



TCF NEWS

A newsletter for supporters of The Compassionate Friends

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The Countess Mountbatten of Burma, CBE | 1924-2017 Passionate supporter, President and Patron of The Compassionate Friends UK, dies aged 93 years.

It is with deep sadness that we learnt in June this year of the death of the Countess Mountbatten of Burma, President of The Compassionate Friends in the UK. The Countess was an enthusiastic and loyal supporter of our charity. We will miss her enormously, and warmly thank her for her compassion and care for bereaved parents and their families over the many years she was a Patron and President of our charity.

The Countess lost her fourteen year old son, Nicholas, in a terrorist attack in 1979. Her father, her mother-in-law and fifteen year old family friend Paul Maxwell were also killed in the attack. She, her husband, and their son Timothy Knatchbull (who is a Patron of The Compassionate Friends representing bereaved siblings) were injured but survived the attack. For more than 30 years she used her experience of the loss of her son to help other bereaved parents, through her support of The Compassionate Friends.

Our Chair of Trustees, Maria Ahern, commented "I didn't have the honour to meet the Countess, but I have spoken to others in our organisation who did and they spoke warmly of her compassion and her dedication to helping the bereaved. She was, by all accounts, an inspiring lady and she will be greatly missed by our charity. Thank you, Countess, for all the help that you gave us."

The family asked for donations in memory of the Countess to be made to The Compassionate Friends.



TCF join Royal mourners...



On Tuesday, 27th June, representatives from TCF joined Royal mourners for the funeral of The Compassionate Friends' President and Patron, Countess Mountbatten of Burma, which was held at St Paul's Church in Knightsbridge, London. The Countess wrote the story of the death of her son Nicky for our charity and here are a few of her thoughts and insights...

"(losing a child) makes it very much easier to help other people because you share a common bond in your loss".

"I think the lesson I have learned from grief is principally to get your priorities right and to differentiate between the important and unimportant things in life in order not to waste time on the latter. The important aspects concern people and relationships-and not material things".

"I do not believe you can run away from, or permanently circumvent, grief. You may make a temporary detour, which can be helpful, but eventually you have to find your way through the dark and painful tunnel to reach the light which really does shine at the far end".

She finishes by writing *"But now I do take comfort in the thought that when I die Nicky will be waiting for me if I ever reach heaven".*

We do hope she did indeed reach heaven as she wished and has now been reunited with her beloved son.

Her funeral was both a humbling and joyful occasion - celebrating and honouring a compassionate and special lady, who used her experience of traumatic loss to support and comfort others. H.R.H The Prince of Wales and her surviving twin son, Timothy Knatchbull, gave moving tributes to the Countess. The Queen and Prince Philip, Princess Anne and Prince Andrew all attended.

Margaret Smart attended the funeral of the Countess

The Reverend Canon Dr Simon Stephens (founder of TCF), Maria Ahern (TCF Chair of Trustees), Carolyn Brice (CEO), Irene and John Baldock (National Specialist Coordinators for parents bereaved by murder or manslaughter), Dinah and Barry Perkins (County Contacts, Oxfordshire) and I were pleased to represent TCF at Countess Mountbatten's funeral on Tuesday, 27th June, at St. Paul's Church Knightsbridge.

The Countess became our President following the terrible deaths in 1979 of, not only her father (Lord Mountbatten), and her mother-in-law, but also that of her son Nicholas, (aged fourteen years, the twin of Timothy, who is one of our sibling patrons) and Paul Maxwell, (aged fifteen years, their Irish friend and boatman), when their boat was bombed by the IRA.

In an interview in 2008 with the Daily Telegraph, the Countess recalled 'being overwhelmed by grief for Nicky who was just on the threshold of life'.

The tragedy happened shortly after our own son had died and, as a bereaved parent myself, I was very conscious of the loss of two young lives.



The family survived the horror with great valour and dignity serving as an example to us all; the Countess particularly with her commitment to public duty (not least for The Compassionate Friends), and her family. Despite her own terrible grief, when our founder Simon Stephens contacted her, she very kindly agreed to become our President. While the funerals of our children of whatever age are hell on

earth, because they have died before their time, Countess Mountbatten's funeral was really a joyous occasion of thanksgiving for her life. The setting, the music, the readings and the Litany of Remembrance led by Philip Knatchbull, were sublime. The service was held on at St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, a very beautiful Gothic Revival church, well known for its outstanding music.

