

Spring 2017 | Issue No 191



# COMPASSION

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The Quarterly Magazine of The Compassionate Friends.



*Never fear shadows. They simply mean there's a light  
shining somewhere nearby - Ruth E. Renkel*

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# Contents

Reflections from the Editor .....	4
Thoughts from the Chair .....	5-6
Your Letters .....	7-9
Poem, 'Our Story' by Roger .....	9
News from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library .....	10
A Shared Moment by Kate Shand .....	11
Sorrow with Hope by Joyce Offen .....	11
Don't Let Anyone Tell You How You Should Be by Gill Hartley .....	12-14
Coping with Mother's Day by Clair McCarthy .....	14- 15
Poem, 'A Mother's Love' by Carol Maindonald .....	15
Poem, 'Blue', by Coral Jane .....	16
Book Reviews .....	17
Organising Your Griefcase by R Glenn Kelly .....	18-19
Poem, 'My Grief is in a Trinket Box', by Helena Flint .....	19
Memory Corner edited by Gill Hartley .....	20-21
Getting a Handle On It by Maria Ahern .....	22-23
Poem, 'Esme the Star' by Emma Williams .....	24
How Your Journal Works .....	25
Leaflets and Publication .....	26
Creed .....	27
Audio version of Compassion - Talking Compassion .....	Back pg
Compassion Magazine Contacts .....	Back pg

**Correspondence is welcome and should be sent to the Editor. Contributions can also be sent via TCF National Office. Addresses are on the back page of this issue.**

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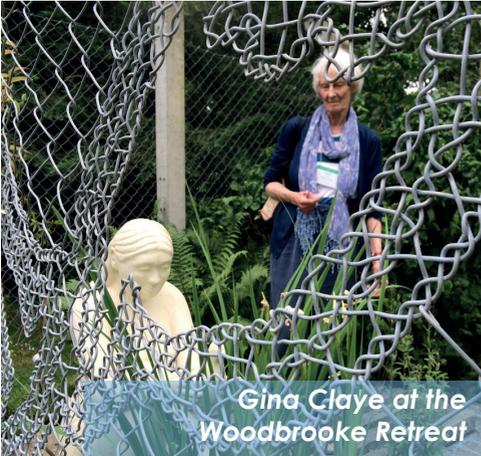
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# Reflections from the Editor



Gina Claye at the Woodbrooke Retreat

## Dear Friends

Imagine knocking on the front door of a house. Imagine it being opened by someone who welcomes you warmly, is obviously really pleased to see you then guides you through to the sitting room to join other bereaved parents gathered there, some whom you know, some whom you're about to meet. You are handed a cup of hot fragrant coffee and offered a choice of scrumptious biscuits. Your host introduces you and sings your praises. You feel valued and at home. You are then led into the dining room where a delicious lunch is spread out on the table and you tuck in, sharing stories with others who understand. You feel comfortable, safe, valued, ready to listen to others' sorrows, to uphold them in their suffering, to support them, because of the way you have been valued, supported and affirmed by your host.

Our host is Margaret Brearley, our truly amazing Chair of TCF for the last three years. With her affirmation of all, her positive inclusive approach, her ability to enthuse people, her gift for listening and her endless compassion, she has given TCF a new ethos which has taken our beloved charity from strength to strength. Although she has now stepped down as Chair (the position is for 3 years only), she still remains a trustee and continues to inspire us all.

Back to her lovely house again. After eating well and having told my story and listened while others told theirs, I feel it is time to stretch my legs. Maria is standing by the patio doors. 'Hi,' she says, 'come and have a walk in the garden.' We set off together down the path that Margaret has laid down. I have a feeling of confidence, enthusiasm and expectancy in Maria's company.

Maria is our new Chair of TCF. Over the past year she has helped Margaret with some of her work load and proved an inspirational member of our trustee team. As she herself is the first to say, she has learned so much from Margaret and is eager to carry on in her footsteps and to embrace TCF's present ethos and vision.

I feel privileged, as do all who know her, to be taking our beloved TCF forward with Maria in the Chair.

**With my love to you all, Gina Claye**

# Thoughts from the Chair

## Dear Compassionate Friends

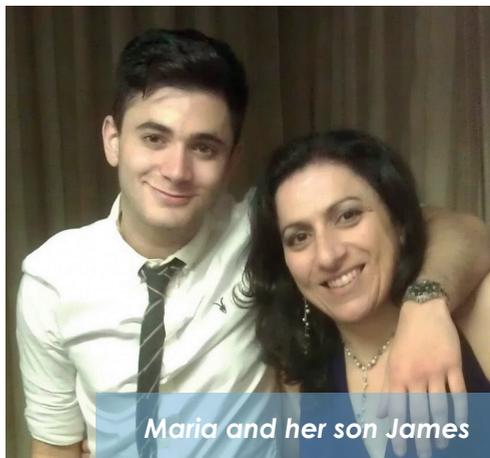
To those of you that I have already met, hello again. To those of you that I have yet to meet, allow me to introduce myself. I am, first and foremost, James Ahern's proud and devoted mum. He was my only child and I will remain devoted to him and to his memory for the rest of my life.

James was 22 when he left the house on that sunny August afternoon in 2014 telling us that he'd be back soon to watch the football with his dad. The universe had other plans for my boy. His car was involved in an accident. James didn't come home and we were catapulted into our life without him. I don't need to tell you how that feels. You already know.

I'm often asked, how I have survived. Of course, you all know, that a bereaved parent has no choice. Survival is the only option. But we all have our different strengths and supports.

Today, since I am introducing myself to you as the new Chair of The Compassionate Friends, I will tell you, in the briefest way, how I came to be here.

A few months after James's passing I found myself invited to a lunch hosted by one of the patrons of the Compassionate Friends. Tentatively I accepted, resolving that I wasn't obliged to attend and that I could change my mind at any point and stay home. I decided to attend the lunch, resolving that I could turn around at any point and go back home. I completed the journey and decided that I could leave at any time. You have all experienced this step-by-step approach I'm sure as you have struggled to find your place in this new world we occupy.



