

Spring 2018



Newsletter for Childless Parents

A newsletter for parents with no surviving children



Photo by Elly Sutherland

Thoughts from our editor

Photo by Ely Sutherland



Dear Friends

As I write this snow is gently falling. It is Sunday afternoon and a cold January day. By the time you read this, daffodils will be starting to bloom, and the fresh green of Spring will have made an appearance. The nights will be lighter, and the darkness of winter will be starting to leave or at least hopefully!!

It will also be Mothering Sunday on the 8th of March bringing another holiday to navigate for us all. I have a friend who once shared some advice given to her after the death of her husband to suicide.

'Don't make an event of anything'

At first, I felt it was harsh and certainly easier said than done when one is bombarded with yet another round of fancy cards, flowers, and gifts. It is hard to escape the over indulgence of another Hallmark holiday. However, as the years go by, I have found it helpful to try and not make these days events in as much as it is up to me. I think it is called compartmentalising.

After losing both my children, almost ten years apart to the day, I set no expectations of any special days. A hedge of protection perhaps. Of utmost importance is approaching these 'events' in whatever way helps you get through

it. Each of us grieves differently. I don't know about you, but I am often surprised by grief. My friend in America whose son died the day after Rachel in 2004, calls them 'grief bursts'. There are no rules to this grief journey.

I met an elderly couple recently, and during conversation they shared with me that they had lost two of their three children. The couple have been married for sixty-one years and are now struggling to support one another as they age. They lost their first child to crib death about sixty years ago. The father shared how he walked to the hospital carrying his lifeless baby boy through the dark streets. As he spoke his eyes filled with tears and the sadness, even some sixty years later, was visible and profound. His wife told me that there was little help back then unlike nowadays and that she wished there had been someone to reach out to in her grief. Another son died recently from illness in his early fifties. They have one surviving child. I shared with them about my children. There was, as always, an immediate bond. When it came time to leave the man feebly got to his feet and shuffled toward me. He looked straight into my eyes and said, "there is nothing worse in the world than living each day without your children". Yet they have every single day. Bereaved parents are the bravest of people and it is always a privilege to meet them and share stories of endurance and strength.

Wherever you are in this journey thank you for allowing me the privilege of sharing it with you as we strive to cope day by day, side by side, with love and acceptance.

**I send you love,
Elly, Rachel and James' Mom**

A selection of poems written by Aileen Cross, Mother of Erika



My Daughter

To me you are absolutely
every beautiful thing I could
have wished for & I want
to thank you for bringing so
many smiles into my life.
Thank you for being in all
my favorite memories & all
my most thankful prayers.
Of all the things I could have
been, I will always be grateful
beyond words
that I got to be the parent
of the sweetest girl in the
whole, wide world.

A Face Before Me

There is always a face before me
A voice I wish to hear
A smile I always remember
Of a daughter I loved so dear.

You Were Real

You were real
I held you in my arms
I loved you
We talked, we fought
We laughed, we cried
We gave, we sought
We lived, you DIED
I hold you in my HEART
I love you ALWAYS
YOU ARE REAL



Dylan's Woodland

My son Dylan died this time last year. A few days after the funeral, we planted some 50 trees in his name, with around 20 of his friends and another 20 of our family and friends, within the Future Forests Project of the Sylva Foundation, in Oxfordshire, where we live. We've named it 'Dylan's Woodland'.

It had been a dream for Dylan, to have his own woodland one day.

On 30 January this year, to mark the day, we are holding a gentle memorial to pay homage to Dylan, and we're going to hold it in his woodland. We'll tie ribbons round a post, I'll say some words, and a friend will read a Celtic Blessing.

In life, Dylan was what mattered most in my life, he came first, and that was the case even though he was an adult man when he died. Dylan is my first thought as I awake and my last thought as I sleep, yesterday, today and forevermore. He's in my heart always, and will be until my last breath.

Dylan was my Love, unconditionally.