H.R.H. The Prince of Wales gave the Address. He spoke in an amusing, self deprecatory tone, recalling with happiness his time at the Mountbatten's home in Kent. He reminisced about the light-hearted fun household and how any mishaps on his part were greeted with amusement by the Countess. He spoke of her 'generous heart' and 'kindness'.

This was followed by the anthem Nunc Dimittis, which begins 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word'. I have always found these words very soothing and a balm to the soul, even I think, for those who are not religious (like my husband). I have included them because some of you reading this may still be in the early stages of grief and I hope these words may give you comfort too.

A LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE was then held by Timothy Knatchbull, her surviving twin son. He spoke of her life, how it had 'spanned a good old life', and how in her 80s she was still running for the bus! She was also an inveterate litter picker-upper, which I found most impressive.

I thought the prayer was so apt:

'We pray that nothing good in her life will be lost, that it will be of benefit to the world; that all she held sacred may be respected by all those who follow her; that everything in which she was great may continue to mean much to us. We ask that she go on living in us who have loved her so deeply, in our hearts and minds, in our courage and conscience. Amen.'

Tim Knatchbull made the very poignant and sensible suggestion that we should 'say her name because when we say the name of the dead, they live again' and this was so apt given the name of our own campaign and film 'Say Their Name'.

I hope that you find these words comforting as I still do, even now, thirty nine years after the death of our son.

A Prayer of Blessed John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was read by Joanna Knatchbull, Lady Mountbatten's youngest daughter, very beautifully and with great feeling:

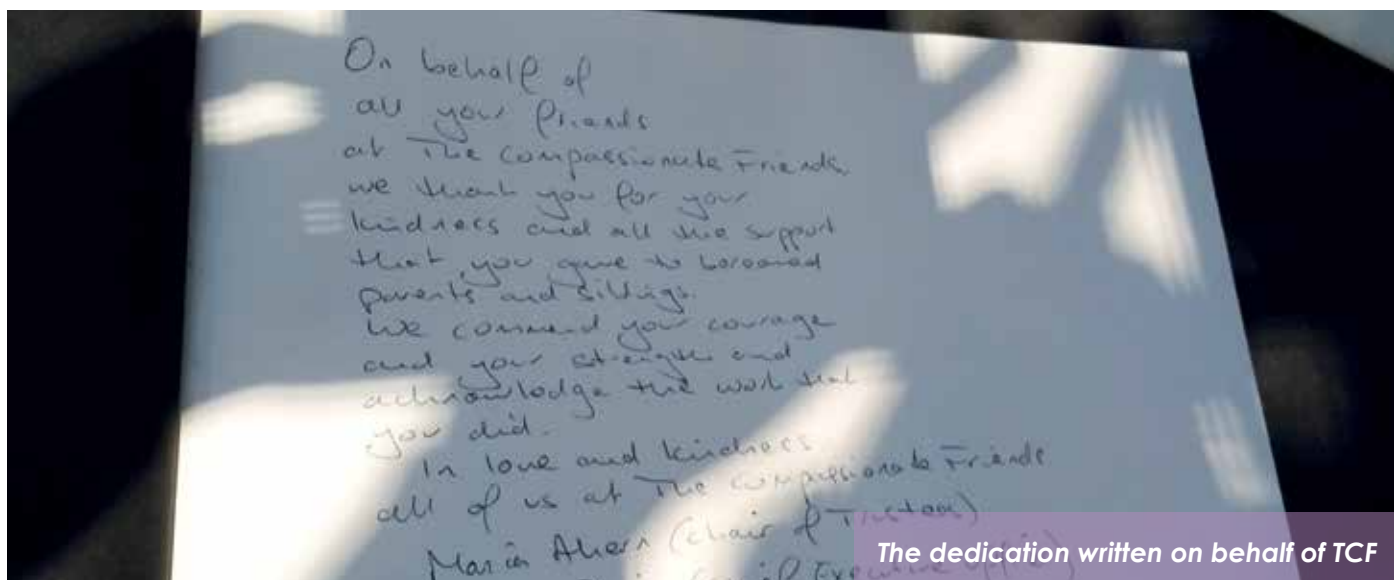
*O Lord support us all the day long, of this troublesome life,
until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes,
the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over,
grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace
at the last. Amen.*