At this lunch I was introduced to Dr. Margaret Brearley (my predecessor as Chair). I have said this to her in person, so I don't mind repeating it now. She did something very special; she smiled! Yes, a smile. Simple eh? Something as ordinary as a smile but it had an extraordinary effect. I don't think I had smiled since James left. Most of the interaction I had with non-bereaved people was, well, let's be honest, just pitiful looks and lists of, 'I don't know what to say,' and, 'I can't imagine how you cope,' platitudes. But here was a woman who knew... she just knew how I felt because she was a bereaved mum like me, and amazingly she could smile! I realised then that I could smile too... and I did. It happened again when I met Sue Hughes, our Vice Chair, and Gina Claye who edits this magazine. That was my introduction to this wonderful organisation and I am grateful to everyone for all that they have taught me and for taking my hand. I felt that I had permission to be myself. To be a grieving mum. Nothing to hide and no need to pretend. We chatted, we bonded and we spoke about our children in that easy natural way that friends do. As I wrote at the time,

***'Child loss unites people in a way that is inexplicable to others but requires no explanation to those who are bereaved. It feels as though when we are in a group we somehow create a force of compassion that is palpable. Strangers become friends very quickly in this group.'***

So, having been taught that I could smile, I wanted to do it again and I wanted to help others do it too. Long story short, far from leaving early, I was one of the last to leave; I did so with a list of telephone numbers and emails of the new friends that I made. It feels like I've known these new friends all my life. Well, given that my life has changed forever I guess that I have known them all my life. For all of my new life anyway.

Here I am now, Chair of the board of trustees.

Many times, since that first meeting, I have found myself in a group of mums and dads who had been catapulted into this world. Some have been here longer than I have and know their way around.

I lean on those compassionate friends and I learn from them too. Some are new. To those mums and dads I hope to pass on what I have been taught. And what is that? I am learning about hope, unity and survival. I am learning that I can honour my son and that I can grieve for him and carry him with me as I continue to live. That I can include him, talk about him, smile when I think of him and cry when I miss him. I have permission to do all of these things and more and I hope that you feel that you do to.

I will write more, in time, about what I hope to achieve as Chair. For now, I will say this. I hope to be a worthy successor to the inspirational Dr. Margaret Brearley and to carry on in her footsteps. I am honoured and humbled that the board of trustees have considered me equal to the task and I pledge to do my best to help bereaved parents survive their loss and find their way in this new world that we all now occupy.

**Maria Ahern**

Grieving is not a short-term process; it's not even a long-term process; it's a lifelong process. 'Having a future' now means that although your life will flow again, it will flow differently as a result of the loss. Your grief will become incorporated into your life history, become a part of your identity. And you will continue now, and forever, to redefine your relationship with your deceased loved one. Death doesn't end the relationship; it simply forges a new type of relationship - one based not on physical presence but on memory, spirit, and love. **Transcending Loss by Ashley Davis Bush**

# Your Letters

Please remember to let us know if you do wish us to print your full name and address. Any response can be forwarded through the Editor (address on back page). Clear writing is important – we do not want to get your message, your name or your child's/grandchild's/ sibling's /step-child's name wrong.

## Dear Friends

We have just received the very sad news that John Norris has died. John was the first Compassionate Friend we spoke to.

It was about six weeks after the death of our wonderful daughter Samantha, who had been killed as a passenger in a car returning home after an evening out with friends.

Life had returned to normal for the rest of the world but we continued to stumble around in that new and frightening world inhabited by newly bereaved parents. We had two other families travelling with us (the three passengers died) and my husband's eldest sister had been killed at 17 too but we still felt lost and alone.

As we left the hospital on that dreadful night we were given the telephone number of the local Compassionate Friends Contact who happened to be a Sister in the A&E department. It had gone into the drawer with all the other information which we couldn't read. I am so pleased that I remembered that number.

As you know, that first phone call is so important as it's touch and go that you complete the call. John answered and I will never forget that call. His voice was warm, caring, compassionate and confident. He said he and his wife Audrie knew of our loss and we had been in their thoughts and that his wife would phone when she returned from work but to just hang in there and Audrie would phone.

She did.

It's over 27 years since that conversation and it will stay with me forever. John was everything a Compassionate Friend should be. Countless parents both locally and nationally have been cared for by John and Audrie. As a couple they manned the helpline when the rest of us attended the first International Gathering in Birmingham in 1994, supported the newly bereaved parents and others at countless National and International Gatherings and they were the glue which kept our local group functioning.

The world was a better place for having John Norris in it. I've always believed our Compassionate Friends are a gift and John was a fabulous gift.

**Jane and John Morris, Derbyshire**

## Dear Friends

I like reading the poems in ***Don't Let Them Tell You How to Grieve*** by Gina Claye. I take heart in reading about putting things off and putting the kettle on, as in ***Carpe Diem***. I often do nothing for hours but I do listen to a very happy channel, UCB Ireland, a Christian channel.

I love ***Compassion***. Thank you to all who contribute.

Yours in Hope,

**Pauline Barratt**

197 Norwich Drive, Upton, CH49 4GD

## Dear Friends

I lost my son in May 2016 and I am finding it very difficult. There is a closed facebook group that I belong to which I think we all find tremendously supportive.

With addiction and associated deaths becoming more and more of a problem I would like to suggest a leaflet be prepared for just this type of loss. Often there has been years of extreme stress and trauma prior to the death. We have been living with tremendous fear sometimes for many years. The aspect of guilt seems to be huge as we all feel we have somehow failed as parents when our children become addicted.

I wrote this poem, **Only Forever**, very soon after my son's death. I have no recollection of writing it. My memory deserted me in the very early months after.

My son, who was in treatment was taken off methadone as he continued to drink alcohol. He decided to go to Thailand and wean himself off opiates by taking over the counter Tramadol. He died alone in a hotel room in Bangkok. I was not allowed to see him as he was not found for 24 hours. We flew to Bangkok and cremated him there at a Buddhist ceremony. The trauma was huge.

## Only Forever

I only weep for you now and then,  
I cry till dry  
All day, then sleep with tears  
Never far away.  
And wake and cry, now and yesterday.  
Now and then.

I only ache for you all the time,  
In the here and now  
In yesterday.  
And knowing it will be  
The same tomorrow.  
Only all the time.

I only long for you sometimes  
Like when I breathe  
Or when I sleep.  
Or remembering  
Or looking forward.  
Sometimes, all times.

I will only miss you all my life,  
What's left, shattered, broken,  
Incomplete and lonely.  
I only miss you in my heart  
Now and then  
Here and now and all of my tomorrows.

I only love you  
When I see you in my mind  
And in your photos.  
When I hear your voice  
Deep and compelling  
Echoing across the veil.  
When I recall your skin  
And your hair  
And the way it kicks up at the back of  
your neck.  
When I smell your clothes, and rock,  
Clutching Calvin Klein pants.  
When I think of you and know  
That I cannot touch you.

