

Spring 2018



SIBBS Newsletter

Support In Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters



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Siblings...

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

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

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

hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

By post:

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Letter from the editor

Dear Siblings,

Hello, and a very warm welcome to the Spring issue.

Our lives are so very much defined by our various roles (friend, son or daughter, parent perhaps, employee, manager) and the energy we put into fulfilling these. And now we find ourselves surviving siblings to our own parents, who will never be quite the same again. And neither will we.

Within this particular and most unwanted role, we often have to be strong, 'holding it together' for our parents and other family members. We are likely to have a hand in arranging practical matters in the early stages. A vivid memory from soon after we lost my brother, Adam, is sitting between my broken mum and dad, making the phone call to discuss funeral arrangements.

In those darkest and most surreal of moments, I felt draped in an invisible cloak that offered some protection and a strength that carried me, and I imagine many of you, through unimaginable difficulty. Otherwise, how would we possibly survive?

But all the invisible cloaks in the world can't protect us from the huge toll grief takes on us...emotionally, physically and mentally.



So in all of this, remember to look after yourself and your own needs. You don't need to carry the weight alone. If it doesn't feel possible to turn to family for support, there are other sources of help. Cruse, for instance, offers free and confidential bereavement support that many in the TCF family have found helpful. You can talk to your GP for details of local counselling services. There are also charities focused on specific losses, for instance SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) and The Loss Foundation, for those bereaved by cancer.

This Spring, let's all try and find a chance to do something for ourselves, however small.

**In friendship and compassion, Hayley
(SIBBS editor) xx**

E: hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

Dates for Your Diary 2018

Below are details of forthcoming events from
April 2018 - September 2018

NEW North East England supportive weekend for parents , siblings and grandparents

When: 21 – 23 September 2018

Where: Park Head Hotel,
County Durham

The weekend will be a mixture of discussions and informal activities which you are free to participate in as much or as little as you want. Most of all, this is an opportunity to spend a few days away with people who truly understand what it means to be a bereaved parent or sibling.



The Park Head Hotel is situated on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland and easily accessible from the A1, in the heart of County Durham. The Park Head is renowned for its friendly atmosphere, service and delicious locally sourced homemade food. We can arrange lifts from Bishop Auckland station if you are coming by train.

There are some bursaries available to fund part of the costs of the weekend to those experiencing financial hardship. If you would be interested in applying for one of these, please ask us for a bursary application form.

For further information and to book online visit: www.tcf.org.uk/northeastweekend2018 or contact TCF's national office on **0345 129 3785** or events@tcf.org.uk

Please note that this weekend is primarily for bereaved parents. Adult siblings are warmly welcome to attend but please be aware that there will not be a separate sibling programme at the weekend.

Scottish Gathering for parents, siblings & grandparents

13 - 15 April, Perth. Booking is open at www.tcf.org.uk/scottishgathering2018

Summer supportive weekend for parents, siblings or grandparents

17-19 August, Derbyshire. Booking opens soon.

Book Review

If you'd like to recommend a book for us to review, or submit your own review of a book you've found helpful (or otherwise), please do get in touch: hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk

Standing on my Brother's Shoulders: Making Peace with Grief and Suicide by Tara J. Lal, published by Watkins Publishing

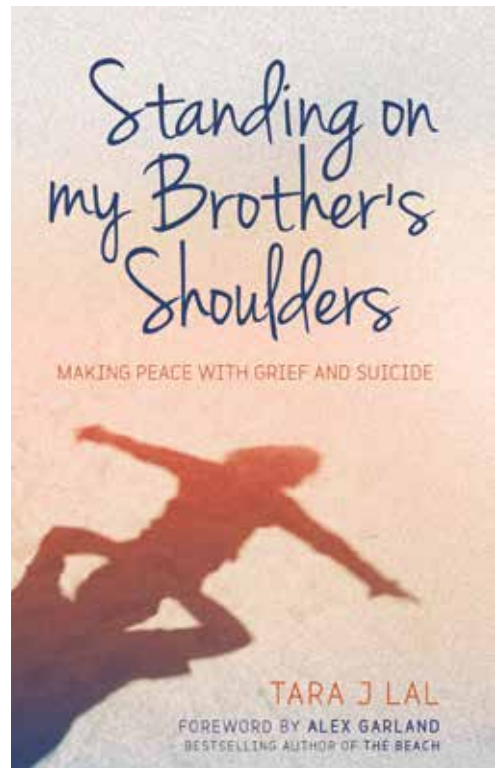
Apart from being a totally inspiring human (as a woman in the male dominated world of firefighting), Tara J. Lal has also done a service to anyone struggling with the loss of a brother or sister to suicide by writing this powerful book.