Following "The Last Post" Michael-John Knatchbull said:

*May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rain fall soft upon your fields.
And until we met again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

The final hymn was the stirring 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' words by Juliet Ward Howe (1819-1910), sung with great enthusiasm by all the congregation, and with rather more finesse by the choir! It was most appropriate for the personality of the Countess because it is, after all, basically, about kindness, consideration, care and charity towards those in society who are in need.

A party from Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (the "Patricias" as they are called) bore her beautifully decorated wicker coffin. Coincidentally my uncle, who had emigrated to Canada just before the First World War, fought with the 15th Battalion Canadian Infantry during that war. **Margaret Smart**



The dedication written on behalf of TCF

Memories of the Countess

Our thoughts at The Compassionate Friends are with the family and friends of the Countess. We asked for recollections, memories and tributes from those TCF members who knew her. We were inundated. Here are just a few to share with you.



The Countess at TCF's first International Gathering in 1994

The TCF library was a lifeline for me after my daughter died and one of the first books I was sent was 'Our Children', an anthology of stories by parents who had suffered the death of a child. One of the stories was written by Countess Mountbatten and she wrote very movingly about the death of her son, Nicholas and her concern for his surviving twin, Timothy.

A few years later I met Lady Mountbatten at the 40th anniversary gathering and remember her telling us she was a member of TCF, just like the rest of us, and that our grief for our children connected us all. At that time I was reading 'From a Clear Blue Sky' by Nicholas's twin brother Timothy and I later reviewed the book for Compassion magazine.

Countess Mountbatten wanted to talk to me about that book and I got a phone call from the office in Bristol asking me to phone her. I did so, expecting to have the phone answered by a lady in waiting, but it was actually the countess herself who answered the phone and she had such a good sense of humour. She said 'I asked them for your phone number but they said that was confidential, so I said you'd better give her mine them!' We both laughed at that and then went on to have such an interesting chat.

Thankfully she liked my review and we talked about both books, about her grief for Nicholas and how proud she was of Timothy, and then she asked me about my loss. She wanted to know all about my daughter and she showed real compassion and empathy. All of us in TCF are able to connect with each other no matter how different we are in other ways and I really did feel that connection. I feel sad to hear about her death but am pleased to know she died peacefully in her sleep. I do hope she has now been reunited with her beloved son.

Mary Hartley, TCF Librarian

I was fortunate indeed to have met and chatted to Countess Mountbatten at the 40th Anniversary Celebration at Bosworth Market in 2009. I warmed to her immediately and found her to be an interested, interesting and caring soul.

When Maria Ahern and I visited Iris Lawley on 8th May this year, while I was in England on the way to attend the Scottish National Gathering in Perth, we spoke of the Countess. Iris told us how she would look forward to the phone calls the Countess would make on their son, Kenneth's anniversary. How thoughtful was that – to recognize the vision of our Founders and to support the work of it.

Please extend to the family the gratitude and appreciation of the Compassionate Friends worldwide and especially that of The International Representatives who value her dedication to helping those who are travelling the devastating journey that she travelled and to making a difference in so many lives.

She will long be loved and remembered - and those who had the honour of meeting her will treasure a special memory. (I have a photo taken with me standing next to the Countess and Joe and Iris Lawley on either side which is even more precious to me now).

In loving compassion, Myrtle Fleming, International Chairperson of The Compassionate Friends

We vividly recall how, at The Compassionate Friends' first international gathering at Birmingham for the 25th anniversary in 1994, she told us that on arriving by train the first thing she saw was a large sign written on the wall of a building saying NICKY, the name of her twin son who was killed by the IRA. She went on to give a warm and inspiring address.