It's only now and then  
Here and now.  
All the time.  
It's only forever.

**Christine Evans, [chrisevans23@gmail.com](mailto:chrisevans23@gmail.com)**

## Note from the editor

There is a leaflet entitled, '**Coping with Judgemental Attitudes**', which deals with loss by addiction and associated deaths. Go to our website at [tcf.org.uk](http://tcf.org.uk), click on Find Support, resources, then on to leaflets and fact sheets.



## Dear Friends

I saw this poster on display in a department store and thought I would share it with you all.

It reminded me of a beautiful quote:

***We may hold our child/children's hand for a short time,  
But they are in our hearts forever.***

**xox**

Just beautiful. Two sentences, but so much meaning.

**Warm wishes, Joy Sebborn, Southampton**



## Our Story

*If our foreheads were blank sheets of paper  
Our stories could be put there to show,  
The reason we look so downtrodden,  
The cause of our grief you would know.  
Our story would be such a sad one,  
The reason our spark has just gone,  
The loss of your child it destroys you,  
But for others you must carry on,  
You exist day to day on your memories,  
You keep going, you try to be strong,  
You're living your life now for others,  
But deep in your heart it feels wrong,  
Each new day you put on a brave face,  
To the world all seems rosy and bright,  
But the world doesn't see the despair  
And tears that you silently cry every night.  
So if you see someone sad and downhearted,  
Give a thought as to why it may be,  
Their story just might make you see,  
If you lived through the sadness that they have  
How would I cope, if that happened to me.*

**Roger, in memory of his beloved daughter, Yvette**

# News from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

I expect everyone is very pleased that Christmas and the New Year are over and done with. It's such a difficult time of year for us, especially in the early years.

I wasn't in the library for about three weeks but, thanks to Charité at head office keeping me up to date with the parcels that were arriving, I was able to keep sending new ones from the stock of books I'd brought home. I was so pleased to be able to get the books people needed into the post in plenty of time to beat the Christmas postal deadlines. I think we are extremely lucky to have Charité, Buz and Carolyn working at head office; all three of them go above and beyond to help us and I'm very grateful.

I am always very pleased to have recommendations for books which might be good for us and will always follow up any suggestions. I am reading a book at the moment which was recommended by a TCF member and it's very good. It is the librarian's perk to have the first read of a book and, as all my family and friends will testify, I'm never as happy as I am when I have my nose stuck in a book!

As books come in I am incorporating them into the on-line catalogue which can be accessed through the website. I had hoped to have it completed by now but am still plodding on with it. Most of our books are there now though so do have a browse through it if you'd like to.

We do have some quite unusual books in the library and I would just like to mention one of them. The Art of Remembering is a book about memorials. It's full of photos, as well as information about the artists, and the memorials are so beautiful and so varied. They range from headstones to vases and planters to plaques to woodland tributes to benches to roadside signs and more. Most of the memorials are

fairly modern and they are all beautiful. It would be a good book to browse through if you are looking for ideas or if you're just interested in the beauty artists can create out of the saddest life events.

The book concentrates on the memorials and artists rather than the inscriptions but one of the latter did catch my eye, and is rather lovely, so I thought I'd share it. It is carved onto a beautiful tall grey stone, with a Celtic cross carved above the wording, in what looks like the edge of a wood.

***'Mystery gleaming in the stars, pouring down in the sunshine***

***Speaking in the night the wonder of the sun and of far space.***

***It is eternity now; I am in the midst of it.***

***It is about me in the sunshine, I am in it as the butterfly floats in the light-laden air.***

***Nothing has to come; now is eternity; now is the immortal life.'***

**(p23 *The Art of Remembering* edited by Harriet Frazer and Christine Oestreicher)**

If you are interested in this book, or any others in the library, please email me at the library. I will then let you know how the library works and will then need you to confirm, by email, that you are happy with the arrangements regarding postal costs. Then I will get the books into the post as soon as possible.

Of course, if you live near enough or are in the area on a Tuesday, please drop in and see me and I will make you very welcome. I am in Deptford most Tuesdays but it would be worth checking with head office first just in case it's one of the rare weeks that I'm not. **With best wishes from Mary xx**

## A Shared Moment...

I dropped a friend off at the station this morning. I stopped at a red traffic light on Oxford Road. Anthony and the Johnsons singing Leonard Cohen's, 'If it be Your Will' loudly in my car. Lost in my daydream.

A beggar approached the car. I had no cash. I showed him my empty hands. Nothing today I said. He was a young man, about 17 years I would guess. I looked ahead but was aware that he stayed at my window trying to get my attention.

So I turned back to him. He was trying to tell me, quite urgently, that he recognised me. That I was the mother of the boy who killed himself. 'The book,' he said. 'You wrote a book. About your son. Your son who killed himself. Shame,' he said. 'So sad,' he said. 'Your son's photo was on the cover of the book,' he said. He took his finger and cut it across his throat. Indicating that he had hanged himself.

There was so much sorrow in his eyes. He blessed himself. He put his hands in prayer position. I did the same to thank him for acknowledging, for sharing, for caring. I drove away. To pottery class. I went past later in the day to give him a packet of food. He was gone. A boy with nothing, standing at a traffic light begging, gave me so much.

**Kate Shand - In memory of her beloved son John Peter Butler, TCF Johannesburg Chapter**

*The human heart has the extraordinary capacity to hold and transform the sorrows of life.*



## Sorrow with Hope

I cry in private, I cry alone. The tears are not always those warm and comforting ones that bring solace. They sometimes are those of anger, of shouting out against injustice and the sore trials of life, sometimes those of raging against the world and sometimes those of self-pity. They are sad tears and angry tears and even tears of joy. I do not often share them with the world.

But tears there are. Whether public or private, tears are an honest expression of grief. They are a gift and not to be denied.

In my tears and in my grief, I question and search and grow. I cannot do it with dishonesty and denial. The divine is in my tears and in my sorrow as well as in my joy and my hope; it is there to shower down love in abundance to ease and soften the pain, even in my foolish rage.

Do not ask me to deny my tears. Allow them to wash my inner wounds and speed the healing of my heart.

**Joyce Offen TCF USA**

# Don't let anyone tell you how you should be

***“The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross***

This quotation is very true, although for me the words, ‘You will be whole again’, do not sit comfortably with me, although I agree that we will never be the person we were before. We are totally changed by our experience.

