

Autumn 2019



SIBBS Newsletter

Support In Bereavement for **B**rothers and **S**isters



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Siblings...

SIBBS is for you...by you...

The material published in the SIBBS newsletter is for people who have suffered the death of a brother or sister. It is written and produced by bereaved siblings and aims to share information about bereavement, reduce isolation, and offer mutual support and reassurance. We welcome contributions from bereaved siblings of any age.

Reading about the experiences of others helps us know we're not alone. If you would like to contribute a piece or become involved with SIBBS, please get in touch: **By email:**

hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

By post:

The Compassionate Friends - SIBBS
Kilburn Grange,
Priory Park Road,
London NW6 7UJ

Letter from the editor



Dear Siblings,

A very warm welcome to your Autumn issue of SIBBS.

We're proud and excited to bring you the first fully digital issue of SIBBS. A major motivation for moving online is so that we can reach more bereaved siblings. Previously, the print issue only went out to donating siblings and donating parents who had requested the newsletter for their surviving children. By moving to an emailable pdf, we can now reach each and every sibling who has contacted TCF and shared their email address. We also hope this will improve how we can share links and resources with you. We'd love to hear your feedback on the new format.

Much love to you all at this transitional time of year. As we all move on together into another season without our brother or sister, we also bring our timeless bonds with us.

In friendship, Hayley x

E: hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

I leave you with these words from Emma Jacobs, shared on the fourth anniversary of losing her darling Loo:

About 3 weeks before my sister died I said to her ‘...but Loo don't you think life is so cruel?’ And she replied with this: ‘Em, life isn't cruel, life is wonderful, and I want to be here as long as possible’. And she was right. Life is wonderful. Don't waste it.

News & dates for your diary

A round up of what's happening for siblings at TCF and beyond.

TCF attends ColdFire Festival

The Compassionate Friends held a stall at the ColdFire music and wellbeing festival, held in East London. The event was organised by the **Pace Foundation**, created to commemorate the life of Thomas Crosbie. Thomas AKA PACE was passionate about music and sport. The foundation describes Thomas as a creative sensitive and deep thinking individual who cared greatly about his friends family and community, the environment and justice. It was a pleasure to meet and speak with those whose lives had been touched



by Thomas on the day. Having a presence at events is a crucial part of the TCF and SIBBS missions. We hope that every person we reach out to and support will be able to go along their journey not feeling quite so alone, which is a huge part of our ethos.

Two TCF sibling retreats set for 2020

Bereaved siblings spoke, and TCF listened. Feedback from the last sibling retreat held in April 2019 spoke of the need for more opportunities for siblings to come together in a safe and supportive environment and work through their experience. We are delighted to announce that in 2020 TCF will be holding two retreats. We look forward to welcoming many of you there. For further details or to register your interest, please email events@tcf.org.uk



Adult bereaved sibling retreat: Dates for your diary

The first will be back at Woodbrooke (in Birmingham) – **May 2nd – 3rd, 2020.**

The second will be at the Ammerdown Centre (near Bath) – **November 28th– 29th 2020.**



Up for grabs! Two places in the Royal Parks Half Marathon

Challenge yourself – or a family member or friend - and support our charity's 50th year by raising funds for us! The Compassionate Friends has secured two places in the Royal Parks Half Marathon on Sunday 13th October 2019.



The stunning 13.1 mile route takes in the UK capital's world-famous landmarks on closed roads, and four of London's eight Royal Parks – Hyde Park, The Green Park, St James's Park and Kensington Gardens.

If you would like to apply for one of our places, please do get in touch with Stephen at stephen@tcf.org.uk or call him on 0345 120 3785.

Kyla Preston hosts social takeover on Surviving our Siblings

Kyla Preston, a much loved member of the SIBBS community, recently hosted a week-long takeover of the Surviving our Siblings' social media pages.

Surviving our Siblings (**here on Instagram**) is a beautiful and moving hub of surviving siblings' personal stories. Here, Kyla shared beautiful words and pictures of her experience of loving and losing Bea, and how she continues bonds with her sister.

