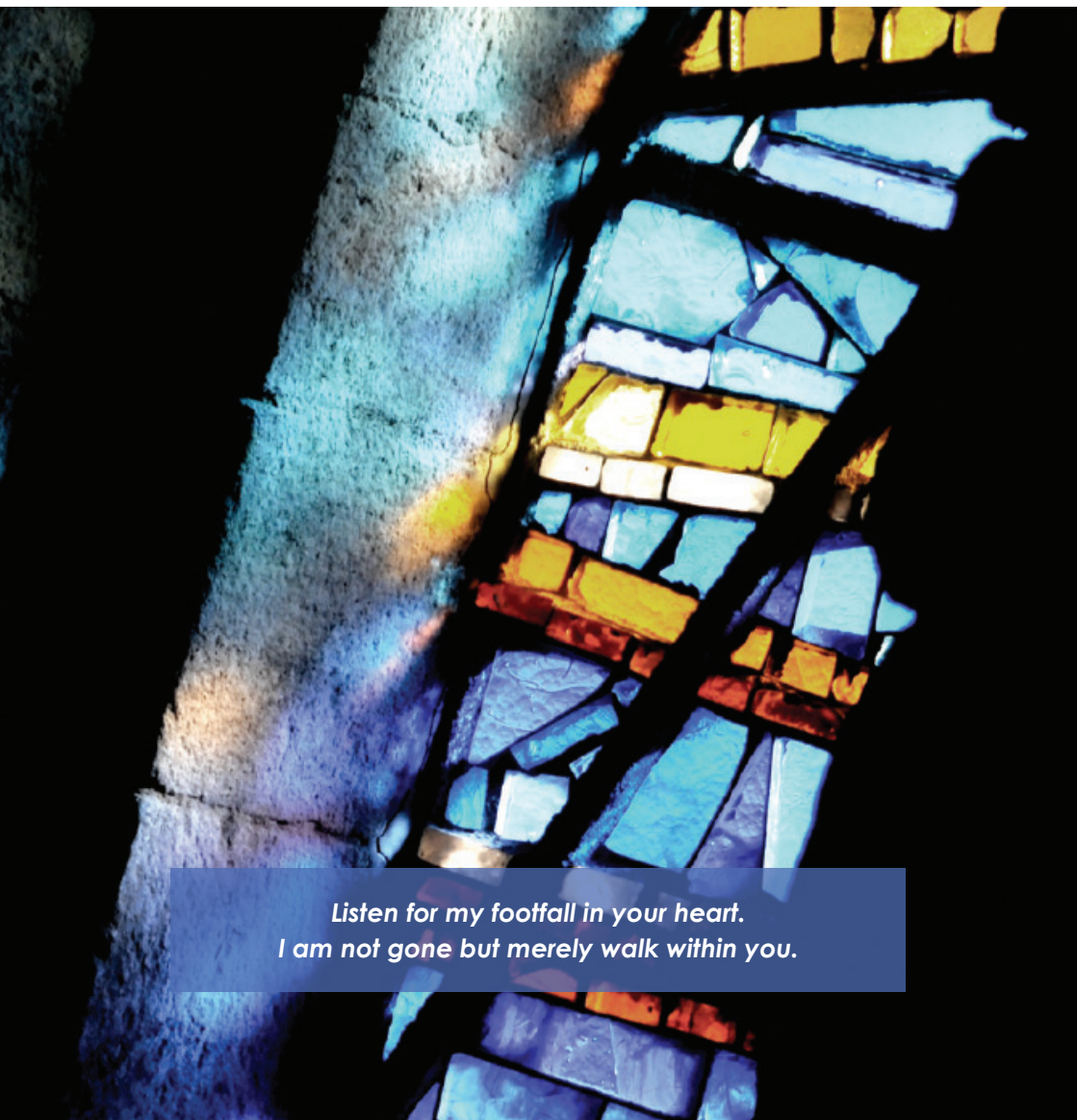


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COMPASSION

The Quarterly Magazine of The Compassionate Friends.



*Listen for my footfall in your heart.
I am not gone but merely walk within you.*

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Reflections from the Editor

Dear Friends

I find it so difficult to get out of bed these days. The hour has gone back so in order to 'seize the day' i.e. get as much out of the day as I can, I feel I need to get up reasonably early. When I can't manage this I feel as though I'm trying to catch up the whole day long. I suspect I'm not alone...

I shot out of bed, well, relatively speaking, recently at the National Gathering at the beginning of October as there were my lovely Compassionate Friends of so many years to chat to and new Friends to get to know. And of course there were the discussion groups, the art and craft, the choir, the outing, creative writing and many other activities to join in if I wanted to.

Since I've been home I've tried to carry with me the poem, To Honour You, which I read at the Closing Ceremony. I'm afraid I don't know who wrote it but I'd like to share it with you all. Here it is:



Gina Claye at the Woodbrooke Retreat

To honour you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile and the way your eyes twinkled with mischief and secret knowledge.

To honour you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back, risk making a fool of myself and dance every dance.

You were my light, my heart, my gift of love from the very highest source. So every day I promise to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh and love. Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honour you.

