

Summer 2018 | Issue No 196



# COMPASSION

The Quarterly Magazine of The Compassionate Friends.



*Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary  
promise that every human life is of inestimable value.*

*Desmond Tutu*

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

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# Reflections from the Editor



**Gina Claye**

## Dear Friends

Yesterday was my son, Robin's birthday. He would have been 48. I sat by the fire and remembered... He died fifteen years ago and there are still times when tears come and the longing...

Even though it was raining and very windy I went outside and filled the empty bird feeder. Robin loved sitting outside on the patio, a mug of tea cupped in his hands, watching the birds come and go. Back inside, sitting by the warm fire, sipping a hot cup of tea, I let the minutes, the hours slip by. I had a list of things I needed to get on with but still I just sat there...

Some of you reading this will be newly bereaved and I remember back to the beginning of it all, the raw grief, the not wanting to go on, the wondering if there was any point left in life, what on earth was I going to do... But there is hope; all these years on the grief is quieter now and I have found hope, wonderful friends thanks to TCF and a new purpose in life.

A while ago I would have felt guilty about 'not getting on with things' but I have learnt to be kind to myself, to be gentle with myself. I no longer beat myself up about failing to do what I should be doing or to fail to be what I think I ought to be. The way I do it is to treat myself as a child who needs gentle encouragement. I tell myself it's ok to feel what I'm feeling and to do what I happen to be doing at that moment - however bizarre it might be. Then I try and encourage myself and say, OK, I needed to do that, now it's lunchtime, I'll put one foot in front of the other, gently, and go and see what's lurking in the fridge.

I came across these words a little while ago: 'What ever you are doing, love yourself for doing it.'and I frequently repeat them to myself and I find this very comforting. You are your own best friend and you need this friend to love you.

And thinking about the things we do, thank you to all those of you who put fingers to keyboard and wrote to me about the things that help you get out of bed in the morning, things that help to keep you going. I have been greatly inspired by reading each of your accounts and I hope the rest of you will find help and inspiration from them too. They are all in this edition. Please, please, those of you who haven't yet, jot down a few things, or just one or two and send them in. We want to know what helps YOU!

And remember, be kind to yourself, be gentle with yourself and whatever you are doing, love yourself for doing it.

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

# Thoughts from the Chair

## Dear Compassionate Friends

Hello again dear friends. I say, "hello again", but as I say it, I remind myself that there will be "new" friends reading this magazine for the first time and to you I extend a sad but warm welcome. I am deeply aware of the fact that new families join our club every day. I don't think a day goes by when there isn't a story in the news of another young person losing their lives whether through illness, accident or violence. Very young or older. So many young people and so many grieving families.

For this edition, I have been inspired by the late Barbara Bush who died in April. I didn't know that she had lost a child. How could that fact have escaped me? I guess it is because when she was in the public eye, I was my old self. The person who didn't understand the life-long grief and the changes that come with losing a child. Or maybe I did know, and the depth of what she was carrying really didn't register at the time in my blissfully unaltered life. Anyway, the sad fact is, that for me life is divided into the before and after; and the people in my life are divided into those who are bereaved and those who are not.

When she died, much was written about her bereavement and how she coped with losing her child. I was inspired especially by a quote from her memoirs:-

***"The death of a child is so painful, both emotionally and spiritually, that I truly wondered if my own heart and spirit would ever heal. I soon learned that I could help myself best by helping others."***



This really resonated with me. I too realised that in trying to help others with their grief, I was, at the same time, processing my own; and I have also learned that it is a continuing and evolving process.

That is why the Compassionate Friends is so vital. The unique peer-to-peer support allows us to help each other in a way which doesn't happen in any other organisation. And we all have our different roles, functions, strengths and abilities which when combined, result in a powerful source of support and comfort.

We can take our place in this chain of bereavement in different ways. Some of us can offer practical help but that isn't for everyone. And with the charity growing, we do have to employ staff to help with the administration of all the activities that we provide. So this month I'm going to include a small appeal. We can't provide all the services that we offer without funds. I know that most of you will already have a standing order to the charity in place and we are all grateful to you for that. If you haven't yet got around to it, (and it's so understandable



that with everything else to cope with, this would be the last thing on your minds) I wonder if you might think about setting up a small regular payment to the charity? It's so important because it keeps the rosy complexion on the cheeks of our wonderful finance man (kisses Nigel!) and it helps us to budget appropriately to provide all the support needed. I hope you will forgive me for asking. Donating is easy and everything you need is on the website or the Facebook donate button.