It saddens me how often very newly bereaved parents feel the need to apologise for their feelings. Understandably anxious for reassurance that the pain will not always be as raw and unbearable, these parents can be easily influenced by those around them, such as friends and family. This is because the majority of people, unless they have experienced the utter devastation of losing a child, can rarely understand the depth of pain involved or that parents will continue to grieve and long for their child for the rest of their lives.

Thankfully, within a charity such as TCF, they will find the understanding they so need. Without this support, parents can end up feeling isolated and misunderstood. The fact that TCF now runs an annual retreat for newly bereaved parents up to and including the third year of their loss, shows we are not expected by those who really understand to ‘feel better’ after the first year.

Our son Will, our only child, died from a mystery illness in January 2006, after seven weeks in intensive care. We were members of an active church and were supported throughout his illness by members of our church community. Sadly, after his amazing funeral service,

our support began to filter away. And this included family and friends outside our church too.

Some people offer helpful suggestions in the hope we will “feel better”. But, although well intentioned, this can be damaging. When we do not take their advice – simply because we are unable to live up to their expectations – some people move away from us, telling themselves that, had we taken their advice, we would indeed feel ‘better’ and return to being the people we were before.

My reaction to all this was to withdraw into myself. Struggling with PTSD and still in shock, I found myself alone for hours when Edwin, my husband, returned to work. I sat for days and weeks on end, staring into space, unable to do anything, even make a cup of tea. All I could do during the endless days and nights was attempt to read anything and everything I could find relating to death, bereavement and the afterlife, desperate to find an answer to the burning question, ‘Why?’ There are of course no answers.

Grief is, and always will be, an intensely personal and lonely experience, no matter how much support we may have. We all try to cope the best way we can.

This year it is eleven years since Will died and for friends and family this will seem a long time ago, not realising that our children’s anniversaries will always be very significant for bereaved parents. We have

found this anniversary especially difficult, largely because the anniversary dates matched the week day on which our child died. We placed lanterns with long burning candles in our church and at his grave to burn overnight. There is a stained glass window in the Lady Chapel of our church dedicated to Will's memory; it was very special to light a lantern to burn in front of it. No matter how many years have passed since our child died, there will always be times when the pain and grief sweep us off our feet and, for a while, we are back to the early days of our loss. This is what those not in our situation often struggle to understand.

I do not like to see others feeling as I did when Will died - that I was somehow failing, not trying hard enough and fearful of being seen to be weak. This was very distressing. Had my niece not phoned one morning to tell me about TCF, I do not

know what I would have done... I know I did not want to go on living. TCF became our lifeline.

It was many months after Will died, before I began to believe I could achieve something in his memory, to honour him. Some parents set up a charity or fund raise very soon after their child has died. I admire those who do this and used to berate myself for my inability to do the same. But now I realise we can only cope in our own way and our own time – there are no rights and wrongs, no guidelines, no maps to follow.

Looking back now, the best advice I was given (but regretfully did not heed enough) was, 'Don't let anyone tell you how you should be.' I am including two poems, one from each of my books, which I feel are in keeping with this subject and send all of you my love and strength for this New Year. **Gill Hartley**

## Second Time Around

*We should be 'feeling better',  
after all, it all happened last year.  
We're expected to be 'over it now?'  
and pack you away with our tears.*

*What could be further from the truth?  
Last year seems a blur, somehow,  
I can't remember all we said and did,  
all I can think of is... now.*

*Now your room is still empty,  
your shelves are still full of your books,  
your clothes still hang in your cupboards,  
your dressing gown hangs from its hook.*

*Now you no longer call me,  
I don't hear your voice saying, 'Mum!'  
I cannot hold you or see you,  
my grieving has barely begun.*

*It hurt, the second birthday,  
without your presence here,  
now you would be twenty-four  
we missed your twenty-third year.*

*You didn't send us birthday cards,  
or send me flowers this year,  
on Mothering Sunday I cried all day,  
but still you did not appear.*

*The truth is we'll never recover,  
time will not heal our wounds,  
our pain will linger with each passing year,  
and anniversaries come too soon.*

**Gill Hartley, from My True Son**

# Silver Wedding

*The year you died was our Silver Wedding,  
but without you we could not celebrate.  
Ironic, you named yourself Will Silver  
on your mobile and your email address.  
At your funeral one of your friends told me  
the girls had christened you, The Silver Fox.  
We bought Silver Birch in your memory,  
reflecting your lovely silver blond hair,  
I bought silver white snow drops and crocus,  
planted them by your stunning slate  
headstone*

*carved with silver letters bearing your name.  
We will always associate silver  
with you, our wonderful silver tongued son,  
our love will never tarnish, it lives on...*

**Gill Hartley, from Aspects of Loss**  
**hartley9ar@btinternet.com**  
**www.gillhartley.com**

# Coping with Mother's Day

I am the mother of a child who died. And that makes Mother's Day very hard. Recently I was talking to a mother whose child had just died. 'What about Mother's Day?' she asked, through tears. It was hard to know what to say, because it's a terrible day for those of us who have lost a child. Other days of the year you can maybe make it a few hours without thinking about your loss; other days of the year you can pretend that you are an ordinary person and that life is normal. But not on Mother's Day.

On Mother's Day you can't pretend you are ordinary or that life is normal. All the hype, the cards, flowers and family gatherings, make it almost excruciating.

Our town has a Mother's Day road race for which I am eternally grateful because, in a demonstration of grace's existence, the start and finish are next to the cemetery where my son is buried. On my way I can visit his grave and say what I need to say. At the end of the race, they give all the mothers a flower; on my way home, I go back to the grave and lay my flower there. And then I move forward with the day.

See, that's the real challenge after losing a child, moving forward. It's almost impossible to envision in that moment of loss; how can life continue after something so horrible? But life does continue, whether we like it or not. There are chores to do and bills to pay; morning comes, again and again. So you pick yourself up and you live, but you are never the same.

At first, we are different because of our raw sadness. But over time, the sadness moves from our skin into our bones. It becomes less visible. It changes into wisdom, one we'd give up in a heartbeat to have our child back. We who have lost children understand life's fragility and beauty. We who have lost children understand that so many things just aren't important. All that is important is those we love. All that is important is each other. Nothing else.

It can feel very lonely, being the parent of a child who died. Especially on Mother's Day or Father's Day. We feel so different from those around us, all those happy people with children the same age our child was, or would have been. But over

the years, I've come to understand that I'm not alone at all.