To Honour You

To honour you, I get up every morning and take a breath. And start another day without you in it.

I find this poem inspiring and I do try to make a difference, to share a smile and to live, laugh and love. And many times I feel I succeed.

But on days that I find it too difficult to do, I don't beat myself up. I think of the poem Carpe Diem (Seize the Day) which I did write not long after my son Robin's death.



Carpe Diem (Seize the Day)

*A new day is an opportunity not to be missed;
I must make a list,*

*There are so many things to be done.
First, I'll put the kettle back on,*

*I need another cup of tea
Just of course for energy.*

*Next, there's that last piece of blackberry tart
Then I really will make a start.*

*It's not that I'm lazy or slacking,
Deep down I want to get cracking,*

*I'll get round to things soon
And seize the afternoon.*

So be kind to yourself. If you can't manage to get things done, have a little smile at yourself. Tell yourself it's ok. You're surviving. You will get through these next few weeks however large they loom. Remember, you're not alone. We will all be lighting a candle for our children, on the Worldwide Candle Lighting Day, December 11th and over the Christmas season itself. So go with your gut feeling; do what you feel you need to do to remember your beloved children and to get you through. Above all, be kind to yourself.

With my love to you all, Gina Claye

The Encounter

This piece is in honour of the generations of bereaved mothers that have come before us. It is also an exploration into the way in which we often judge others without knowing the battles that they privately face...

It happened on one of the 'before' days. A taken-for-granted day, that with the hindsight of 'afterloss', was truly filled with moments as beautiful and precious as a daytime star. A day with my son.

I don't know your name, or anything else about you. I don't remember your exact appearance; only that you were probably in your early eighties, with a slim profile and an air of elegance.

I had taken my rambunctious little boy for a walk to the shops. I strolled happily into town, my young son babbling and smiling from the comfort of his buggy. Billy-Joe must have been looking particularly handsome that day, as I was stopped twice by passers-by who commented on his resemblance to Prince George. My stomach fizzed with pride.

We found ourselves in a large superstore. I was standing in an aisle, perusing the vast array of baby toys, when you rounded the corner. As you came face-to-face with Billy-Joe, you stopped. I waited for you to behave as had a thousand other elderly ladies in the presence of my son. They adored him and encounters would usually end in cooing, cheek-rubbing, chin-tickling, and hair-ruffling. Billy-Joe would lap it up with a giant toothy grin.

But that didn't happen. You just stared. You locked eyes with my boy, and stared. Moments passed. I began to feel uncomfortable, expecting you to speak, ask about him, smile. Anything. But you didn't. You stood, with furrowed brows,

reddening eyes, and lips parted, in the slightly stooped posture of someone who has been punched in the stomach.

A few more moments passed. I was about to speak to you when you lurched forward as though forcibly pushed. I watched you dash toward my son, never taking your tear-filled eyes from him. Without even acknowledging my existence, you quickly took hold of Billy-Joe's hand, squeezed it, and rubbed his dimpled knuckles with your thumb. Then, before I could utter a word, you were gone...

Our encounter left me feeling uneasy. I muttered under my breath 'What the hell was that?' I smiled reassuringly at my boy, and said with exaggerated gusto 'What a weirdo!'

We walked home and waited for Daddy to return from work. As we each summarised our days, I told Neil about our strange encounter, bemoaning the manner in which elderly women grabbed, stroked and tickled our son, not that Billy-Joe minded. Then, I put you out of my mind.

Billy-Joe died in the early hours of the 5th of November 2015. Before we even left the hospital, in the company of a memory box in place of our son, I thought of you with an intense sense of remorse. I don't know who you are, even if you're still alive, but if you ever get to read this, I just want you to know that I 'get it', and I'm deeply sorry.

I now understand the profundity and anguish underlying your encounter with my son. I know, with reluctance and tragic insight, what really happened. You rounded an aisle in a shop, an ordinary shop, on an ordinary day. You had probably long-forgotten to traverse this life with one hand gripping a tissue and the other covering your fragile heart. You didn't expect it, but like a lightning bolt to

the chest, you were confronted with your living, breathing, smiling, babbling, lost child. He locked your eyes with his, and your world collapsed again. The decades of time that separated you from your lost son dissolved in that moment and it knocked the breath from your lungs.

You didn't speak to me because you couldn't see me. I understand now that the people around you, and the very ground beneath your feet, disappeared. There was only you, and your son, gazing into each other's eyes. You weren't being rude. You were struggling to breathe. You felt the fragments of your broken heart splinter and course through your entire body.

You were young again, maybe in your twenties or thirties. You were awe-struck by a beaming pair of bright blue eyes and a wave of honey-coloured hair. In a matter of seconds, you processed a thousand precious memories, and finally recalled a moment so terrible and traumatic that your whole body was paralysed by sorrow. Perhaps it was a noise, the passing-by of another shopper, or your own Herculean effort, but something finally broke through your shock. The despair that followed was unbearable. The invisible force which punched you between your shoulder-blades and propelled you forwards was pure anguish.