Or how about planning a small fundraiser for the charity. To give you an example, the 6th May was International Bereaved Mother's Day. Yes, we actually have a day! Just as well really as the other Mother's Day is not exactly fun for us is it? I know that there are mixed responses to us having "our own" day, but I think it's a good thing. It helps people to think about the fact that it's not all "happy hearts and pretty roses" for bereaved Mothers and gives us an opportunity to educate people about grief and child loss. I've set up a donation page so that people can contribute to TCF in memory of James on that day. If all of my friends donate the price of a cup of coffee, or upgrade to a glass of wine, we should easily raise enough to get some more leaflets printed or even provide a bursary for a parent or two to come to one of our retreats. Who knows. If you want to help me reach my target the link is <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/maria-ahern>.

Some mums use the 6th May to host a coffee morning with their friends in memory of their child and other mums meet up together for lunch on the day. I wish everyone a gentle Bereaved Mother's Day however you spend it and I thank everyone who has used this day to raise funds and awareness of our charity. If you are one of these people, please

send us photos and information about your event so that we can thank you personally. We'd love to know what you are doing.

There are other ways to help too. Our trustee Sue Hughes holds an event every year in memory of her son Joe. "Joe's Walk" is a gentle stroll through some pretty countryside followed by a lovely supper. This provides an opportunity for bereaved parents to meet up and share stories of their own children while remembering Joe. Details of this and other events can also be found on the website. The list of things that we can do is endless and you will all have some amazing ideas.

So what have we been doing this quarter? Well, we have set up our own series of walks for bereaved parents. For the first walk, "Parks and Palaces", Terry Ahern (walk leader and commentator) was joined by 19 bereaved parents as they walked, lunched and chatted their way around some of London's popular tourist attractions. The walk ended in a pub for a well earned pint. The second one "From the Modern to the Traditional" is planned for May and all the details can be found on the website. If you like walking, please join in. The walk is free but we welcome a small voluntary donation.

I'd like to mention the London Marathon. Some of you will know that Adelle Brenner ran for TCF and raised over £9,000 for our charity. That is a huge donation and we are so grateful for it. Adelle was dressed as Wonder Woman and was running in memory of her daughter Celia. Thank you Adelle. The money raised will enable us to provide more support groups, more retreats, more literature and more information to those in this bereaved community. And of course, we can't help but reflect that in that same event, a young

man of 28, Matt Campbell, lost his life. If ever there was an example of cruel irony, there it is. One mother running to raise money for a charity for bereaved parents, while another mother is catapulted into this sad world of bereavement. It certainly is thought provoking isn't it?

I can't end this note without thinking about the forthcoming anniversary of the Manchester bombing. 22 lives lost and so many of them teenagers. I'm proud to say that we have been able to help some of those families and are here for any others who need our support. We all know that

the 22nd May will be a hard day for the families of those who lost their lives and our thoughts will be with them that day and in the future.

I hope that by the time you read this, the sun will have stopped teasing us and come to stay for a while and I look forward to reading about all your summer fundraising events! Have a gentle and peaceful few months till we speak again.

**With love and gratitude  
Maria (James's mum)**

## Life Goes On

*When you lose a precious child  
you think the sun will never shine again,  
but you'll find it does.*

*You think the birds will never sing again  
But you'll find they do,*

*And you think you will never smile again  
but you'll find you will.*

*Time changes many things but it can  
never change the precious bond of love  
you shared with your loved one, and I  
feel sure you will be comforted knowing  
you were blessed to share precious time  
together with a beautiful love that will  
live in your heart forever.*

**FROM MY HEART TO YOURS by Patricia Rose,  
[patricia@patriciarose.co.uk](mailto:patricia@patriciarose.co.uk)**



# 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).

## Dear Compassionate Friends

I was very interested in the article by Clara Hinton in the Spring edition of Compassion on the differing ways bereaved mothers and fathers grieve. This was certainly the case when my beloved son, Martin, died at the age of 33 in 1995.