At the 40th anniversary gathering at Bosworth Hall in October 2009 we, as members of the organising committee, were privileged to invite the Countess to the gathering, to greet her on her arrival on the Saturday morning and to act as host to her and her daughter Amanda throughout the morning and at lunchtime. They both showed intense interest in the work we were all doing and they were a delight to share time with. The Countess was not at all aloof, and once again her words later on to the gathering were wise and loving. On the Saturday afternoon the Countess unveiled the renewed marble inscription to the founding of TCF in its new setting within the Garden of Tranquillity at the new hospital in Coventry, and also visited Coventry Cathedral.

We treasure the kind letter of thanks she sent after the gathering.

We shall remember her with affection, and our thoughts and prayers will be with her family and friends.

Pat and Jerry Morris



Left to right Margaret Pringle, Countess Mountbatten and Pat Morris at the TCF 40th Anniversary Gathering at Bosworth Hall 2009

When our son was killed in 1986, I became a member of an organisation to which I never wished to belong. I have since met many compassionate, sharing, caring people who have supported us in The Compassionate Friends.

Later, Countess Mountbatten of Burma was one such person. I met her on several occasions, on a one-to-one basis, so we could get to talk about our sons. She communicated strength as a parent who had seen her child killed and whose response was to double her work for others. She agreed to become the patron of TCF and later its president. As patron, she was always willing to come to events that TCF felt would benefit our bereaved families.

I met her when she agreed to take part in the Week's Good Cause on the radio, which promoted and financially aided TCF. Then again when we were finally able to launch The Compassionate Friends rose at the Chelsea Flower Show. We decided to mark 25 years of our charity with a fundraiser and permanent symbol of our children: a beautiful, perfumed patio rose. The fruition of the two-year propagation project was Countess Mountbatten's gracious presence, with her husband, at Chelsea.

Later, I shared a platform with her at the funeral directors' annual conference – again her presence brought home to those gathered the pain of loss, but as her surviving son, Timothy, said in his book, ***"whenever she spoke, they were moved by her ongoing love for the Irish and her complete lack of bitterness. They enjoyed her light touch, her lack of introspection and her humour."***

Sandra Green



The Compassionate Friends rose

Jean and I first saw the Countess years ago when we attended a meeting. I can recall that she walked down the side aisle and up onto the platform carrying her shopping bag, which she put down by her chair. Jean and I both agreed that it was like our mums would have done: not standing on any ceremony. The Countess then proceeded to talk without notes for about an hour.

We met her again when she came to rededicate The Compassionate Friends stone at the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. I can recall that our very dear friends Pat & Jerry Morris met her at the railway station. They waited where the first-class carriage was due to stop, but there was no sign of the Countess. Then they looked down the platform and saw her getting out of a third-class carriage. Pat & Jerry proceeded to escort her for the rest of the day.

Things were going well up to elevenses, but then they couldn't find her. Where was she? They found her three-quarters of the way corridor talking to several mums as though she had known them all her life.

Someone had made the most beautiful cake with the TCF logo on the top. My wife, Jean, and Barbara Darling had been asked to slice up the cake and serve it. Suddenly the Countess appeared at the cake-cutting table and said to Barbara, 'I do adore icing; may I pinch some that has broken off?' Barbara looked at her and said, with a twinkle in her eye, 'Well, seeing as it's you, go on then. I won't tell anyone if you don't.'

All through our dealings with the Countess, she came across as a very dear lady who wanted so much to be a part of us. But, then, she was after all a bereaved parent.

When the time came to leave the venue, the Countess stood on the steps to await her great-niece to pull up in her car. She put her arms out to Jean and they both gave each other a full hug. I also got one.

Peter Austin

I was so sad to hear of the passing of the Countess Mountbatten of Burma. She was a very compassionate and caring person and always had time to listen and talk to individuals about their child.

I remember, in August 1994, when the Countess came to The Compassionate Friends 25th Gathering in Birmingham. This was also the Charity's first International Gathering and the theme was Walking Together - bereaved parents from all around the world came to share their experiences with each other. The Countess spoke at the Opening Ceremony. She told us what had happened to her family in Ireland after a bomb, which had been planted beneath the boat they were in, exploded resulting in the death of her twin son, Nicky, her father, her mother-in-law and a young Irish boy. She shared her thoughts on grief and the devastation caused to the whole family. Her fears, which we all share, of never forgetting our child and how it was so important to say their name. Her pain so evident to us listening to her.