Despite your pain, despite the shock, you needed to touch him. Maybe you needed to know if he was real. Maybe you just needed to feel the sticky warmth of a little boy's hand held tightly in your own. I understand your yearning. I understand the terrible conflict of needing to hold and nurture a little boy whilst grappling with the despair of knowing that you can never again embrace your own. I'm sorry that I judged you. There was nothing weird about you. You are a bereaved mother,

and I understand that your grief, when it strikes, remains as powerful and agonising as the day you kissed your baby boy for the very last time. You are a warrior, somehow surviving your loss in a generation which set an arbitrary time-limit to unfathomable grief. You found a way to breathe, eat, and function, in a time before forums, online support, and help-lines. I don't know how you did it. You navigated your way through five or six decades while quietly bearing an unimaginable ache. I have so far managed just months. You have my deepest respect.

I hope that you somehow found your way to some happiness beyond your despair. I understand now that every moment of your post-loss years have been lived in the shadow of a little boy gone-too-soon. But I hope that his were not the only baby-blue eyes that you gazed into. I need to know that you lived, loved, and mirrored the smiles of other precious children. I need that to appease my guilt for thinking you weird, inappropriate and unsettling.

I don't know if I would recognise you if I saw you again, and I'm sure that you wouldn't know me because you simply didn't see me in the haze of your grief. Perhaps by some serendipitous quirk of chance we will one day find ourselves side-by-side, locked in despair as we gaze at another princely little boy, his disgruntled mother aghast at our inexplicable reactions to her precious son. If we do, I will gently take your hand, and tell you in a broken whisper, 'I get it'. Please know that you are loved by an entire community of heartbroken mothers, and if you ever reach out to us, we will wrap you in our arms and say your beautiful son's name. We will light a candle for him, remember him, and love him too.

Jules Lloyd

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

NOW

This is the first time I've been able to write about my daughter, Amber. It's taken ten years to get here and even now I'm distressed every day about losing her. I've had numerous counselling sessions, seen a Psychiatrist and even a short spell of CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy). Have any of them worked? I can't say to be honest. All I know is my life has changed beyond recognition.

Before 2007 I had a successful career with the Civil Service as a Senior Manager; travelled in Europe and all over the United Kingdom. I successfully managed 200 staff and considered myself a professional able to make decisions and understand the wheels of Government. Boy how I've changed. Amber would not recognise me now and would be totally flabbergasted at how different I am. Unfortunately her brother watches me and realises I'm not the Mum they both had. As a single Mum I had to be Mum and Dad, make decisions about their welfare and be strong for all of us.

Amber and I had a bit of a tough time when I met someone when she was 16 and he almost destroyed our family. But my bond with Amber and Brad was strong and I realised my partner was only interested in creating a division between us – it did scar the three of us for a while.

Fortunately Amber went to University in Southampton and started to forge a new life; what I didn't know was that her epilepsy had worsened. If I'd known Amber was experiencing seizures I would have worked in Southampton so she was with someone all the time. That said, I lost her overnight Saturday/Sunday when I probably would have been in Essex seeing her brother. Amber and I would have had a fiery relationship if I'd lived with her as she was a free spirit and didn't appreciate the seriousness of her condition, and the need for someone to be with her. She developed epilepsy at 13 (in puberty) and had experienced a happy life without the condition; she didn't accept it and wanted to continue life as a fun loving teenager/young woman.

Bradley was already resentful towards me because of my previous relationship; he also thought I favoured Amber so probably staying with her would have caused major problems all round. An 'if only' situation I live with daily as I know being with Amber would have been my choice.

I left the Civil Service in 2012 after five traumatic years when they failed to care for me and I still find it difficult to deal with stressful situations. I've undertaken several jobs but find it hard to concentrate and pick things up.

Amber continues to dominate my life; I admire people who are able to honour

their children by organising events, run marathons, raise money for charity, write books or poetry etc, while all I do is think about her constantly and do nothing. It's as though losing her has paralysed me. I suppose getting up each day and going away in my caravan (it's been a life saver) shows I continue to live. Ten years without her has been hard and to think I may have another 10 or 20 depresses me at times. We know our children would have got on with their lives had it been the other way round but for me, personally, my life changed irrevocably on the 14th January 2007.

Amber lived a full life and thoroughly enjoyed herself; I wish I were able to do the same. I hope writing it all down shows that I have changed just a little bit. I have gained strength from many TCF friends and for that I will always be grateful but at times still wish I didn't know them. Bradley is a tower of strength to me and he's done exceptionally well by training to be a Social Worker. How to finish this letter I really don't know... my life is so different and always will be but I know Amber and Bradley are both so important to me and will continue to be so for the rest of my days.

From Maureen Chudley
maureenchudley@live.co.uk

NEVER apologize for
being sensitive or
emotional.

Let this be a sign that
you've got a BIG HEART
and aren't afraid to let
others see it.

Showing your emotions is
a SIGN OF STRENGTH.

Brigette Nicole

Grieving people are
fighting the most aching
fight of their lives.
Stand with them. Be
with them. Love them in
your willingness to admit
that you don't know the
answers. Your presence
contains more love than
any answer ever will...