There is a Buddhist story about a woman whose son gets sick and dies. She goes to the Buddha to ask him to bring her son back to life; I will, he says, if you bring me some mustard seed from the home of a family that has not known loss. She goes from house to house but can find no family that has not lost someone dear to them. She buries her son and goes to the Buddha and says: I understand now.

That is what I understand now. It doesn't make me miss my son any less, or Mother's Day any easier. But it helps me make sense of it; loss is part of life. There are no

guarantees, ever. Our children, and all those we love, are gifts to us for however long we have them.

I understand now too that we are together in this, all of us, in joy and in loss. It's the connections we make with each other that matter - it's the connections we make that give life value and help us face each morning. Years ago, I chose words to say each time I go to my son's grave. It makes it easier to have a ritual. And over the years, the words have come to mean more to me. They aren't just about grief anymore. They are about who I am, what I have learned, and what I can give.

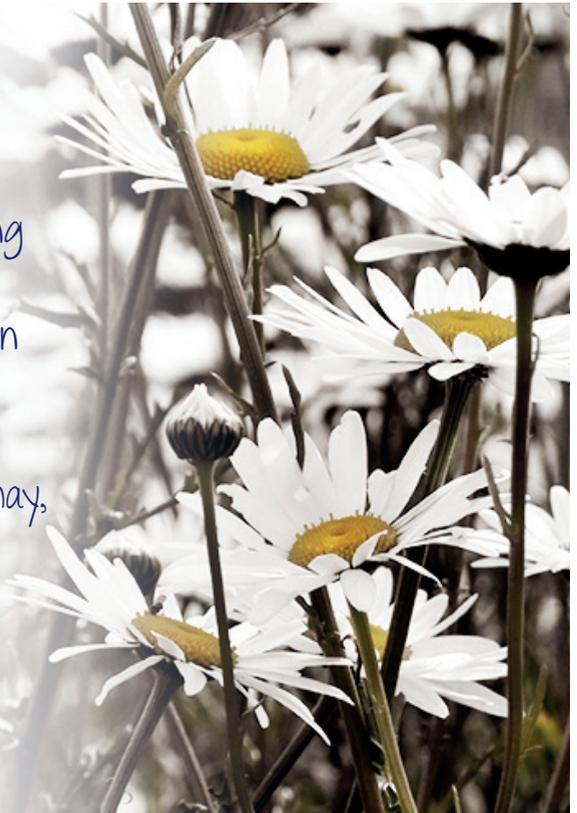
***'I will always love you,' I say.  
'And I will always be your mother.'***

**Clair McCarthy MD, TCF Johannesburg Chapter**

## **A Mother's Love**

A Mother's love is something that no one can explain. It is made of deep devotion and of sacrifice and pain. It is endless and unselfish and enduring, come what may, for nothing can destroy it or take that love away.

**Carol Maindonald**



# Coral Jane Writes...

Soon after the sudden and unexpected death of my daughter, Julia Macpherson, in May 2016, I scribbled an outpouring of grief in a notebook. Julia died whilst on a short unaccompanied outing from a local Psychiatric Unit and a few months passed before I could look at my scribbles again. It was only then that I realised I had unwittingly written a poem. Julia's death had brought back painful memories associated with the loss of her baby brother Robert, half a century earlier. This poem, **Blue**, was the result.

## Blue

I don't remember his face  
it was so long ago -  
small, crumpled yet perfect to me,  
but I do remember the silence  
after he ceased to breathe,  
I looked, I saw  
blue  
before they took him from me  
I never asked where...  
and neither did you.

So different with you, his sister -  
you I had for half a lifetime  
yours, mine - but not long enough

You remembered him too,  
faint, disconnected memories  
of a baby, who came and went  
leaving your child-mind in turmoil  
as mine is now...

I see you on my shower-seat  
that last Sunday -  
woman-child,  
as I bathed you, washed your hair  
dressed you... and one last time  
laid you on my bed,  
watching for the rise and fall,  
noting your pallor, searching for pink -  
reassured hearing your soft snoring

You asked for tea, Earl Grey,  
your favourite, made with love  
and gratefully sipped -

I've had a nice time, you said,  
as I held back tears, wanting to  
keep you right here, fearful...

I let them take your brother,  
but I knew that couldn't happen again -  
brother and sister,  
new and young-old, my  
imperfect creations -  
so I returned you to the so-called  
place of safety.

Three days later I heard a doctor  
utter those same words -  
your son/daughter hasn't made it,  
I'm so sorry...

Disbelief - I had to check for myself,  
see your lifeless body  
noting your hair needed washing again,  
when I touched it, it felt the same -  
next Sunday, I thought -  
but then I saw your face,  
mouth half-open as if to speak,  
and I knew what I did not want to know -  
fate had struck twice  
two out of three.

I had seen blue before, so of course  
I knew - kissed you goodbye and  
turned to my one out of three,  
my only child, still holding on to you,  
willing her life into yours...

blue, she said  
I nodded,  
Blue.

**Coral Jane**

# Book Reviews

We are always looking for people who are willing to review books for us. Please contact Mary at the library (address on back page) if you would like to help in this way.

**LAMENT FOR A SON** by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Published by Wm.B.Eerdmans, [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com), ISBN No 978-0-8028-0294-1

**Lament for a Son** is a short book and easy to read, written from a Christian perspective with some biblical verses about his son, Eric, who died in a skiing accident aged 25.

The author asks a lot of the questions most of us ask ourselves, searching for answers to help us move forward in our grieving journey.

Page 34 talks about what you can say to others to help,

**'Sit beside me on my mourning bench'**,

which I think is a lovely expression and also on page 51 it says,

**'Delighting in things but the zest is gone'**,

which I personally can relate to and I'm sure others will do too.

Reading this has helped me move a little further on my journey.

**Carol Maindonald**

**THE FORGIVENESS PROJECT**  
**Stories for a vengeful age** by Marina Cantacuzino Published by Jessica Kingsley, ISBN 978-1-84905-566-6

In 2004 Marina Cantacuzino, an award winning journalist, founded The Forgiveness Project, a highly influential organisation which uses personal stories to explore how ideas around forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution can be used to impact positively on people's lives.

Forty people, from nineteen countries tell their stories, ranging from a Holocaust survivor to a young Norwegian who survived the Breivik attack in 2011. Many stories are horrific, the rampant inhumanity of man to man almost defying belief. Yet, from these traumas, the forty have survived - some through their faith, others with no faith at all. Some have apparently solved or resolved their pain. Others are still striving to do so. We can learn from all these stories however remote from our own tragedy. Indeed Emma Thompson, the actor, has rightly called The Forgiveness Project 'probably one of the most important projects in the world today'.