He was my heart, my best friend, my teacher, my negotiator, my rebel, my angel, my gift, my helper, my freedom, my treasure, my rockstar, my sonshine, my soaring comet, my

dreamer, my wings, my tree lover, my surfer, my biker, my adventurer, he was my soul, my beauty, my Joy, my comfort, my fearless, my worry, my strength, my determined, my tattoo, my hug, my handsome, my authentic, he was my artist, my passion, my stoic, my courageous, my generous, my loving, my funny, my full moon, my otherworldly visitor, my spiritual, my star, my child, my baby.

My Son. My Dylan.

He is still many of these things to me, but some left with him when his breath stopped that afternoon, so suddenly.

There have been times this year, when I have felt Dylan's presence; I have tried to see things through his eyes, and I have invited him to see life through my eyes. When I visit Dylan's Woodland, I ask him to be with me. And I talk to him. When I go for walks, I invite him to walk with me, and I point things out, and I talk to him. Sometimes I can smile with him. When I walk on beaches, and see the surfers, it's Dylan I see, when I am passed by young men on mountain bikes, or a tall young man with headphones and hoodie, it's Dylan I see.

Dylan has given me many beautiful, specially chosen gifts, but it's the last ones he gave me I cherish most, acquired with no money, – a large shell, and a pebble with a setting sun and the sea painted on it, which he swapped something of his own for, from Nicaragua, where he spent his last holiday with friends, surfing.

I'll be going to New Zealand in February, Dylan's favourite land and spiritual home, and I'll be meeting his friends, visiting the places he loved, and scattering some of his ashes in places he was deeply connected to.

I have my memories of wonderful times spent with Dylan, and I feel his absence very deeply, but I do honestly believe that Dylan is around me and, as long as I remember him, hold him in my heart, and say his name, he is alive in me. Dylan.

**Dylan Christopher, 33,
beloved son of Margaret Pinsent.
Accidental drowning. 30 January 2017**



Just 3 small things...

How practising gratitude has lightened my life without Phoebe

"It is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratitude that makes us joyful" Brother David Steindl-Rast.

Practising gratitude could, I understand, appear like an incongruous or even insensitive suggestion to make to a bereaved parent; after all the loss of a child is pretty much universally perceived to be the worst and most traumatic of all losses and what an earth have we to be grateful for, we have had the most precious of things snatched away from us....?

I was well aware of this when I shared my thoughts with a room full of other bereaved parents at last year's TCF gathering. I didn't want to cause offense or upset anyone. But I decided to share that I keep a gratitude diary because it really has helped me to find peace, hope and even a little joy in my life following the loss of my 4 year old daughter, Phoebe in 2016.

I first came across the concept of a gratitude practice last summer. Gratitude was the subject of the penultimate chapter of "From Grief to Growth" by Paula Stephens. At that time, I admit I was

somewhat sceptical, but, as Paula herself was a bereaved parent and because the recommendation kept popping up over and over in books I read subsequently, I decided to give it a try. I began noting three to five things that I was grateful for in a journal.

At first it wasn't easy, but I was thinking too big, looking for the extraordinary. Once I reset the bar and began to see the beauty in simple, ordinary moments, my practise began bear fruit. Before losing Phoebe I took so much for granted. I lived life at such a pace that I never took the time to fully appreciate the value of the small stuff. I suppose I'd always appreciated things like clean sheets or the smell of freshly cut grass but now in search of things to record each day, I refocused and gradually, I began to realise just how foundational fluffy socks, morning dew or spotting the first snowdrop are in terms of finding a little relief and even happiness.. Once I realised this and how important it was to actually write down my 3 things down each day, my practice gained momentum. I'm an Instagram fan, and

recently I saw this quote posted: "By writing down the things you are grateful for, you start looking for more things to be grateful for" and I concur beyond doubt... Brene Brown (another of my favourite writers) talks about the "magic" of gratitude in an interview with Oprah Winfrey that you can find on YouTube and I quite like this way of describing it because it has been nothing short of transformative for me.....