Tim Lawrence

News from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

I've just come back from the National Gathering and am up to my eyes in books waiting to be transported back to their home in Deptford. The effort of taking a large selection of library books to the Gathering has been very worthwhile though. I was so pleased to see people browsing through them, wanting to find out about, and often join, the library. We have also expanded our stock of books, thanks to the generosity of our members wanting to both dedicate a book to honour their own beloved child and, by doing so, help others. Thank you everyone. The memorial book-list is accessible through the TCF website.

I had so many interesting chats with people about books, and what helps them, and one very good idea is for us to acquire more audio books for people to listen to in the car or while doing the ironing etc. They would be a great addition to our collection of 'Talking Compassions', beautifully recorded by Janet Armstrong, and very popular with our library users. I'll be looking into this over the next few days and, by the time you read this, we should have some ready to be borrowed.

Meanwhile the online catalogue is coming along, although it is still a work in progress. If you go to www.tcf.org.uk, go into 'resources' and then 'library', the link to the catalogue is there. You can search it by title, author, subject (eg suicide or siblings) or by a keyword (eg Goodbye or Grief). You can put a review on, if you want to, and for many of the books you can go into external reviews mostly from Amazon customers. It is a very user friendly site so do have a look and let me know what you think.

As well as taking the library to the Gathering I was in charge of the shop and would like to thank everyone who brought or sent items along to be sold. The surprise big sellers were the knitted scarves and gloves and Christine already has advance orders for gloves for next year! Of course we also took a selection of books for sale and at least one or two of each title were sold. This all raises money for TCF, of course, thereby allowing us to help more bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents.

One of the books on sale was *Don't Let Them Tell You How To Grieve* by our editor Gina Claye. Gina read several of the poems from this book during the Gathering and, whenever she did, I knew I had to scurry back to the shop pronto to deal with the queue. I bought my own copy of this book when it was published, in 2006. It joined the 'emergency reading' beside my bed ready to comfort and console me in the wee small hours when sleep eluded me and the blackness of despair engulfed, and threatened to overwhelm me. One poem of Gina's could always reignite my tiny flicker of hope even when it was almost extinguished and I'm sure Gina won't mind me quoting it here. It's on page 64 and is called *Facing Death*.

Facing Death

*I do not fear death,
or even dying,
like some do.
For when it comes,
you will be waiting,
I will be with you.*

I think that's true whatever happens after we die. Gina's book is available from the library and can also be purchased via the website or from head office.

With best wishes, Mary

For Family and Friends

The absence of our child when the 'whole family' gathers seems to accentuate our incomplete family. We are sorely reminded of 'how it used to be' and don't want to accept what it is now. We need the patience and understanding of our family and friends to help us through the holidays as best we can.

We may want to change the way we spend Christmas. If the family traditionally gathers at one house, perhaps the gathering place could be changed, especially if the gathering home is that of the bereaved. If we do prepare the meal, be aware that we may not have the energy that we had in the past and will need a lot of help.

Perhaps we'll try to avoid the holiday altogether by going away for a few days. Whatever our thoughts are for coping with the day, please take our feelings into consideration when you make your plans.

For some of us shopping for gifts is a painful experience. The stores' festive decorations and music belie our mood as we feel forced into participating in the 'season'. We think longingly about that special gift we won't be buying this year. Again, our depression zaps us of the energy to do things we have done in the past, and we need your understanding for the things that remain undone.

Perhaps the single most helpful thing you can do for us is to include our child in the holidays. We want to hear his/her name, to have you recall fond memories of their lives, to know that you, too, are feeling their absence and remembering them with love.

Getting through the holidays is a rough task for bereaved parents. We need to handle them in a way that we feel is best for ourselves and our families. Dear family and friends we ask for your love and support at this especially difficult time.

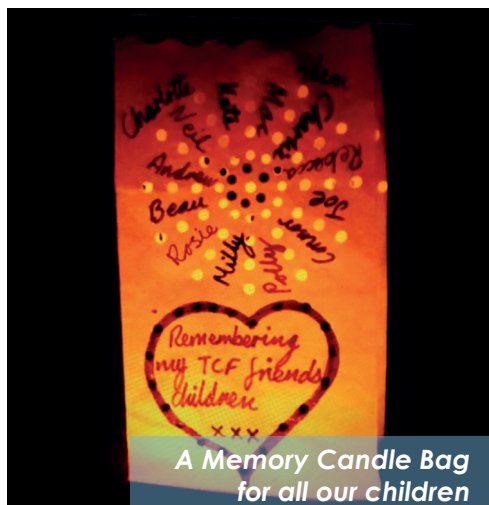
Marge Henning, West Orange, NJ



To All Our TCF Families

We understand this time of year can be very difficult for bereaved parents and their families. Our caring thoughts and heartfelt good wishes will be with all our hurting families over this Christmas and New Year period - and we especially feel for those of you who will be experiencing your first Christmas without your dear children.

Professor David Mosse's Speech from The National Gathering 2016



Professor David Mosse whose son, Jake, died from suicide, was our Keynote Speaker at the National Gathering this year. It was a privilege to listen to him and we have printed his profound and deeply moving speech here for you all to read.

Loss and a journey of the heart.

I am honoured to be invited to speak here at this very special gathering; a gathering to which we have all come bearing the treasure of love and of grief, for the children who will always be a part of us.