In one sense grief, however caused, has no boundaries. In short, despite our personal grief, we are all in it together so I strongly recommend this unusually disturbing but encouraging book.

**Christopher Compston**

**This book is available to borrow from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library.**

# Organizing Your Griefcase

Time can often be an immeasurable concept in grief. Our profound loss always seems like it happened yesterday, irrespective of taking place months, years, or even decades before. When my dear son's precious heart failed after a relatively simple medical procedure, he was taken from this world in what seemed like the snap of a finger. In reality, however, an army of skilled doctors, nurses and technicians spent exhaustive amounts of time and effort in trying to revive my Jonathan that fateful morning.

When thinking back, it seems as if one moment I was planning the eventual trip home from the hospital with my child, and the next I was handed my very own Griefcase. It was given to me by the doctor who tried in vain to revive my child. She was certainly compassionate, if not emotional herself, but I wonder if fully aware of what she gave me? After all, only one who has experienced the loss of a loved one knows that there is no "getting over it." There is no normal any longer, and what was once an unquestioned certainty is no longer even a possibility. Was that doctor, a stranger just a short time before, aware of exactly what was within the Griefcase she issued to me?

Grief is the case that holds all our emotions from the loss, and therefore, a Griefcase. Now, if you will allow me a stretch of the imagination, I ask that you think of the old spy movies, where a briefcase was physically handcuffed to the secret agent. Somewhat like that spy's attaché, our Griefcase becomes a permanent part of who we are.

However, unlike that spy, ours can never be removed. There simply is no lock and key to be found here on Earth.

Early in our journey, those individual emotions inside our Griefcase are like separate manila folders found in any ordinary briefcase, each tab labeled with the contents inside. Yet, the folders are at first jumbled, overstuffed, and so very confusing. Nothing seems to make sense, and the whole thing is overwhelmingly burdensome, and so very heavy early in loss. Because of that, we sometimes refrain from any actions, as the thought of the emotional weight serves to anchor us in place. If we do carry on with it regardless of painful effort, it will get in the way at first, as we find ourselves stumbling over it as we try to move forward. Occasionally, we might even forget for a moment it is even there. We laugh, or begin to enjoy an outing, when suddenly we are stopped in our tracks, as the chain which secures the Griefcase to our wrist has gone taught. It simply cannot be left behind and forgotten.

The Griefcase certainly does not have to remain a heavy burden in our journey to a life of peace and purpose. Although it starts out disorganized, confusing and oftentimes frightening, we can face each emotion and begin to organize what is inside. We open the case, and then each folder, working through the confusion and removing such things as false anger and false guilt. We discover aspects within one emotion that actually belong in the file of another, or is possibly redundant. We can simply ball those up and toss them out. Then, by addressing each folder, and not allowing any to remain untended, we slowly begin to lighten the load. While it certainly will not be easy, and it will be a lifelong task, your Griefcase will slowly become less of a burden in your journey.

Take heart, fellow grievers. Although we never wanted the Griefcase, it will actually be a wonderful part of who we are to become. To realize this, we must be aware that we could never completely empty any of the emotional folders found inside, even if we tried. Yet, we must always strive to discard all that which is false, harmful or unnecessary. What remains will be the experiences that touched our soul, regardless of how agonizing. These are the foundational building blocks of becoming an amazingly compassionate supporter, with honest empathy, and a true desire to be there for others on the same journey. This is one of the blessed gifts our loves ones left for us.

However, if you should find yourself having difficulties working through the folders within your Griefcase, I want to bring one folder in particular to your attention. Every one of us will have this

folder, and it can always be found in that pocket inside the lid. It is boldly labeled, "Unconditional Love." It is already well organized and contains all it should, and actually has room to add more over time. If ever you find yourself feeling the overbearing weight of the Griefcase, and despondency seems to be the norm, reach up and pull out that file. Allow the unconditional love you feel for the one you lost to lift you up, so you may face the other dark files in the case, and continue your journey forward.

On a final note, as you remove all the confusing emotions from your Griefcase, not only will it be lighter and far less a burden in your daily life, but it will also have some available space inside. That space belongs to you. Why not give yourself a break and toss in some sunscreen and flip flops? You deserve some peace.

**R. Glenn Kelly, Jonathan's Father, Author, Public Speaker and Grief Support Advocate  
TCF/Coeur d'Alene Chapter, BP of USA**

## My Grief is in a Trinket Box

Helena Flint 28.11.16

*My Grief is in a Trinket Box  
That sits upon the shelf  
I take it down and look at it  
When sat alone, all by myself.*

*My grief is like a howling gale  
A wasteland wind, a desert parched.  
It's crashing rain, and constant pain  
That scour my beating pulpy heart.*

*I take that messy fleshy heart  
And put it gently in its place  
In trainer box that held his shoes  
There on the shelf where dreams are  
safe.*

*I take it down and put it back  
I open it or leave it closed.  
My precious grief, the fruit of love  
Upon the shelf in boxed repose.*



# Memory Corner

We remember with love all our children

Edited by Gill Hartley, hartley9ar@btinternet.com

**From Lynn and John Brown**  
**For our wonderful, dearest son**  
**JOSEPH. It will be 23yrs on 24th March**  
**when you gained your Angel Wings.**

For Joseph My Star  
I look up to the sky  
And see the stars  
Twinkling bright  
Which one is you?  
I think of you as a star  
Looking down, watching over us  
Trying to help us  
To live with losing you  
My star  
My shining star  
Stay bright for me  
And I will look up at night  
And think of you  
And send you all my love

**From Jim, Elaine and Stefanie Mannion**  
**Natalie Rachel, 23 years old on 13th**  
**April 2017.**

Remembering our beautiful daughter  
Natalie, a funny, happy kind little girl who  
would share or give her things to others.  
You were very brave throughout your  
illness and never complained once.  
Your cousin Craig misses you and talks to  
his children about you.

We miss your sense of humour, your smile.  
We miss you, we love you!

**Mum, Dad and Stefanie**

**From Carolyn Brice**  
**Remembering with so much love my**  
**daughter Rosie Collette**  
**21.5.1995 – 04.12.2004**

Forever 9 and a half, you would've been  
celebrating your 22nd birthday on 21st  
May 2017. I wonder what you would be  
doing on that special day.

