

The TCF Online Talks
'A Good Mourning' with Maria Ahern

The worst part of lockdown, for me, was having to forgo the TCF Gathering and weekend retreats I had signed up for. I was bereft. So, when the opportunity came up to attend Zoom groups and the talks, I was first in line. And I've not been disappointed.

This last talk, by Maria Ahern, former Chairman and current Trustee of TCF, was no exception. Maria is an enthusiastic writer and speaker, with a deep mine of well researched information - and she has an enviable way of expressing her ideas that resonate profoundly; Maria makes me sit up and consider other sides of my devastating loss.

My son Dylan died on 30 January 2017, aged 33. Dylan is my only child, and the love of my life and the light in my world. At the end of July that year, I went to my first TCF weekend retreat in Oxfordshire - The Childless Parents gathering. And that's when I met Maria. I hadn't wanted to stay but I did, and I'm so glad I did because that was where and how I discovered I am not alone, there are others like me, and they are still alive. So, I will survive this too.

This special talk, via Zoom, was entitled 'A Good Mourning'. A play on words that works very well and brings a smile to my heart, but there is a good reason for using the idea too. 'Mourning' without the 'U', is just a word for a time of day but in the context of our loss, the all important 'u' or 'you' is all about how we/you can live *with* our/your grief. It may sound convoluted at first, but there is a difference between grief and mourning which I hadn't grasped before Maria spoke of it. So, what follows is what I have taken away from Maria's wonderful talk.

Grief is defined in ways that imply the emotion will typically decrease. The bereaved person will move on and the death will fade into the background. We know that is not the case for us. Our feelings and emotions for the child that has died will never decrease or indeed cease. The death of a child, grandchild or a sibling, is the worst possible loss anyone can experience. And, until it happens to us, we cannot imagine the devastation. The day before our child died, we were not bereaved parents and we had no idea how the death of our child would collapse our world. And that's why it's called 'Complicated Grief'. There's no going back, and there's no moving on. We are forever changed. The

beginnings of that life 'without' or 'after' is taken up with the practicalities of living - choosing an order of service, the funeral, a will in some cases, the belongings, the documentation, etc - and it is grief, deep unadulterated grief, that engulfs the heart and soul that, somehow, gets us through the motions and keeps us breathing, one breath at a time. When those terrible days are over, and everyone has gone back to their lives, we are left with Grief.

And that's where mourning comes in. Mourning, is how we manage our grief. Maria spoke about how death throws us away from the life we had, and we land in a place she calls Planet Grief. That's where we can start to mourn, and start to learn to re-engage with life. 'Mourning is the healthy part of bereavement', and it's where and how we find hope for life after. It's not that we suddenly start feeling great. It's more that we learn to live with the grief. It will always be there, alongside us, and it will trip us up all the time, but those times will become less and less painful. We learn to manage the hurt by mourning the loss, the death, of our child, sibling, grandchild while, at the same time, we manage our life; we acclimatise to this 'after' time, and we breathe, and laugh and cry, and talk about our child in a new way, in a language we are still learning and, more and more, we use rituals to comfort us and keep us close to our child. Our Grief and our Mourning co-exist in our life, and we each do it in our own time, at our own pace.

Maria gave us a few tools to help us to acclimatise and adapt, such as 1) to breathe. Deep breaths when things get tough. We're still learning how to be. From one moment to the next we became bereaved parents. We need to give ourselves time to breathe. 2) Learn to laugh. Humour is a great balancer. Laughing turns inevitably into tears, and our children deserve both our laughter and our tears. 3) Cry. The battle is in the trying to stop crying, but crying is fine, and it's part of our healing. Crying needs no explanation. 4) Talk to your child, always. Talk to them when you're on your own, and talk about them with others too. Just as you did before, you can now too. It's healthy and it's comforting. As Maria said, 'Love me, Love my child. Listen to me, Listen to me talking about my child'.

I could write more, but I would like instead to encourage you to listen to the replay of Maria's talk. It's on the TCF website at <https://www.tcf.org.uk/news/tcf-news/a-good-mourning/> I'd also like to strongly recommend that you attend the upcoming talks. This is the second one I've gone to, and both times I'm glad I did. You're given the option to donate

when you sign up; any amount you can spare will be gratefully accepted. Maria has given me renewed hope that there is a life for me again. Not like before, but I can find a way to live that is meaningful.

Planet Grief is where two or more bereaved parents are gathered, be it in person or online, and TCF offers us various options for coming together, connecting, learning from others. Take full advantage of them all! With an open heart, and broken as it is, I can honestly say I could not have survived these 43+ months without Dylan, if it weren't for the mothers, fathers, siblings and grandies that I've met through TCF. I'm so grateful we are able to meet also through the magic of Zoom.

'Look up.

Blink. Breathe. Repeat.

And then, not just a *Good Mourning*,
you'll have had a *Good Day*.'

(Maria Ahern)

Maggie Pinsent

Dylan's Ma