You can follow Kyla's grief journey **@findingawayforward** on Instagram and Facebook. Kyla also blogs about her experiences at **Grief and Motherhood**.

More dates for your diary

September 22nd 2019 : SIBBS meet-up in Bristol

Meet 12pm at The Bristol Stable, Canon's Road, Harbourside, BS1 5UH Bristol, United Kingdom. Check the SIBBS Facebook group for any updates.

4th October 2019: Activity Weekend for bereaved men hosted by At a Loss

Activity Weekend at High Ashurst Outdoor Education Centre, set in 56 acres of woodland on Box Hill, near Dorking. It is nestled in the tranquil Surrey Hills, and offers wonderful spaces in the natural environment for learning and self-discovery.

This event offers an opportunity to engage with the excellent facilities and the beautiful countryside whilst utilising the skilled instructors from High Ashurst and the AtALoss Bereavement Support for Men team.

For more information:

Please email roger@ataloss.org or visit **AtaLoss**

Art Can Begin to Heal Our Grief



Paintings in Hospitals aims to transform the UK's health by using art and art activities across clinical environments. Here, the organisation highlights how art can help us cope with loss...

It's impossible to imagine the reality of grief until we're confronted with it. Grief and mourning come from loss, whether it is the loss of our health, a relationship, a job, a pet, a loved one, or something else entirely.

Loss can be life-altering. And as Joan Didion wrote: "There is no real way to deal with everything we lose..." Everyone will respond to loss in a different way. But there are ways that can help us all cope and even begin the healing process.

Grief is a **natural, normal, and necessary** response to loss. Many people confuse grief with sadness but the reality is that grief involves a far wider range of emotions, from anger and confusion to guilt and anxiety.

This torrent of emotions can be difficult to process, and we may not even realise what is happening to us. Grief makes us feel like we are **not ourselves**. It can change our behaviour and can bring with it low self-esteem, depression and physical illness. Our confusion and overwhelmed state can make verbalising our experience of grief almost impossible.

“When we create, we give ourselves permission to examine all that is happening within our grieving bodies.”

Douglass Mitchell, therapist

Grieving and adjusting to loss has no quick fix: it is a long process. But art can help begin this process by opening channels through which to explore and vent the unspeakable.

For thousands of years, artists of all kinds have used their work to express their sadness, anger, fear, love and hope. Of course, there is no painting or poem that can ever bring back what we have lost but they can help us accept that it is gone.

The general benefits of art therapy are widely documented. But what about evidence for visual arts interventions in loss?

Research into the effects of visual art on grief and loss are in the very early stages. However, a study in February this year found preliminary evidence to support the effectiveness of visual arts interventions in **alleviating grief symptoms** such as general distress, functional impairment, and symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Douglas Mitchell, a family therapist, says:

“Art influences how we look at, unblock, wrestle with, and shed light on the need to distance and detach from our pain. When we dodge grief to avoid, deny, or block the inevitable pain, the arts invite the imagination of these stuck places to come to the surface in images, movement, colour, and sound. Our art process releases the tension of grief, allowing it to expand and contract, while providing a safe container in which this process can take place. When we create, we give ourselves permission to examine all that is happening within our grieving bodies.”

You can follow Paintings in Hospitals on Twitter and Instagram.

What I Still Can't Do

By Kellyn Shoecraft –with gratitude to [modernloss.com](https://www.modernloss.com), where the article originally ran

Ten months after my sister's death, I can laugh and smile. I can sometimes care about other people's problems. I can't listen to voicemails or write thank you notes or stop waiting for the other shoe to drop.

As I am writing this, it's been about 10 months since my sister's unexpected death. A short enough time that I can think back to a year ago today when life was significantly better, but a long enough time that it feels like I never had a sister. Within days of her death, it kind of felt like she had been gone forever.

I have a semi-reliable list of things that help me feel better, or prevent me from getting to a really dark space — things like going outside, accomplishing something (anything!), fun with my toddler and nephew, and visiting a friend are a few such examples.

I still get a lot of comfort from reading about other people's grief experiences, even ones that seem very different from my own. I want to know as much as I can about other people's sadness.