Standing on my Brother's Shoulders is a brave, personal story. Tara doesn't spare any details in setting the scene of a difficult childhood dominated by tough family dynamics. Not only did Tara's dad suffer chronic mental health issues, the family also lost her mother at the age of thirteen. What these difficulties did was to bring Tara and her kind, charismatic brother, Adam, into a close, caring bond.

Finding her brother's diaries enables Tara to get deeper into Adam's psyche and understand more about what led him to take his own life. In a way, I envy Tara's opportunity to get to know her brother better through his diaries. If I ever find a scrap of tatty paper or a battered notebook used by my brother, I cling to it...analysing any new doodle, and trying to imagine what was going through his head when he drew it. An abandoned notebook or even a casually written shopping list takes on new meaning when we have lost someone. It becomes a precious treasure.

Tara also shares how her grief journey leads her into other rocky waters, for instance how it affects her future romantic relationships, studies and career choices. Witnessing how Tara slowly rebuilds herself and her life after experiencing the pain of loss is inspiring. On finishing the book, I felt that Tara's brother would be immensely proud of her.

This book is published by Watkins Publishing and is available to buy on Amazon and on Kindle.



Guilt-free laughing: Always keep a tin of tomatoes handy

by Frankie Hall

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What a strange phrase to say. Why would anyone feel guilty about laughing? Is this about bullying? No. This is about living and laughing after loss, particularly after losing a sibling, because I, and my TCF friends, have said we sometimes feel guilty for laughing despite being bereaved.

I'm not suggesting you should feel guilty when you laugh, but if you've been sibling-bereaved it's entirely possible that you've felt guilt when laughing, or smiling, or enjoying something after your sibling has passed away.

Recently in hospital I helped a stranger, Yvonne, whose mother, Jeanie, was dying. Earlier in the day we had been talking and Yvonne advised me to call my mum as the nurse had said she'd been on the phone panicking (note, I felt guilty in

hospital as it put my parents back into the mindset of when Josh, my brother, was in hospital- it's the way guilt creeps into everything, isn't it?).

Suddenly a very confused Jeanie began speaking urgently, so we broke off conversation as Yvonne listened to her mothers' important message: always keep a tin of tomatoes handy, because they never go off. It was sound advice and it made us laugh. I didn't feel guilt at laughing, but there have been times when I've laughed and thought 'Josh isn't here to laugh at that' or thought about how Josh would have found it funny and felt guilt for being able to enjoy it when he can't.

A while later, at night, it became obvious (to me before the doctors) that Jeanie was in the final hours of her life. This happened just like Josh, except none of Jeanie's family were there, so the nurse phoned Yvonne, the doctors mused over how to stabilise Jeanie, and I sat in bed



Frankie and Josh, supplied by Frankie Hall

and cried, thinking about the day Josh had died.

A while after Yvonne arrived, Jeanie passed away peacefully, like Josh had, which I was thankful for. Yvonne was in pieces and I could hear her on the ward not knowing what to do—her family far away in Australia.

I was thinking about how I could help and what Josh would have done and how I would have wanted to be helped immediately after Josh's death if no one else had been there. I know nothing can ease the pain at this point and you must ride it out like one horrible tsunami of grief. I also knew she'd be getting hugs and cups of tea from nurses, but I wanted to talk to her, having been bereaved in similar surroundings.

Finally, Yvonne came away from her mother and saw me sat on my bed. I stood up, hugged her and told her all the truths I'd have wanted to hear after Josh died: she knew you were there; this was the best place for her to be; be kind to yourself, you have done nothing wrong; this is going to be so hard, but I believe you can keep going even if you don't believe it.

We stood there hugging for a moment as my heart monitor sounded, and Yvonne squeezed me and said I needed to sit down and phone my mum. I squeezed her and said I would, and that I'd do something else as well. She asked, "what's that" and I took a gamble with this sobbing, newly bereaved stranger and said with confidence "I will always keep a tin of tomatoes handy."