There are so many different experiences of pain and loss, and we are gathered here knowing, learning, or perhaps being surprised by, the power of sharing with others as a force for strength and healing.

I stand before you now as a father grieving his dearly, dearly loved son; but also as a survivor of a terrible trauma. First, I will talk about the shock and confusion of loss; second, about the journey of bereavement; and third, about sources of

strength, especially the fellowship of the bereaved.

Loss and its pain

Six years ago I lost my 23-year old son Jacob - Jake - to suicide. He was a postgraduate student at the Manchester Business School. He'd just achieved a first class degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE). He was talented, ambitious, the most admired among his friends... I know that I am not alone in this room to bear the burden of this terrible bereavement, and that some of you have the indescribable pain and confusion of recent bereavement. My heart goes out to you.

Like so many young men who die by suicide, Jake had no known history of mental health problems. The time from when he first told me he had been to see his GP and was taking anti-depression medication to his death was just 5 weeks. Jake suffered a grave depressive illness that was inadequately diagnosed. He was unable to get the help that he needed, unable, in fact, to think of his crisis as a treatable condition; indeed he did everything in his power to avoid a stigmatizing diagnosis.

Neither I nor any of his closest of friends, nor his brother who was so dear to him, could have imagined that this loving, talented young man would contemplate his own death.

Jake is not with us to explain why he felt there was no other choice available to him (when we can see so many); and even now his suicide has an unreality about it.

Those here who've experienced this terrible bereavement will understand what I mean when I say that for me, one reality ended that day; and another reality began. Suicide tore through and ruptured the story of my life and that of my family, as it has for so many. The time before his death is another continent.

For a moment, I imagined that I experienced a shadow of the pain that made Jake himself think of oblivion.

Like others, I not only face the deep sadness of the loss of my darling son, but have a second — sometimes overpowering — grief for the manner in which he died: his suicide. Out of the trauma and confusion or suicide comes the repeated question, why? I do not know anyone who has been bereaved by suicide for whom this is not an urgent, overwhelming — and, we discover, ultimately unanswerable — question.

How could this have happened? Why was he not stopped? We may ask whether we truly knew the person who is gone? How could distress so deep as to lead to suicide be invisible? We look back painfully to try to name the 'warning signs' that hindsight offers, we ruminate on the 'if only's'.

Suicide leaves us unbearably powerless.

But there are no reliable signs of impending suicide; every suicide comes as a shock. Our loved one's wish to die is revealed as a terrible secret hidden from family and friends, perhaps by extraordinary effort, itself contributing to suicidal exhaustion. Nothing is more haunting than the later realization that the person we so loved had already disengaged from the world of the living.

If we are not careful, as we strain to explain, suicide can colour the memory of those we love, robbing us of their past as well as their future. It seeps into and taints our memories, as we ask of each childhood photograph, was there something unknown behind that face.

Like others who grieve, I've begun a life-long search for understanding.

I've learned about the distorting mental processes of severe depression; the fragility of male strength (over three-quarters of suicides are male, and suicide is the most common cause of death under 30); the dangers of perfectionism, or self-worth conditional on achievements; the perils of isolation, entrapment, and fear of humiliation.

I've learned that humans are moved to self-harm both by passing impulsiveness and by deeper drum beats of the psyche of which we are hardly aware. Those who die may be no better predictors of their suicide than anyone else.

I'm no expert, but I've also learned some things that suicide probably is not: it's not a choice as we normally understand choice, but comes out of a state of mind simply unable to think of alternatives; incapable of imagining a positive future, or reaching out to those most loved.

Suicide is probably not a wish to be dead or to abandon us. The end that those who are suicidal seek is not of life itself, but of torturous emotional pain, in many cases the result of severe depression. When I and others look back on the lead-up to the death we grieve, we see clear signs of the desire for life.



*Memory candle bags
at The National Gathering*

Bereavement's journey

For me and I think many bereaved by suicide, the compulsion to try to understand what happened is where grief begins. As I mentioned, we "have two griefs to resolve. We grieve for the fact that a loved one has died and we grieve the cause of that death... the fact of suicide, and all suicide means and all society perceives it to mean." It is this that at first overwhelms.

With the struggle to make sense of the senseless comes an overpowering guilt and responsibility, and self-blame. I ask why did my child die; but also why was he not stopped; why did I not know or realise? An intense rumination on events was I think, for me, a way of trying - with the mind - to undo what cannot be undone; to recover control amid the experience of utter powerlessness, that the death of a child brings.

Sometimes we want to blame others – the health service, doctors, work colleagues, the university, a stigmatising society; this at least gives the possibility of action, of prevention for the sons or daughters of other parents.

Not uncommonly we (who lost children to suicide) feel judged, or perhaps we too readily project our self-judgement onto others: "what sort of a father, a family...?"

Great stigma surrounds suicide, born of the worst of fears and anxieties. In our society today suicide is unspeakable; we look for its causes in the 'otherness' of its victims and their circumstances. And that can be terribly isolating for those affected by suicide.