The Countess ended by telling us an old Chinese poem that is on Nicky's headstone.

*He took his big candle
And went into another room I cannot find
But I know he was here
Because of all the happiness he left behind.*

John and I feel very privileged and honoured to have attended The Countess's funeral on Tuesday 27 June 2017 in London. We will always remember her for her gentleness and compassion.

Irene Baldock



It is with deep sadness that we learned of the recent death of Patricia, The Right Honourable The Countess Mountbatten of Burma and President and former Patron of The Compassionate Friends. We met her when she attended the First International Gathering in Birmingham in 1994 and again in 2009 when we held our 40th Anniversary Gathering.

As part of the organising committee for both these events we were privileged to get to know her and found her to be very friendly, interested in our work and very down to earth. We had offered to send a limousine to transport her from the station to the hotel but she replied that there was no need for any fuss - she would just get a taxi.

Like most TCF members, the Countess became associated with our organisation following the death of not only her 14 year old son Nicholas but her father Lord Louis Mountbatten too in 1979. Sadly later, in 1991, her 5 year old granddaughter Leonora Knatchbull also died after battling with cancer. She helped raise awareness of TCF by broadcasting a Radio Appeal - reading a very moving poem. Now, following in his Mother's footsteps, we are very privileged to have Timothy Knatchbull as Patron of our bereaved siblings group and thank him for the support he gives. In 1994 The Countess unveiled the original plaque, commemorating the fact that Compassionate Friends first began in the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital.

When the hospital was demolished, Founder member Joe Lawley rescued the plaque and had it restored before it was placed in the garden at the new hospital. The photo shows The Countess after unveiling the plaque for the second time in 2009 when TCF celebrated 40 years. On this occasion she was accompanied by her daughter who was very interested in our work and attended one of the workshops offered that day.

This event was also attended by representatives of the TCF International Council. The picture shows below Adaline Lear, Gwen Linski and Susan Doyle Lawrence (all from Canada) presenting the Countess with a lovely portrait and she remarked "Oh, I'm wearing the same brooch!" Everyone who met her was charmed by her unaffected manner and friendliness and it is unfortunate that she will not be able to attend the 7th International Gathering in 2019 which will mark the 50th Anniversary of the Compassionate Friends. We are grateful to Patricia for all the help and support she has given to bereaved families and feel sure that all who met her will remember her with great affection. We send our love to all her family at this sad time and trust they have many happy memories to bring comfort in the days that lie ahead.

Margaret and Jim Pringle



News and comments from recent supportive events...



The weekend as a whole was everything I wanted it to be. We changed venue this year, the hotel was great and the staff were fantastic, but to be honest the venue doesn't make the weekend - it's the people. The keynote speaker Stewart Wilson, CEO of Cruse Scotland, gave a moving and very honest account of family life with his daughter Anna and the influence she had on their life and career choices. A life well worth living indeed.

Being at this special weekend is like receiving a small injection of courage and strength, so small that you won't notice it tomorrow or even next week but at some point, when you are feeling low or struggling with something you will remember a conversation with someone's mum, dad, grandparent or sibling and you'll think I get that now or I'll try that.

To summarise, the weekend is about not feeling alone with your grief. It's about appreciating other people asking about your child and being interested in your reply. It's about trust and sharing precious memories. It's the privilege of getting to know so many children after they've gone, smiling at their antics, applauding their achievements and recognising the love they brought into our life. It's about friendship, love, understanding and being supported through the bad times and knowing there is a band of TCF cheerleaders behind us applauding every small, painful step forward as we recover from the worst loss.

This year I arrived on Friday afternoon and left on Sunday afternoon feeling that I had been looked after and looked after well. I am so thankful for that.

Dawn Stokes

The next Scottish Gathering will be held in Perth from 13th - 15th April 2018. Booking will open towards the end of 2017.

Scottish Gathering

Dawn Stokes runs a TCF support group in Glasgow. Here she writes about her most recent experience at the Scottish Gathering in May this year...

I have been to the Scottish Gathering five and a half times.

The first time I arrived (rather reluctantly and with great trepidation) late on the Saturday afternoon and left on the Sunday. Very shortly after I found myself on the organising committee.