That was the first time since her mother's death that she laughed, and I'm so very glad she did. It's not a crime to have

emotions after someone dies, especially your sibling, and although you might be sobbing, laughing is also okay. You won't feel guilt in grief, but you might feel it in joy: laugh anyway. I've come to accept that Josh isn't going to die again if I laugh, the world won't break in two if I smile, and wherever he is, he may feel better if he sees his little sister laughing than crying.

And now every time I open my kitchen cupboard he will see his sister laughing because there sits a tin of tomatoes, labelled 'Jeanie'.

Special thanks to Frankie Hall for sharing her story with us all.



Nurturing Yourself When Grieving

by Alan D. Wolfelt Ph.D



Over many years of walking with people in grief, I have discovered that most of us are hard on ourselves when we are in mourning. We judge ourselves and we shame ourselves and we take care of ourselves last. But good self-care is essential to your survival. To practice good self-care doesn't mean you are feeling sorry for yourself, or being self-indulgent; rather, it means you are creating conditions that allow you to integrate the death of someone loved into your heart and soul.

Remember—self-care fortifies your long and challenging grief journey, a journey which leaves you profoundly affected and deeply changed. To be self-nurturing is to have the courage to pay attention to your needs. Above all, self-nurturing is about self-acceptance. When we recognize that self-care begins with ourselves, we no longer think of those around us as being totally responsible for our well-being. Healthy self-care forces us to mourn in ways that help us heal, and that is nurturing indeed.

Nurturing yourself in five important realms

When we are "torn apart," one of our most important special needs is to nurture ourselves in four important areas: physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. What follows is a brief introduction to each of these areas.

The physical realm

Your body may be letting you know it feels distressed. Actually, one literal definition of the word "grievous" is "causing physical suffering." You may be shocked by how much your body responds to the impact of your loss.

Among the most common physical responses to loss are troubles with sleeping and low energy. You may have difficulty getting to sleep. Perhaps even more commonly, you may wake up early in the morning and have trouble getting back to sleep. During your grief journey, your body needs more rest than usual. You may also find yourself getting tired more quickly—sometimes even at the start of the day.

Muscle aches and pains, shortness of breath, feelings of emptiness in your stomach, tightness in your throat or chest, digestive problems, sensitivity to noise, heart palpitations, queasiness, nausea, headaches, increased allergic reactions, changes in appetite, weight loss or gain, agitation, and generalized tension—these are all ways your body may react to the loss of someone loved.

Good self-care is important at this time. Your body is the house you live in. Just as your house requires care and maintenance to protect you from the outside elements, your body requires that you honour it and treat it with respect. The quality of your life ahead depends on how you take care of your body today. The “lethargy of grief” you are probably experiencing is a natural mechanism intended to slow you down and encourage you to care for your body.

And be certain to “talk out” your grief. Many grieving people have taught me that if they avoid or repress talking about the death, their bodies will begin to express their grief for them.

You can read this article in full at
www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/nurturing-youre-grieving/

Private TCF Facebook page

JOIN US!

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

To join contact

Emma Andow at
emmaandow@icloud.com or
Hayley Hayes at
hayleypinkerfield@yahoo.co.uk



INSPIRED GRIEF: Before I Die, I Want to....



Do you ever find yourself side-stepping the topic of your sibling's death to prevent other people from feeling uncomfortable? I know I have. Do we avoid talking about death and those we've lost far too much as a society? What are we so afraid of?

At The Compassionate Friends, we strongly believe in the healing power of talking about our lost loved ones. We want to remember them, to honour them, to say their name and keep the memory of our brother or sister alive, vital and powerful.

After the death of her friend, and a long period of grief and sadness, artist Candy Chang turned an abandoned house in her New Orleans neighbourhood into a giant chalkboard inviting people to contribute with their answer to the phrase: "Before I die, I want to...".

The site became a space where people could share and celebrate life, death and everything between. As it goes, sharing our innermost thoughts about mortality proved a pretty popular concept. What started as a local project evolved into a global

interactive collaboration, with people recreating the idea in over 70 countries including Argentina, South Africa and beyond.

Candy tells us that her neighbours' responses to 'Before I Die, I want to...' were sometimes surprising, often poignant, or funny – and always human.

I love this idea, for pushing the taboo of death out into the public sphere and encouraging us to share our hopes, fears and dreams together.

You can watch Candy talking about her project

https://www.ted.com/talks/candy_chang_before_i_die_i_want_to

What would your sibling have written on the wall? What would you write...?



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*“Two of the most valuable things we have are our time
and our relationships with other people” Candy Chang*



The
Compassionate
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