At first I felt utterly depleted by Jake's suicide. Hardly wanting to live. For months I felt exposed, perhaps ashamed, awkward; I wanted to hide away; I could not face going to work or meeting colleagues. I imagined I was being avoided. Being a good father was such a central part of my self-identity, and my son had killed himself.

The experience of Jake's sudden death was as if a 40-foot container had crashed through the roof of my house. There it was; huge, shattering, leaving no space for living. At first, I imagined someone would take it away, there would be cranes and lifting gear. But none came. There this dark mass remained, overwhelming

everything. Over the months and years this great block has not shrunk, but I have learned to live with it; learned to move around it, to find space to live with what is now part of my house, my life. It shapes new habits. New living things have seeded at its base, and grow up its sides; I am surprised that it supports artwork on the edges of its dark mass.

Very soon after Jake's suicide I sought help, beginning with one-to-one psychotherapy. When the container crashed into my house, I was fearful for the stability of its foundations. I imagined psycho-analytic therapy as working with a structural engineer to look into my frame, by beams and joists. This was for me necessary and very helpful.

Very soon, I also joined a survivors of bereavement by suicide (SOBS) support group in London. Everyone who comes to the group finds a freedom to talk openly, to risk honest but difficult questions such as 'did I love him enough?', and be understood in a way denied them in their everyday life, even (sometimes especially) within families, or in certain cultures. Grief is a burden that is often hidden, grief is close to our hearts, and we often have to choose carefully with whom it is shared.

The healing and strength from being with others bereaved by suicide is an important part of my journey. We are, after all, social beings and we live our emotional lives through relationships. From that comes the great pain of loss, but also the extraordinary power of being with others who understand.

Early on, those of us who have lost our child to suicide, simply need to know from others if it is possible to live after such a terrible thing. For me, contact with parents who had survived provided

evidence that I needed that life could be lived when overwhelmed by pain. I came across LaRita Archibald's 'Letter to the newly bereaved' and knew that I needed to talk to someone who could write such a letter. Over the following weeks, I spent hours on the phone to this wise woman living in Colorado whose son had killed himself 30 years ago.

When together with others bereaved by suicide, we are able to tell our story, we find witnesses to our tragedy, and recognition for our inner pain or guilt. And because we are at different points in grief's journey, and have different circumstances, we learn things from each other and from what we share. Maybe about the feelings of dread around anniversaries, or particular places, how we handle our child's belongings, the fears we may have of loss of the memory of our child's touch, their voice, their smell; which thoughts bring solace, and which self-torture.

I discovered another thing too. I found myself speaking as Jake's representative; saying what he could not say; talking about his courage, his bravery, standing up for him as his advocate.

We don't just learn about others' experience, we find new ways of thinking or expressing our own tragedy so that we can live with it. We lend or find narratives, shared stories, that are necessary to order the confusion, the pain of guilt, and as protection against being re-traumatised.

We come to see a pattern and realise ours is not a singularity but a kind of experience. In a survivors' group, my individual, subjective and fragmentary experience – perhaps a trauma that has no words – acquires language and social recognition.



Memory ribbons for each of our children at the Walk to Remember

Perhaps most important for me: through compassion for others whose experience I share, I learned to be kinder to myself, and blame myself less.

Hope – finding a future

A few final words about finding a future.

Suicide changes the bereaved. In different ways we are transformed by this tragedy. For many, knowing that the worst can happen also brings a new vigilance, a sensitivity and an openness to others, an awareness of the fragility of life which is always lived with hidden layers.

Many I know have discovered a deep concern for others, in family, work and society. As a university professor I am alive in a new way to the emotional experience of my students and have a different level of concern. I have deeper compassion for those suffering mental illness. I pay attention to extreme suffering – of the homeless, the refugees, those struggling with addiction, those suffering discrimination, as well as the suicidal. I'm not saying that I'm a good person or a

selfless person, but these are palpable effects of my son's suicide.

The loss of a child changes the scale of what is important. It daily brings the question of what it means to be human, to have life, to care for others; but also the mystery that we are to each other.

I've learned bitterly from suicide about the destructiveness of the human mind; but also that those who are intensely suicidal may be in that state for a short period of time; and many who have been pulled back from the edge are deeply grateful for the second chance they've been given.

If those who are suicidal don't want to die, but rather experience emotional pain beyond the threshold of what is tolerable, and see no means to rebuild selves that have fallen apart, and cannot ask for help, then we need to, and can, intervene to save lives. Engaging with this hope has for me been a way to give meaning to a loss that threatens to be unbearable.

I know that everyone here is on a different inner and outer journey, living with a child who is no longer alive; but also that whatever that journey is, it gains strength from intersecting with that of others, which is why I am so grateful to be here today.

Thank you. David Mosse

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.

Michael Rosen attended our AGM so it seems appropriate to review one of his books.

Carrying the Elephant by Michael Rosen, published by Penguin Books in 2002.

Carrying the Elephant is a collection of poems which bring into focus different aspects of Michael Rosen's life. In his forward he says that 'he wanted to make a mirror'. He wanted the mirror to be perfect but he ended up with 'bits of old mirror' given to him by people he knew. Not perfect but it worked and these poems work too. Michael Rosen uses language sparingly, honestly and effectively to convey very complex ideas and feelings starting with the stories he's been told about his father's wartime experiences and continuing into his own adult life.