All my strength was taken by trying to accept that this terrible tragedy had taken place. My husband, on the other hand, felt sorrow and deep anger. He felt that something more could have been done, that someone should be blamed for our son's death. We both went for counselling, which I found very helpful in coming to terms with the situation but my poor husband argued with the counsellor so much that she ended up in tears. In the end he went for anger management and did find this a help, but he was never the same person again, and I think he died of a broken heart.

We did manage to stay together and with the help of our younger son who like me managed to come to terms with the situation, went on to have a reasonably stable marriage for the next twenty-five years... In all we were married for fifty-two years.

I should be interested to hear how other bereaved parents have coped.

**Yours with love,**

**Ann Wilkinson**

## Dear Editor

On reading your reflections and thinking of ways I cope and get out of bed in the morning since Debbie died, I guess I have 'moved on'. To start with I had so much to do with regard to her funeral, paperwork, notifying people, making sure her memory was kept alive and that the papers printed things well.

After that it was back to thinking about the Pre-school I run and managing that again properly. I put Debbie away in a box somehow and carried on. This was after 4 weeks of her accident.

Then it was finding people who had lost a child also that I could talk to. This wasn't easy, but eventually through other people and God incidents (I am a committed Christian) bereaved parents came to me, and basically we helped each other and cried together too.

Then further on, I retired a bit early and I started my Bereaved Parents Support group. I knew God wanted me to do this and that Debbie would also expect nothing less of me. Now the group in Westcliff, Essex has gone from strength to strength and is a very close supportive group with two sessions on a Monday (due to numbers) once a month and a more casual meet up once a month at a local café overlooking the sea. I now feel a deep love and empathy for bereaved parents. This wouldn't have been possible before I lost my beautiful Debbie.

**Joy Rooke**



# Cycling to Remember

Just before my son, Matthew, died suddenly at the age of 32, he helped me to choose a cycle to buy to start me on the road to better fitness. He had been a fairly keen cyclist for a long time but in truth, I was at the 'reluctant' end of the scale. I found it rather boring, hard going and usually, inconvenient.

'Just do little and often Dad', was his advice. OK I thought, I will. So, for a while I did. Then came the phone call every parent dreads and many of us in TCF have received.

Strangely, it wasn't too long after he died, perhaps a few weeks, that I was almost compelled to get back on my bike. At that time I cycled alone, but I found the relative peace of the lanes near where I live and a strong sense of a connection back to those conversations with him, reassuring and somehow comforting. I felt now that I was doing this for a number of reasons, not just about fitness improvement.

Someone told me early on that sleep, food and exercise are crucial to taking those early steps on the 'Path not Chosen'. Easily said and maybe obvious but how very true. I was now doing this mostly because I simply had to, for Matthew. To show him that I could do it and to make him proud.

During one of my last conversations with him, he asked me if I was going to set myself a goal. I thought and we talked and half jokingly I said, 'I wonder if I could ever cycle the length of a marathon quicker than the world record holder takes to run it?!. ' Now, to any experienced or even some inexperienced cyclists, that's

a Sunday afternoon warm up. But to me, at that time, me who got bored after half an hour and sore very soon after, it was merely words and never likely to be a reality.

Months later, when I was still doing 'little and often', I joined a cycling club. I was really beginning to enjoy this. Matt was, and always will be, with me every mile I cycle.

One cycle ride, with about 8 other club members, felt rather longer and a bit quicker than usual. Was it my lack of fitness or that fish and chips I'd had the day before I wondered. I thought little more of it until we returned to the car park at the end of the evening. I didn't have 'an app' or on board speed/distance recorder at the time so asked the leader how far and time taken. 'Just over 26 miles in 1 hour 54 minutes', she said. Until then it didn't even occur to me that I might be about to achieve my goal thought up and inspired by Matthew. But, achieve it I had. I cried on the way home, bitter sweet tears but, I knew then that I was proud and that Matthew was also.

My next goal ? To do it on his bike that I have kept in storage waiting for me to have the courage to get on board, to sit where he sat and to achieve something that we talked about, together.

