so expertly and, may I say, so modestly. As part of this

tribute we have collected together a few e-mails from some of the hard working crew with whom Eve has worked.

Mick Wilson, Editor



Vikki Smallman: In the time that I have worked with Eve I think she is a fantastic person and is a pure inspiration. She has helped me a lot, not just with SIIBS but also at the Gathering. I didn't know anyone and Eve took me under her wing. I am so grateful and lucky that I have had the opportunity to work alongside Eve and to have her not only as a friend, but also as a role model.

Sue Grant: Being editor of Compassion is not always an easy task, but Eve has simply got on with the job, quietly and unassumingly stitching together diverse contributions from various sources (although some, such as the book reviews sometimes only arrived in the nick of time!). Eve has produced a series of harmonious, supportive and informative issues. Thank you Eve for all your hard work!

Annette Rodgers: Although I only ever communicated with Eve by e-mail or telephone, the warmth and compassion that came from her was invaluable for us all to do 'our bit' for Compassionate Friends. Good luck Eve!

Eve has continued a great tradition set by past editors, and we offer our support to Sue Sedgwick who will be Editor of Compassion with the next edition due in the summer.

M. W.

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:

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

It is with regret that I have to announce the resignation of Derek Reed, TCF Webmaster, after over six years of sterling and valuable work, creating and maintaining the TCF website. Derek feels that, with increasing demands from his employment and training commitments, he can no longer give to the role of Webmaster, the attention and commitment that is required.

On behalf of my fellow Trustees and all members of TCF, I thank Derek for all his hard work over the years and wish him well for the future.

Diana Youdale
TCF Chairperson

As a result of Derek Reed's resignation, Jim Pringle is continuing in his webmaster support role aided by members of the IT sub-committee. This arrangement cannot be allowed to continue for a protracted period and therefore we urgently need a new Webmaster.

Are you a budding webmaster and a supporting member of TCF? Can you assist in this area? If so, in the first instance, contact Jim Pringle who will be able to give you more information about the position. He can be contacted by telephone on 01642 551261 or by email: JMDKWLAR@NTLWORLD.COM

Charity Night in Teesside

TCF members and friends enjoyed a Charity Night recently in Middlesborough. The event was organised by bereaved father Dave Griffiths and his sister Marie - known locally as 'Double Edge'. They provided the entertainment, assisted by Dave, Steve, Elle, Chris and Gary. A Tombola, raffle, donation and blind card helped to make the total amount raised up to £742. Margaret Pringle, the local contact for the Teesside area, thanked all who had helped and supported the event, especially the manager of the David Lloyd Centre who provided the venue free of charge.

West Yorkshire Annual Service of Remembering and Sharing

Our Service this year will take place on March 10th, 2007 at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Standbridge Lane, Sandal nr. Wakefield (close to junction 39, M1), starting at 2 p.m. You are warmly invited to join us with your family and friends, bringing along a single flower each. The Service is a mixture of music and readings, all by TCF members. Refreshments will be served following the Service. (Further details from Diana Hack on 01484 681514; dianahack2@yahoo.co.uk)

TCF Spring Weekend Retreat

You are warmly invited to join us for a weekend at Whirlow Grange Centre on the borders of S. Yorkshire/Derbyshire. The centre offers well furnished accommodation and is set in its own grounds. The weekend will be a mixture of formal discussion and informal chat although you are free to partake as little or as much as you want. There will also be free time to visit the glorious surrounding countryside. For more details and a booking form, please contact Diana Hack on 01484 681514; dianahack2@yahoo.co.uk

We should like to express our gratitude to ATW Print Services (Tel: 07734 981233) for their help in the production of this edition of TCF News and thank them especially for their generosity in carrying all the substantial costs involved in this four-colour production

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