At the heart of this book are a series of poems relating to the death of Michael's eighteen year old son Eddie and every bereaved parent will relate to them. Somehow he captures the horror and sadness and pathos and pain in a very few words.

Reading this took me back more than twelve years, looking at the posh frock my daughter had bought for her end of school dance, to the agony at the core of my being as I realised all that potential, the promise of a girl on the brink of womanhood, was never going to be fulfilled. I think it's a pretty amazing talent that can capture such powerful and complex feelings in just over fifty words.

Sadly this book is out of print at the moment but I have acquired three copies for our library. I shall also email the publishers to ask whether there's any chance of it being re-issued and I might even start one of those trendy online petitions because I think every bereaved parent should have the chance to read these poems. I thoroughly recommend this book.

Mary Hartley

A poem from page 41 he writes:

"There were ways of figuring how big he got. Like where his eyes came, face to face. The way his fingertips edged beyond mine, hand to hand. His wrists peering out of the ends of his shirtsleeves. The way the guys couldn't keep hold of the body bag as they tried to slide it down the stairs."

NB: Most of the poems about the loss of Eddie in **Carrying The Elephant** are included in **Michael Rosen's Selected Poems** – available from the TCF website www.tcf.org.uk (go to SHOP/BOOKS).

Reflections from The National Gathering, 2016



I attended the TCF National Gathering at Sedgebrook Hall the other weekend and found it a very positive experience. I have been a member of TCF since my son, Giles, died 7 years ago and for various reasons never felt able to attend a gathering until now. Living in Jersey it is a bit of a distance but I am certainly glad that I made the effort and will definitely attend the next one.

Everyone was so lovely and supportive from the moment I arrived and I felt enveloped by the warmth of the friendship that we were all united by, however much we regretted it. I joined the choir, something I have always wanted to do but never got round to, but it was fun, non-pressured and a very cathartic experience. I also enjoyed the craft workshops and it helped to be

with others who really understood having been through the terrible tragedy of losing a child themselves. The speakers and other workshops were also helpful and I particularly enjoyed the Creative Writing workshop held by the wonderful Mick Wilson who gave us a talk on poetry and then gave us free rein to write a poem. Since Giles died I had not been able to write and at first, in the workshop, I felt as though I had no ideas and nothing would come to my mind but looking out of the window at the beautiful gardens around Sedgebrook Hall the writing started to flow. Since being back in Jersey I have fine-tuned it a little and on the right is the final version.

By Hannah Curnock

**This is a poem about my son, Giles,
who took his own life on the Island of Jersey, in 2009**

*The sea, the surf, the Island that you
loved:
sitting on White Rock waiting for dolphins'
shimmering fins darting in the water
around
the tidal covered rocks between
you and the coast of France.*

*Beach parties, Bonfires,
Beatbox, Bacardi, Brothers, Barbados
and Becky
Friends and Fun and something else.*

*What could be more perfect fun, but
something else?
A lovable guy 'G', (teenage years
forgiven long ago)
Surfing at Secrets, chasing the tide, Island
life*

*Smiles, oh those smiles,
seagulls, skateboards and Spider-man
but something else?*

*Sitting on the sea wall:
ice cream in sticky hand,
fragile sandcastle soon to be destroyed
by that ever moving, constant presence
of the sea,
Island life.*

*Wedding party:
happy futures ahead, turned by a pretty
girl,
that is not a crime, not now,
Love, loss, loneliness – but who knew?
Island life*

*Diddy singing over and over:
'Every step I take, Every move I make'
as we take that walk
from medieval church
to newly dug grave
in the sunshine of a sunflower hue
Island life.*

*And the people on the sunlit beach:
leaving their work, school,
everyday life behind them for a while
and something else.*

*Such a glorious turquoise sea, blue and
calm for now:
but who knows what tomorrow may
bring;
the chatter of happy people present in
the background
while I listen to the last song I ever want
to hear
Life goes on, for them but not for you
Island life or something else.*

Hannah Curnock

Memory Corner

We remember with love all our children

Edited by Gill Hartley, hartley9ar@btinternet.com

From Aileen Cross

Remembering ERIKA at Christmas

With all my love, your broken hearted
mom xxx

I know you are an angel now in Heaven

I just wanted you to know

that you are forever in my heart

and I love and miss you so.

Happy Christmas ERIKA

From Lisa McCulloch

George McCulloch 17.4.92 - 27.1.12

Please take the memories away...

They hurt too much

Please take the dreams away

They hurt more than you can imagine

I only want you here

I only want to see you

Hear you

Smell you

Touch you

Feel you

I want you to be here

I want everything to be as it should be

Please ...

Come back to me for real.



From Pauline Barratt

**For my precious daughter,
little Miss Julie Savin,
19.04.89 - 18.01.08**

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,

You make me happy when skies are grey

*You'll never know dear, how much I love
you,*

Please don't take my sunshine away.