**Robert Treadgold**

# News from the Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

As the year moves on and spring turns into summer, the library continues to thrive. I think, after the catastrophic loss we've all suffered, we vary in how we might, or might not, benefit from reading. Some of us can't read at all, some of us (like me) want to read anything and everything we can to do with the death of a child, and very often bereavement in general, whilst, in the middle, are lots of people who dip in and out of books and can read sometimes but not others.

One of the things I'm asked for a lot is something to provide some hope, hope of survival of course but also hope of a return to a meaningful life. Very often this can be found in our biographies and books of advice written by bereaved parents and siblings. They're based on the actual experience of people just like us so, when they write, 'I can enjoy life again now', or 'it's not the same life but it's a good life', we can give that thought house room even if we can't quite believe we'll ever feel like that.

Some of our books are positively hopeful and upbeat, like *Thriving After the Death of a Child* by Cathy Cheshire; Cathy's only child died, plunging her into a very dark place but she's clawed her way back and feels she has a life well worth living again. It's a very positive message but one I would have found difficult 14 years ago. I'm not advocating the misuse of our library books but I did actually throw one at my bedroom wall in the early days because the author was telling me that one day I'd actually enjoy life again. What a load of rubbish I thought then, very angrily, but now I know she was right.

Another big source of hope for many readers are our books which talk about an afterlife, either from a religious, scientific or paranormal point of view. I know some of you don't believe there is anything after this life, and I fully respect that, but these are among the most popular books in the library. For me, since I'm of a scientific turn of mind, I was on the lookout for evidence right from the beginning and I found a lot of hope and comfort from reading about Near Death Experiences, the accounts of people who have nearly died but have survived and who report conscious thoughts and experiences when they were clinically dead. It is actually something I've been interested in since the 1970s when my patients started to talk to me about these experiences, and after Claire died following a cardiac arrest, I found a lot of comfort in these accounts.

A lot of readers also find hope and comfort from books by mediums like Ross Bartlett or Gordon Smith or from their own faith. We have many very hopeful books by people whose faith has helped them and the two that come immediately to my mind are *A Grief Observed* by C S Lewis and *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner, a bereaved dad and a rabbi. Most of our books do focus on the Christian faith but not all of them, some focus on other faiths and other cultures.

Finally, for the days when there is no hope in sight and we don't know how to go on, we do have a few books to help with things like depression or panic attacks. Since nearly all of us suffer from PTSD we should have more books on that subject and, by the time you read this, I will have

researched the subject, and hopefully acquired some useful books. Recommendations will be gratefully received. We're all coping with the very worst thing that can happen to any parent and we need as much help as we can get; I'm very pleased our library can provide some of that help. This little poem, by Sascha Wagner, always reminds me of the mountain we have to climb. It's called:

## A Life Lost

*I have lost a life - not my own*

*But it would have been easier to have lost my own life*

*Than to have lost the Life I loved more than my own.*

**With love from Mary**

## Mothers Day - From a mother to her child

**Michael, I wrote this poem for you x**

*My child, how I remember holding your tiny little hand  
when you were little,  
The way your fingers grasped mine.  
The way your hair curled at your neck.  
The way it tickled my face when you slept on my shoulder.  
My child, how I remember how you hid behind my legs  
when you were shy,  
The way your eyes looked around to see if it was safe  
and the way your eyes scanned a room,  
checking I was still there.  
I close my eyes and still smell your child like aroma  
and the chubbiness of your little body next to mine.  
My child, how I remember you growing up  
and the way we used to measure your height on the  
wall.  
The day your feet were bigger than mine  
and you looked over my shoulder  
when we looked in the mirror.  
Yes I remember when you said that you loved me  
and you would be alright and not to worry  
as you were all grown up!  
Yes I remember.  
I will always remember, as you are my child  
and those memories are mine alone as your mother.  
Precious and tucked away in my thoughts,  
bringing smiles and sadness.  
So as time passes, I will never forget  
and I will always be your mother  
and you will always be my child.*



**Sue Brooks**

# A Love That Never Dies (12A)

Directed by Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds in UK Cinemas from 18th May plus Q and A's

One cold but sunny Sunday morning seven years ago two policemen knocked on our door to convey a message from the British Consulate in Vietnam. Five hours earlier our son Josh (22) had died in a road accident on the Ho Chi Minh Highway just south of Hanoi. In the blink of an eye our world had changed and that was the start of a new journey for us and a new way of looking at life.