Practising gratitude daily has completely changed my perspective; I no longer see happiness as a destination beyond the grasp of the bereaved parent or as something I might be able to experience one day in the distant future, perhaps when I'm stronger or when enough time has elapsed. It has helped me to find peace in the present and to focus less on the pain of the past or related to a future without Phoebe. I now believe in the

power of opening my eyes and my heart to the small, quite ordinary moments of joy that occur (really they do, think the taste of your coffee or the smell of clean, dry washing fresh from the tumble dryer) every day. It has been illuminating and liberating. Life has begun to feel lighter and so at the risk of sounding nauseatingly evangelical, I would urge you to try. Perhaps writing down 3 things is too much to start with, so maybe just look for one thing, however seemingly small or insignificant "just one little thing" as is the mantra of another bereaved parent I follow on Instagram and just see where that takes you.....

"I believe a joyful life is made of joyful moments, gracefully strung together by trust, gratitude and inspiration"
Brene Brown

By Claire Casson 8th February 2017,

www.beyondtheroundabout.wordpress.com. Instagram & Facebook: @beyondtheroundabout

Weekend Retreat for Childless Parents

When: 27th – 29th July 2018 | Where: Charney Manor, Oxfordshire



You are warmly invited to join us for this unique weekend especially for parents who have lost their only child or all their children.

Whether your loss happened recently, or some time ago, you will be with others who understand what it means to lose your only child or children. If you are newly bereaved, there will be other parents who are recently bereaved and our team of bereaved parent volunteers will also be there to help and support you. Come and meet and talk with others in safe and supportive surroundings and find comfort, hope and reassurance that you are not alone.

Booking will open shortly online, in the meantime to register your interest contact TCF's national office 0345 120 3785 or email events@tcf.org.uk

We would love to hear more from you

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks all our contributors who have sent articles and poetry as well as photographs: Claire, mother of Phoebe; Aileen, mother of Erika; Margaret, mother of Dylan. I feel sure that our members will be enriched by reading your words, as I have been.

I'd like the newsletter to reflect our CP community as much as possible. If you'd like to write something yourself, or suggest a piece of writing that has 'spoken' to you, then please send it through to me at elly.sutherland59@outlook.com.

All submissions by 24th April 2018 please.

When we lost our Children, people who knew and loved them may have written to us, in letters, emails or cards or spoken at our Sons' and Daughters' services. So often these words become our private, locked-away treasures and we find ourselves unable to share them with anyone, although in our hearts we want to sing out loud about our Children. Perhaps some of you would like to write about the things people said about your beloved Child or Children?

Please don't forget our Helpline on 0345 123 2304 if you would like to speak with another bereaved parent.

Our Creed

We are the Parents with No Surviving Children
We are a group of the Compassionate Friends.
We are together because of the most precious thing in our lives.
We stand alone, no one to call us mom & dad.
We support one another on a journey we take through our grief.
People forget. We rarely hear their name.
Standing alone we hear the emptiness echo.
Who are we now? Are we still parents -
With no child(ren) to hold?
No matter what is said our love didn't die
It grows within our hearts.
We will try to be strong, to go on.
Not as before, our lives are very different now.
Our children may not be around
But they are never forgotten.
Our lives are empty. A never-ending ache.
We will go on with the love and support of our family -
The Compassionate Friends.

Aileen Cross



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Private Forum & TCF Facebook page

Our private TCF Facebook page for our CP community currently has over 60 members and it's growing steadily along with our small section on the main forum. Both are a good way of communicating, writing about our Children, developing friendships and hearing about, or announcing, informal get-togethers.

To join please contact:

CP section of the Forum: dianeminshall@hotmail.com

Private Facebook page: Contact the TCF national office
or Maria at ahern.maria@gmail.com (our Chair of Trustees and mum to James)