I read memoirs about pregnancy loss. I follow a widows group on Instagram. (I think widows and surviving siblings are tightly bound because, in some sense, we've both lost life partners.) I attend bimonthly **Compassionate Friends** gatherings for bereaved parents and adult siblings. I eagerly listen to podcasts that focus on tragic stories. I'm particularly fond of **Terrible, Thanks for Asking, Everything Happens**, and **Grief Out Loud**. I find comfort in hearing the voices of people who know this sadness of loss.

My emotional state and what I am capable of have changed since she died. I no longer spend a portion of everyday weeping, the raw grief of this loss seeping from my body. I still feel panicked in most social situations, worried about how it might force me to talk about myself, and therefore my loss. I wish that it was easier for people to know what I am capable of 10 months on, and what's still too hard.

So here's how I'm doing today — nine months and 23 days without my sister:

What I can do:

- I can reliably take care of myself and my daughter.
- I can be productive for short windows of time.
- I can go a few days at a time without crying.
- I can remember things that I need to do and do them.
- I can smile and laugh.

What I can sometimes do:

- I can sometimes look at pictures of my sister without crying.
- I can sometimes talk about my sister without crying.
- I can sometimes respond to texts/emails.
- I can sometimes (ok, rarely) return phone calls.
- I can sometimes tell funny jokes.
- I can sometimes engage in conversation and stay focused.
- I can sometimes care about other people's problems.
- I can sometimes feel sad about something that's happened to someone else. I can sometimes socialize in large groups.
- I can sometimes be a good partner to my husband.
- I can sometimes go a few hours without thinking about my sister and her death.
- I can sometimes feel happy.

What I still can't do:

- I can't write thank you notes.
- I can't listen to voicemails.
- I can't pick up the phone when it's ringing.
- I can't stop feeling scared for my sister and wondering where she is and if she's ok. (I don't believe in an afterlife, so I feel very confused by these questions.)
- I can't sing songs/read books to my daughter that my sister used to sing/read to her son without crying.
- I can't inform people that my sister died without crying.
- I can't handle thinking about the enormity of this loss. She was 37 when she died. Her son was 22 months old. She will miss nearly everything that would have mattered to her.
- I can't imagine believing that my life is safe and predictable.
- I can't stop waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I don't consider these categories complete or static. I'm not where I was 10 months ago, and I'm not where I will be 10 months from now. There may be some can'ts that transform into cans, and some cans that revert to can'ts — and that's ok, too. Everyone has their own list. This one is mine.

Kellyn Shoecraft has been intimate with grief since 2004, when her dad died after two decades of autoimmune illnesses. She is now navigating life without her sister, who died unexpectedly in 2017. Inspired by these losses, Kellyn is a co-founder at [Here for You](#), a company that delivers thoughtfully presented practical care packages (think toilet paper) for people living through life's toughest moments.

Losing a Sibling – Support and Advice

taken from Vitas Healthcare



Support for Healing

The death of a sibling is the most neglected loss in adult life. Loss of a sibling means loss of someone who knew your formative past. It might trigger feelings of guilt over unsolved sibling issues or a sense of abandonment.

Adult sibling loss often falls into the category of "disenfranchised grief." Sympathy is traditionally extended to surviving parents, a spouse or children, yet surviving brothers and sisters are sometimes expected to "get over it" quickly so they can comfort others or "replace" the lost sibling. Siblings might not receive the support they need to heal, and they might hide their feelings from others.

Life Changes in an Instant

Common issues faced by surviving brothers and sisters include:

Seeking a New Identity

Someone who has been a part of your life since birth can serve as an essential part of the background from which you live your life, a piece of the unbroken wholeness that defines you.

The death of a sibling, however, upsets birth order within a family, robbing surviving siblings of the individual strengths, characteristics and identifies that are tightly linked to birth order. It takes time to learn how to live your life again. You have to grow within yourself the parts once carried by your brother or sister. You don't "get over" this as much as "grow through" it.