**Miss you and love you, Rosie.**  
**You are always with me, your dad and**  
**sister. With all my love, mummy xx**



**From Bill and Elaine Young**  
**For William's 26th birthday on 28th**  
**March.**

*"Thank you William for 24 years  
of pure joy."*



**From Michael and Susan Lee  
Adam Lee 15.9.1982 - 08.03.2006**

Remembering our precious son Adam who was so cruelly taken from us. His suffering was unbearable, but he fought through all his pain.

We miss you forever and ever and the only consolation is that one day we will be with you. May your darling soul be resting in peace.

**Mum, Dad and Lauren (2.7.84) the daughter and sister we never got to know. xxx**

**From Debbie White**

For my beautiful daughter, Anna Vashti White, 21st July 1987 - 14th March 2004

Always in my heart, mind and soul my darling and missing you so much. I feel so fortunate that you were with me for 16 wonderful years but it's so painful without you. May you be happy and free.

Until we meet again, loving you forever and always,

**Your Mum xxx**

**From Liz Martin**

For our darling boy, Tom, on 14th March, the anniversary of his leaving us and for his 31st birthday on the 7th June.

We will love and miss you forever.

**With love from your Mum, Dad, and brother, Nick xxx**

**From Gina, Tim and Rachael Claye  
Remembering Nikki 18/3/68 - 25/3/87  
and Robin 30/4/70 - 18/3/03**

Robin, Wales have just won their opening game in the Six Nations Rugby against Italy. They woke up in the second half and scored three tries. Believe it or not, Scotland won against Ireland! Although their game was rather boring yesterday, I'm afraid England might get the Grand Slam again this year.

Nikki, your pink rose, Compassion, is still blooming after 29 years. Whenever I look at it I see you.

**Carrying you both with us in our hearts, Mum, Dad and RN xxx**

# Getting a handle on it...

## The Things People Say to a Bereaved Parent...

~ **'How do you do it? Meeting other bereaved parents. Doesn't it remind you?'**

I've just spent the weekend in a beautiful hotel nestled deep in the Derbyshire Dales. There was lovely food, a swimming pool, bracing walks. You name it. Every box ticked.

Did I enjoy it? Oh yes. I was able to relax properly for the first time in ages. And I laughed too. I haven't done that for a little while. Properly laughed I mean. Not that stupid pretend laugh that I do for other people. A real laugh.

Oh, the hotel was full too. So full, that a nearby hotel was also booked for the weekend. Very popular venue? I see you tilt your head with interest. You must give me the details you say. No, dear friend. You don't want to be checking into this weekend any time soon. A weekend for newly bereaved parents.

And here it comes... as sure as clockwork:

~ **'Why would you do that? Why would you spend the weekend with other bereaved parents?'**

Oh my giddy aunts... Because I am one you nummy! Or have you forgotten that because of that stupid fake laugh that I have perfected and that stupid fake smile.

~ **'But doesn't that just remind you of your loss?'**

Oh my word, stop, please, just stop talking! Bereaved parents don't forget that they are bereaved parents! Seriously people.



Come on.

What we do is, we become brilliant actors so that YOU forget that we are bereaved parents. See the difference?

We act. All day, every day. And it's exhausting and we need some time off. Now, imagine if people were so used to seeing the 'made up' you that you were afraid to let them see the real you. Afraid to let the world see the actor without the costume. Well then you would only be able to remove the mask when you are alone. That can be quite isolating right? Who does the 'real you' talk to if he or she only comes out when they're alone?

Quite a choice to make on a daily basis. Pretend, and be with other folk, or be your grieving self and be alone. Tough choice.

What if there was another way? In the best case scenario, the world would learn to accept the grief and pain of others and deal with it compassionately. We haven't reached there yet. So what if there was a place where you could be yourself, kick off the pretence, put on your comfies and be yourself, but around other people!

Think of it as a service station on a long journey. You can take a break. Have a bit of refreshment and rather than all be in the car talking to each other at uncomfortable and unnatural angles, you can actually sit opposite each other and have a face to face chat for a bit. See?

Now. Imagine that journey alone. And you are lost. If you go the wrong way right at the start, finding your way back could be more difficult.

## I'd be lost, literally, without my Compassionate Friends

When your child dies, you are immediately catapulted into an alien world. There are no maps and no warning signs. You have to find the pitfalls and the dangers yourself and the places where you might find some respite too. But... and here's the good bit. What if the people that you meet at this service station can show you where the dangers lie and where the possible relief might be? What if they've been on this journey for a bit longer and know where the signposts are and can point them out. Comforting wouldn't you say?

What if, at that service station, there was someone who could give you a map of the world that you now live in. You would be grateful, right? Yes, you might want to go off and explore on your own and you might not want to go to the suggested places, but at least you know where they are if you need a rest, right?

My service station was The Compassionate Friends. They gave me the map and I am so, so grateful for it. More than that though the organisers and volunteers are like 'stewards' who line my road helping me to hold the map upright. I can therefore feel my way, on my own for a good deal of the time, but I can always turn to someone when the ground becomes a little uneven... as it often does... and they will take my hand, steady me back on my feet and wave me on my way till I see them again, down the road.

I'd be lost, literally, without my Compassionate Friends and what they have taught me has been a lesson in survival.

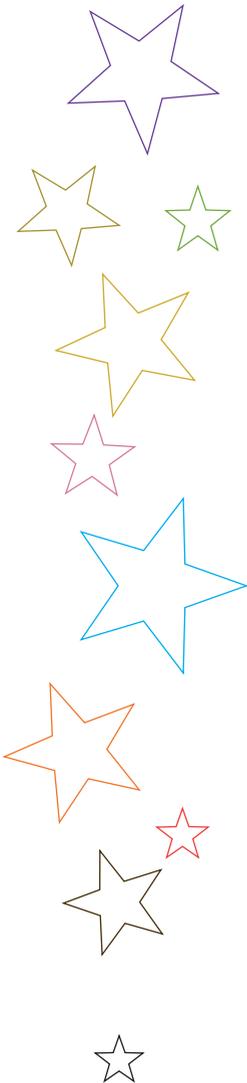
Now, it's my turn to take my place as one of those stewards and try to teach others to survive. So that's why I do it. That's why I meet other bereaved parents. No it doesn't remind me. It allows me to remember the natural way.

**Maria Ahern**

We talk about them, not because we're 'stuck' or because we haven't 'moved on'; we talk about them because we are theirs, and they are ours, and no passage of time will ever change that.