When I returned the following year, and every year after, up until this weekend, I would drive to Stirling mentally lacing my TCF running shoes and pulling on my TCF Lycra (not a pretty mental image). I would spend hours setting numerous alarms on my phone so I could make sure I was where I needed to be and more importantly on time. I didn't want to let anyone down.

So this year was the first time I attended as Craig's mum and it was perfect. For me the Gathering in Perth was like pulling on a pair of comfy slippers and being wrapped in a warm fluffy blanket.

The first thing I enjoyed was time. Time to get to know more about the other bereaved parents and more importantly their children. Time to reflect that even if I forgot a parent's name I remembered their child. Time to realise that for a short weekend it was lovely to stop being Dawn and return to being Craig's mum.

Childless Parents' Supportive Weekend



We have received some lovely feedback and comments from parents attending the TCF supportive weekend for Childless Parents (parents who have lost their only child or children) which was held in a wonderful manor house – Charney Manor - in the depths of the Oxfordshire countryside from 21-23 July. Here are just a few:

"(We) have just returned from Charney Manor. The TCF organisers were amazing and the parents we met with were all amazing too. A very unique and perfect location for a gathering such as this. I hope we will both take some comfort and hope from such a special weekend too and we both thank you so much for making it happen for us".
Peter and Ondine Campbell

"Thank you for the wonderful work which made the weekend successful... I felt anxious about going to the retreat but it helped me to travel with other parents. I was surprised to see so many childless parents who were also attending the

retreat for the first time. I was able to talk, listen and share our experiences. I found the workshops that I attended useful; some of the thoughts, feeling and questions I had were answered and addressed. I realised I was normal, I am still trying to grieve for my only son and my heart is and will be broken forever. My son would want me to be happy and live".
Eula Thomas

"It was mine and my husband's first time with Compassionate Friends last weekend at Charney Manor. I was dreading the weekend and had really negative feelings about coming. I thought everyone would know each other already, or everyone would be really sad and cry all weekend. I didn't want to make a jam jar or show any photos of my son. To be honest I wanted to stay away from any sessions or activities and just go the pub! How wrong was !!! As soon as I arrived I felt at ease, calm and peaceful. I felt it was the first time in 18 months since my son died I could be myself. I heard people laugh and chatter and I felt comfortable with it. Knowing they were all in the same situation as me and my husband and they could still laugh gave me hope. The volunteers were amazing. My husband and I have made some fantastic friends that we will always keep in touch with. I had such a positive experience - totally unexpected so much so I didn't want to leave. We both could have stayed all week!! I have learnt so much and have gained new ways on how to cope with life. Thank you all so much. I will definitely be back and recommend this weekend to other bereaved parents. I would also like to thank the staff at Charney Manor for being so pleasant and thoughtful."
Jo Mcveigh

The next Childless Parents Supportive Weekend will be held from 27 -29 July 2018, once again at Charney Manor. Booking will open early next year.



TCF National Gathering 2017 'Together in Comfort, Understanding & Hope'

A supportive weekend with others for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents.

When: 10th – 12th November 2017

Where: Sedgebrook Hall Hotel,
Chapel Brampton, Northampton NN6 8BD

To book online and for further information visit:
www.tcf.org.uk/nationalgathering2017

or contact TCF's national office by telephone
0345 120 3785 or email info@tcf.org.uk

Supportive Retreat for Parents Bereaved by Suicide, Addiction or Substance Use



Images from the weekend at Woodbrooke

Next year this supportive retreat weekend for parents bereaved by suicide, addiction or substance use will be from 6-8 July 2018. Booking will open early 2018.

“I felt very uplifted and inspired. It was also so comforting to talk with people who truly understood our loss”.

Our second annual supportive weekend retreat for parents bereaved by suicide, addiction or substance use at Woodbrooke in Birmingham in June this year. 50 parents, 2 siblings and 11 volunteers spent two days and two nights together in companionship, understanding and hope. Attendees heard an inspiring talk from Philippa and Graeme Skinner looking at how we can think about surviving traumatic grief. Many participated in discussion groups covering a range of topics including dealing with complex emotions, self-care, losing a child as a couple, and grieving dads. Creative writing and a relaxation session were part of 'free time', as well as a guided walk, strolling in the beautiful gardens at Woodbrooke, simply 'knitting and nattering' or sitting and relaxing among friends. A poignant and beautiful evening candle ceremony under the red cedar tree was held to remember and honour our children.

