

Kaleidoscope of Hope – The Compassionate Friends

On 15 March 2010, my 18 year old son Louis died and, as a family, we were catapulted into a living nightmare. Louis's traumatic death was sudden and completely unexpected, generating national media attention which brought press intrusion and subsequent police investigations.

Being quite a private family we found this added dimension to Louis's death incredibly difficult to bear. Thankfully, we were blessed to live in a close-knit community which enveloped us with care, as we all struggled to make sense of what had happened to us.

My first encounter with TCF was in November 2010, 8 months after Louis's death.

As I stumbled in the darkness, experiencing the emotional rollercoaster that grief brings, combating loneliness and extreme sadness, searching for answers and fearing for my sanity, I found TCF's website and finally, someone turned on the light....

Fast forward 8 years and ...

I have met many other bereaved parents; read every edition of Compassion, joined the forum; am a member of a local support group; have participated in training; I have attended 3 Gatherings and have co-facilitated a workshop. And in 2016, 6 years after the death of my son, I joined TCF's wonderful band of Helpline volunteers.

Just writing this down seems slightly surreal and makes me feel emotional. 8 years ago, I'd have told you that I wouldn't survive the death of my son and quite frankly I didn't care. TCF did care. TCF cared enough to let me know that this was a completely normal and natural response as a bereaved parent and that I was not alone in my thoughts and feelings. TCF gifted to me, their care and compassion, and helped me to navigate this new world – no time limit being attached, an enduring commitment of support.

Now, volunteering on the Helpline, enables me to re-gift the compassion shown for my own loss and guide those more newly bereaved parents, or those just beginning to feel able to talk openly about their loss, through the unfamiliar landscape which has laid waste to their existence.

Being able to support the Helpline gives me an immense sense of achievement and pride. Working for such a wonderful organisation that reaches out to parents in their darkest hours, sits with them in that darkness and is willing to share their pain gives me faith in humanity. The impact that TCF has on the lives of bereaved parents is very real and cannot be under-estimated.

Bereaved parents who call the Helpline for support come from all walks of life and all have lost a child in different circumstances. Each child's death and story is unique to us as individuals and it an absolute privilege to listen to each and every story and hopefully make some difference, however small, in how parents deal with their loss.

Investing in today's bereaved parents may inspire some of them to reach out to tomorrow's: a kaleidoscope of many people, the pattern always changing but the light always shining through.

Through Louis's death, I have discovered the ability to stretch and grow in ways I didn't think possible, and for that I am thankful. After working for many years in the field of Education, I have found that this quote has become more meaningful to me:

"Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me."

Carl Rogers from *On Becoming a Person*, 1961

As bereaved parents, we have all had experiences, whether we wanted them or not, and I believe that this quote resonates with our need to be listened to and our feelings and thoughts validated.

What I have learned, as I continue to weave the fibres of my son's death into the fabric of my daily life, is that not one single parent can change the fact that their child has died, but the fact remains that we all do have choices in how we live with our grief and the relationship we now have with our child.

Every parent deserves to have a 'good mourning' and TCF freely gives this gift in abundance through love, support, and shared experience, and the knowledge that we can learn to live a meaningful life, just not the one for which we had planned

Jacqui Wainwright

Eternal mother of Louis James
Wainwright (aged 18 $\frac{3}{4}$)