**Julie Savin, one of my greatest friends,
Always remembered and always
appreciated, love Mum x**

From Najwa Mounla Written for Haas's 9th Anniversary on 6.10.16

Dream like
I doze off to sleep
Lamenting my loss
Humming my child's favourite song:
"What will be will be"
My eyes closed
My breathing slow
My body floats
I understand all
I begin to see the light
To sense the love
To comprehend the truth
I see sorrow and joy holding hands
dancing to one tune

I understand that death and birth are one
Resting in one room
I know that fear and love are friends
Healing human wounds
I am swimming in a gentle breeze
Held up by the vibration
Of my thoughts
I am
Here
Now
Breathing in
Breathing out
I am one with the Divine

Najwa Mounla - Haas's Mom

From Gill and Edwin Hartley

**Dearest Will, can't believe it will be 11 years on January 18th 2017.
Can't wait to be with you again.**

For Will...
Heart Less
My life has fallen apart,
I am like a broken doll,
pieces of me are scattered
and I cannot find them all.
I need someone to help me
search for some of the parts.
Many of them will never be found,
they are lost, far in the past.
I do know where my heart is -
deep in the ground with my son
but so much else is missing too,
like happiness and love.
My memories are so fragile,
I fear I will lose them too,

if I don't try to recall
every moment spent with you.
Some of the pieces are shattered.
and can never be repaired:
my role as mother to you
and the future we will never share.
I pray I can find someone,
who cares enough to help me,
glue together a semblance
of the person I used to be.
Then I can don my armour,
smile and remember to laugh,
and outwardly be like anyone else,
except I am missing a heart

**Gill Hartley From Aspects of Loss
www.gillhartley.com**

Events

Below are details of forthcoming events from
December 2016 - January 2017

TCF WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

7pm, Sunday 11 December 2016

A worldwide event uniting family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honour the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7pm local time, hundreds of formal candle lighting events and thousands of informal candle lightings are held to commemorate and honour the memory of all children who have died but will never be forgotten.

Go to our website for more info and details of events around the country

www.tcf.org.uk Go to EVENTS/Worldwide Candle Lighting.

This year you can light a candle and leave a message for your child, sibling or grandchild in our Remembrance Book on our site www.tcf.org.uk.

CEREMONY OF REMEMBRANCE

6pm, Saturday 17th December 2016

Hayes Free Church, 111, Pickhurst Lane, Hayes, Kent.

The Bromley group will be holding their annual Ceremony of Remembrance

All bereaved parents, their families and friends are invited to attend.

Please bring a photograph of your child to be displayed throughout the service.

The service will consist of suitable readings, some hymns/carols, candle lighting and a period of quiet reflection.

You will be invited to write your child's name on a butterfly slip to be read during the service. These slips will be kept in a Book of Remembrance.

Further information can be obtained from

Vivienne **020 8658 8130**

or Gill **020 8462 2444**

CELEBRATING A LIFE

2 pm, Saturday 28th January 2017

St. John's Church at the corner of Grainger Street and Westgate Road, Newcastle, near the Central Station.

The Tyne and Wear Branch of TCF are holding their annual service CELEBRATING A LIFE.

The service is led by our priest Father Nicholas Buxton accompanied by our choir; readings by TCF members.

This is a very special time for bereaved parents, relatives and friends to remember children who have died and to light a candle in their memory; and share refreshments with other bereaved parents.

Please bring a photo of your child who has died. All are welcome.

Margaret White



Just So You Know

I can't stop grieving just because you believe it is time for me to move on.

I can't stop hurting just because you do not understand the piercing pain in my heart.

I cannot stop my tears from flowing just because they make you uncomfortable.

My heart is not suddenly mended just because you believe I have grieved enough.

I will grieve the loss of my loved one for the rest of my life.

Just so you know.

John Pete, TCF Quakertown Chapter



How's Your Day

People ask in happy tones 'how's your day?'
I look so blank, I sigh, cannot they see!
My day is not OK in any way
I'm a shadow of the 'me' I used to be
Can't they see my broken splintered heart?
My dress haphazard and in disarray
My look so absent and so far away
Can't they see my bleary eyes, that veil of mist
My reddened eyes that weep so much
My wooden walk that's hard to tread
My hand that clutches onto tissues
I sigh, look here and there in every crowd
Not a glimpse of my child, I yell out loud
'How's my day?' ... Aaaaaaah ...!
Yet again! Another day I DREAD!

Irene J Kosted
2bellsgo@gmail.com

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.

Leaflets for Bereaved Parents and Grandparents:

- Introducing TCF
- After Suicide
- Back at Work
- The Bereaved Single 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

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

Memory Corner

E: hartley9ar@btinternet.com

Support in Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters

TCF SIBBS,

14 New King Street, Deptford, London, SE8 3HS

E: sibbseditor@tcf.org.uk

TCF Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

TCF Postal Library Service, 14 New King Street, Deptford, London, SE8 3HS

T: 01634 666353, E: library@tcf.org.uk

Donating membership enquiries

Subscription and mailing queries

TCF National Office, 14 New King Street, Deptford, London, SE8 3HS

T: 0345 120 3785, E: 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 |  [@tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk)  [@saytheirname](https://twitter.com/saytheirname)

Final Date for Contributions is 14th January 2017

for the next issue of Compassion (Spring 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