# Esme the star

By Esme's mother, Emma Williams, December 2016



Esme... so longed for but unforeseen  
In long winter nights her parents like frozen oak trees  
Stood by a stream  
Hoping for the spring to come  
Suddenly in the **purple** night sky a shooting star appeared  
Esme... the exquisite child, came by  
Two old gnarled branches which wrapped around her  
**Golden** sap rushed, fresh and **green**  
Leaves stretched forth, buds bloomed  
Esme... the precious spring, shining warm **yellow**  
To her oak parents  
She grew strong  
Climbing, swinging from the boughs  
Laughing and dancing to the bird song  
Watching bees buzz round sweet **pink** flowers  
Esme... brought love happiness on a warm summer breeze  
Eating fruit and running through hot **blue** skies  
Canopies lush and heavy with life and all that lived at ease  
The child beams at the contented **white** sheep sleeping at  
the foot of the trees  
Esme... like a shooting star, the bright light was "oh" so brief  
Autumn leaves turned **orange** and **scarlet red**  
She was taken away, to her parent's utter grief  
Planted in the soft **brown** earth  
At the foot of the oak  
Lay the precious child  
The **black** storm clouds came with wind and rain to soak  
Terrible lightning strikes the air  
Leaves stripped bare  
Branches like an empty arm  
Reach out in the dark clear sky  
Esme... the winter star appears once more  
to calm  
The battered splintered broken oaks  
A star now **silver**, shines  
on the Christmas tree  
For all of us to love and see.



# Compassion - How Does Your Quarterly Journal Work?

- For all entries related to the contents of Compassion (including Memory Corner and SIBBS), the TCF Postal Library, the website and the National Office, please see back cover.
- All queries about donating membership of TCF and receiving copies of Compassion, please contact National Office on **0345 120 3785**.
- Send your contributions (poems, letters or articles) to the Editor. You can also email your contributions to **compassioneditor@tcf.org.uk**. Please put your email address under your name at the end, and please let us know if you wish your full contact details to be included with your contribution otherwise just your name will appear.
- **Editing your contributions:** It may be necessary to shorten your letter or article for reasons of space, but we will do our best to make sure that your message comes through clearly. We welcome your thoughts about your grief and the loss of your child - sometimes it's very difficult to know how or where to express the turbulent emotions that wash over you in the months/years following your son's or daughter's death. Other readers of Compassion will understand all your difficult emotions; many will have passed that way before you and be able to share your feelings.
- Enduring friendships continue to be forged through the pages of this journal, especially when a particular contribution 'speaks' to another reader. In responding to expressions of common experience, bonds are forged which help to sustain and console us. However to protect privacy we are now unable to publish contact details in the journal, unless you expressly ask us to do so, but we will endeavour to obtain permission for contact details to be exchanged on request.
- **A practical request:** Please write clearly. It helps if you write your name and address, and your child's name, IN CAPITAL LETTERS - it is sometimes difficult to interpret handwriting. We do not like to get such important details wrong.

*We are always looking for ways to make your  
journal more relevant to your needs.  
Do let us know. We love hearing from you!*

# TCF Leaflets and Publications

The following leaflets and publications are produced by TCF and are available from the National Office (address on the back page) and online at [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk).

## Leaflets for Bereaved Parents and Grandparents:

- Introducing TCF
- After Suicide
- Back at Work
- The Bereaved Lone Parent
- Childless Parents
- Coping with Judgemental Attitudes
- Coping with Special Occasions
- Death Abroad
- The Death of a Disabled Child
- The Death of an Adult Child
- The Death of a Stepchild
- A Father's Grief
- Grief of the Newly Bereaved
- Grieving Couples
- Grieving for Our Baby
- Helping Our Grandchildren When Our Child has Died
- Living with Grief
- A Mother's Grief
- Our Children's Friends
- Preparing Our Child's Funeral
- The Sudden Death of Our Child
- When Our Child has been Murdered
- When Our Child has Died from a Terminal Illness
- When Our Grandchild Dies
- Prolonged and Intense Grief
- Our Child's Digital Legacy
- Grieving Child Loss in Blended and Step Families
- 

## Leaflets and booklets for bereaved siblings and their supporters:

- A Sibling's Grief - For Young Adults
- Our Surviving Children
- When a Student Dies - Guidance for Schools and Colleges

## Leaflets for friends and professionals supporting bereaved parents:

- Guidelines for Funeral Directors
- Helping a Bereaved Employee
- Helping Bereaved Parents
- Ministering to Bereaved Parents
- The Police and Bereaved Parents



# The Compassionate Friends Creed

We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends.

We reach out to each other with love, with understanding and with hope.

Our children have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for our children unites us.

Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.

We are a unique family because we represent many races and creeds.

We are young and we are old.

Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that we feel hopeless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength; some of us are struggling to find answers.

Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; others radiate an inner peace.

But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for our children.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building that future together as we reach out to each other in love and share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

# Compassion Magazine Contacts

Contributions to 'Compassion' are always welcome. Please use the contacts below to get in touch.

## Letters to the Editor

E: [compassioneditor@tcf.org.uk](mailto:compassioneditor@tcf.org.uk)

## Memory Corner

E: [hartley9ar@btinternet.com](mailto:hartley9ar@btinternet.com)

## Support in Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters

The Compassionate Friends SIBBS,  
14 New King Street, Deptford, London,  
SE8 3HS  
E: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

## TCF Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

The Compassionate Friends Postal Library  
Service, 14 New King Street, Deptford,  
London, SE8 3HS  
T: 01634 666353, E: [library@tcf.org.uk](mailto:library@tcf.org.uk)

## Donating membership enquiries

The Compassionate Friends National  
Office, 14 New King Street, Deptford,  
London, SE8 3HS  
T: 0345 120 3785, E: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

## Talking Compassion

The audio edition of this publication is available as a CD on loan from TCF Library. Back Issues from Summer 2011 onwards.

*Beautifully read -  
always wonderful to listen to.*

To find out more about TCF visit

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) |  [@tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk)  [@saytheirname](https://twitter.com/saytheirname)

## Final Date for Contributions is 17<sup>th</sup> April 2017 for the next issue of Compassion (Summer 2017)

If you are sending a letter, poetry or story for publication in Compassion, please remember that to protect your privacy only your name will appear alongside your contribution, not your full contact details, unless you expressly ask for them to be included. Please try and make sure you get your contributions in by the final date for the best chance of being included in the next edition. All views are welcome, irrespective of your personal religious beliefs. Compassion allows freedom of expression in whatever way you wish in order to honour your children.



The  
Compassionate  
Friends