“I have recently returned from the weekend retreat. I was persuaded to go by my wife but was rather apprehensive and was not sure it would be for me. How wrong can you get! The experience was entirely positive and most worthwhile.

The retreat leaders and volunteers were warm, compassionate and very understanding of the different needs of the delegates. They created a very safe environment in which we could explore the immense challenges of losing a child. We lost our son Daniel to suicide 5 years ago and this was the first time I could really explore the impact on myself and my family.

It was beneficial to talk to and listen to other men in a men only group and to share our experiences and ways of coping.

I also gained many insights into how bereavement affects women. It helped me understand the personal pain my wife has been experiencing which is clearly different to my own.

In one session siblings who accompanied their mothers explained the impact on themselves of their loss. This is something I struggle with in trying to understand the effect Daniel's death has had on his younger brother. I gained some useful insights.

On the retreat women outnumbered men about 5 to 1. I would encourage men to take the plunge and come to next year's retreat. You will not regret it!”

John Lunt

“This was our second visit to Woodbrooke and it was a very special experience in the circumstances. Once again, we were so well cared for and the atmosphere was so kind, caring and comforting in a way. We met some familiar faces and made some new friends. We are all in the same sad boat so there is a feeling of silent support.

Praise again for Woodbrooke where the setting is beautiful, the accommodation clean and comfortable and the atmosphere so benevolent and generous - not forgetting the amazing food!”

Bill and Sheila Maskell

I want to thank you for the wonderful weekend you provided for us as those bereaved by suicide or drug or alcohol abuse. I felt very uplifted and inspired. It was also so comforting to talk with people who truly understood our loss. A place where we could take off the mask and be ourselves.

I appreciate all the hard work and preparation that went on to it. Woodbrooke was indeed a special place.

Pauline Chambers

A round up of some the wonderful fundraising going on for our charity

Here's just a taster of some of the amazing activities undertaken this year to raise funds for TCF. We are so hugely grateful to everyone who donates to and fundraises for our charity. We wouldn't be here without you!

Beat that, over £500 raised! Liverpool Rock 'n' Roll Marathon



Louise runs for TCF

Around this time last year I signed up to do the Rock n Roll Liverpool half-marathon. I really wanted 2017 to be the year of my first marathon but when I didn't get into London, I made the decision to upgrade Liverpool to the full marathon instead. The next decision was which charity to run it for!

I had a few charities in mind and eventually settled on The Compassionate Friends which I knew about because my sister has been helped greatly by them since my niece Leah passed away as a result of a road traffic collision in 2012. After contacting the charity and them agreeing for me to run for them the hard work of marathon training began.

I had 12 weeks to get marathon-ready and raise as much money as possible! I had the support of my family, friends and work colleagues and after setting up my Just Giving page and circulating sponsor forms the money started to come in. My training also started well: my plan took me from running 25 miles a week right up to 47+ miles per week, along with weight sessions at the gym so my body was less likely to get injured from the high mileage I needed to put in.

Finally after 12 weeks of training 6 days per week and gathering as many sponsors as possible the day of the race came around. I was very nervous because although training had gone very well, I just didn't know how my body would cope on the day. Thankfully after a very warm week the weather had cooled down somewhat for race day. I woke early for breakfast and to get into my race gear. The charity

kindly provided me with a personalised top to run in with the charity logo and strapline on the front and back.

The start time for the marathon was 10am. I got into position early and after a slightly delayed start was on my way. The route took in the sights of Liverpool, including Stanley Park where we looped round the grounds of Everton and Liverpool football clubs, The Cavern, Penny Lane and Sefton Park, to name a few. The route was tough with some long climbs in the first half of the race and I was glad of my husband cheering me at various points on the course. My race became very mentally and physically challenging from around 17 miles onwards and I had to pull on every bit of strength I had to continue. At these times I thought about my family, particularly my niece Leah, and also how TCF has had such a positive impact on my sister Mandy's life.