The Loss of a Future With Your Sibling

Not only have you lost the actual person and your relationship with them, but you have lost the part they would have played in your future. You go on to marry, have children, buy a house, succeed or fail, retire. Each event underlines the terrible reality that your

brother or sister is not there. Forever after, all events, no matter how wonderful, have a bittersweet flavour. So-called anniversary reactions can arise on birthdays, holidays and other special occasions.

Caregiving

What prevents many bereaved siblings from processing their own grief is a desire to protect someone—perhaps their parents, spouse or children. The focus on "being there" for someone else allows them to put their own grief process on hold. It's not uncommon for surviving siblings to accept the grief of others or take on the role of "compulsive caregivers," always available for others who are grieving.

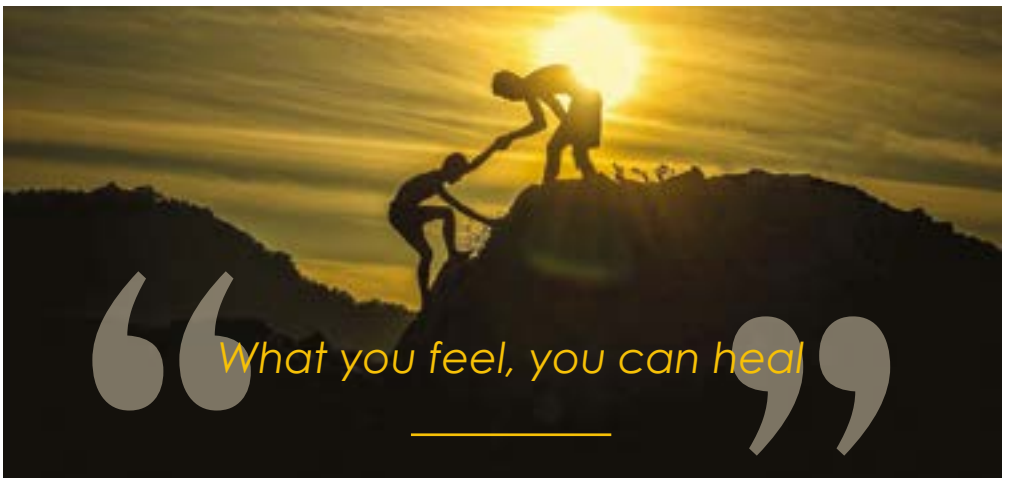
Compulsive caregivers might focus so much energy elsewhere that they become empty, over-stressed and sometimes clinically depressed. They might appear "bristly," speaking in short, quick sentences while denying the underlying pain. Their unacknowledged feelings can turn heavy and burdensome, preventing them from recovering and regaining a sense of identity.

To resolve compulsive caregiving, confront your own sadness and pain, own it and feel it as deeply as you need to. Author John Gray says, "What you feel, you can heal." You might need to talk about every detail of the death and express the associated feelings over and over until you wear out the pain.

Assert Yourself

One last comment: Don't be embarrassed if one of your worries or thoughts is, "Am I next?" When adult siblings die, it is natural to question your own mortality. Siblings are peers, so it makes sense and is normal to think in this way.

Society may not recognize the intensity of sibling loss, but bereaved siblings know that the loss has a real, sometimes devastating impact. You might have to educate the people around you and ask for their much-needed support. Assert yourself and ask for what you need.





The Compassionate Friends

General Enquiries

Head Office
Kilburn Grange, Priory Park Road,
London NW6 7UJ

0345 120 3785

(9.30am - 4.30pm, Mon to Fri)

e: info@tcf.org.uk

UK Helpline:

0345 123 2304

e: helpline@tcf.org.uk

Northern Ireland Helpline:
0288 77 88 016

 [@tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk)

 [@TCFcharityUK](https://twitter.com/TCFcharityUK)

 [@thecompassionatefriendsuk](https://www.instagram.com/thecompassionatefriendsuk)

www.tcf.org.uk

Private TCF Facebook page

JOIN US!

And talk with others who understand in our closed Facebook group for bereaved siblings (18+ years).

To join contact

Emma Andow at

emmaandow@icloud.com or

Hayley Hayes at

hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