The last 4 miles of the marathon were the hardest I've ever run and after what felt like an eternity the finish line was in sight! I got very emotional on the final approach so my husband ran the final 200 metres or so to get me over the finish line strong. When I finished, I had the amazing surprise of my sister Alison and nieces Rachel and Sarah waiting for me. I collected my medal and some well-earned refreshment and made my way through the crowds to celebrate with my family.

It's been such an amazing experience and to know that the money raised is going to an amazing cause is the cherry on the cake for me - 12 weeks, 450 miles training, 26.2 miles in 4hrs 18 minutes (and 37 seconds!) and over £500 raised for TCF, I couldn't think of a more fitting tribute to the memory of my beautiful niece Leah and to the amazing strength my sister Mandy and our family show on a daily basis.

Louise Hill



Louise with her finisher's medal



The team of helpers

Sun shines on Kettering group annual fundraising day raising over £1300...

We were blessed with warm sunshine for our 23rd annual TCF fund raising day on Saturday 8th July. As has happened in the past, members of the Kettering support group manned the stalls as we received over 150 visitors between 10 am and noon eager to buy plants, home produce, cakes, crafts etc. and who, for their £1 entrance fee enjoyed unlimited tea, coffee and biscuits!

BBC Radio Northampton dropped in on the event as part of their weekly Treasure Quest programme and they mentioned TCF on several occasions. They also held short interviews with two TCF members Sue Hall and Carol Smith.

After the visitors left, those who had helped enjoyed a buffet lunch in the garden at Church House, Barton Seagrave, – a chance to relax after a busy, but enjoyable morning, during which we raised over £1300.

Carol and Adrian Keach

A warm thank you to all our new funders!

Our fundraiser, Stephen Armstrong, has been busy in the first few months of joining us in April this year. We are hugely grateful to these grant making bodies and foundations who have funded various aspects of our work this financial year for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents.

- **Alice Ellen Cooper-Dean Charitable Foundation**
- **Awards for All (part of The Big Lottery)**
- **Chalk Cliff Trust**
- **CHK Charities Ltd**
- **Chubb European Group**
- **Ernest Hecht Charitable Foundation**
- **Garfield Weston Foundation**
- **Schuh Trust**
- **Souter Charitable Trust**
- **Stock Exchange Veterans Association**

Stephen is continuing to work with other organisations and trusts to secure funding for our charity, allowing The Compassionate Friends to continue our development and grow our services and support for bereaved parents and their families in the future.

We have moved!

On 24th July the UK National Office of The Compassionate Friends moved from our beautiful and comfortable home in Jessica's Heart in Deptford to a new office on the other side of London, in Kilburn North West London. We were all so sad to leave the lovely Jessica's Heart – it has been such a wonderful place to work and so generously provided to TCF by Stephen, Jannet and Anna Mathers, through the charity set up to honour their special daughter and sister, Jessica. We warmly thank them for giving this amazing gift to our charity for the past 5 years – we cannot thank them enough for their kindness and generosity in memory of Jessica. As a small thank you, earlier this year the Board of Trustees of TCF presented Stephen and Jannet with a thank you gift of a specially engraved silver photograph frame 'from all their Compassionate Friends', at a small reception after a recent Board meeting.

On moving day itself, Stephen Mathers was there to see us off and gave us a wonderful donation to help TCF with the move. After ensuring we were all packed up, we made our way to our new office on the other side of London.

We are delighted with the light, airy feel of the space, and the physical side of the move has gone better than we could ever have expected. However, as I write this we are still having a few issues with internet access and phones, but hope these will be sorted out in the near future. To be expected, I guess- whoever heard of this side of any move going to plan?!

Our new office is on the top floor of a primary school, and we have been warmly welcomed by the staff there and Bellevue Education Trust who run the school. We have a large space to house our office with plenty of storage, and an adjacent room to set up our wonderful library. We also have space that we can use to run training for volunteers and other events. The school is currently being refurbished, with new carpet, a lick of paint and new blinds on the windows. We feel so lucky to be there and are delighted with all the extra space, which will be so important in the future as we expand our staff and activities.

You are most welcome to visit us – just get in touch if you would like to pop in!

Carolyn Brice



Moving day 24th July 2017



The new TCF National Office



The
**Compassionate
Friends**

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