A year after Josh died we became involved with The Compassionate Friends, a lifeline for us at that time, and in 2013 we made **Say their Name** for this wonderful peer to peer organisation.

By now we had learnt that social anxieties about death and bereavement are magnified when a child dies and many parents become isolated from their communities, feared by their well intentioned but often paralysed friends and ignored by professionals, some of the subjects we addressed in **Say Their Name**.

In 2015 we set up our own charity **THE GOOD GRIEF PROJECT** which addresses grief from a creative and active perspective and our first retreat in Oxfordshire at the end of May is now fully booked with another one scheduled for November.

As we met more and more bereaved parents and siblings we decided that we would take a road trip and travel in honour of Josh making a film as we crossed the USA. Our main objective was always to produce a documentary that would shed light on how grieving for a child is so different from other types of grief. And **A Love That Never Dies** is the result.

We started by asking ourselves why in a world where death will always make front page news, real life conversations

about death, dying and bereavement are so problematic. We wondered if we could make a documentary that told the story of grief not as an anthropological exercise, not even as a campaigning film, but as a more subjective intervention into a discussion we had now found ourselves a part of.

We figured that being bereaved parents ourselves we would be able to record and represent the bereaved with an empathy that other filmmakers might lack - that we could perhaps give a voice to those finding themselves struggling both with the death of their child and with social expectations on how they should grieve.

We were also at a moment in our own grief when we both felt strong enough to undertake such a journey involving, as it would, all the emotional and practical challenges of filming as we went. We also liked the idea that our journey could be a metaphor for our own grief.

We had already visited Vietnam, visiting the place where Josh had died and we scattered his ashes in different parts of the world, including Mexico and India; but first to the USA, and an 8-week road trip through 21 states, covering 5000 miles.

We returned, having filmed with eleven different families, of which after a year in the edit, five have made it through to the final cut and the film was completed in 2017. Part home movie, part road movie, visually exciting and we feel full of compassion and insights, **A LOVE THAT NEVER DIES** is Opening in Cinema's across the UK from 18th May with Directors' Q and A's at every screening.

# Screenings

**FRIDAY 18TH MAY 2018 -  
UK PREMIER LONDON PRINCE CHARLES CINEMA, LEICESTER SQUARE**

SUNDAY 20TH MAY 2018 – BRISTOL THE WATERSHED

MONDAY 21ST MAY 2018 – BIRMINGHAM THE ELECTRIC

TUESDAY 22ND MAY 2018 – OXFORDSHIRE SOHO FARMHOUSE

FRIDAY 25TH MAY 2018 – CHARNEY MANOR OXFORDSHIRE

WEDNESDAY 30TH MAY 2018 – MANCHESTER THE HOME CINEMA

MONDAY 4TH JUNE 2018 – LANCASTER THE DUKES CINEMA

THURSDAY 7TH JUNE 2018 – EAST FINCHLEY THE PHOENIX CINEMA

MONDAY 11TH JUNE 2018 – EXETER THE PHOENIX CINEMA

THURSDAY 14TH JUNE 2018 – OXFORD THE ULTIMATE PICTURE PALACE

TUESDAY 19TH JUNE 2018 – LEEDS HYDE PARK PICTURE HOUSE

TUESDAY 26TH JUNE 2018 – CARDIFF CHAPTER ARTS CENTRE

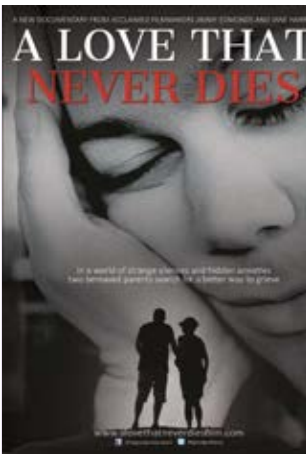
SUNDAY 1ST JULY 2018 – GLASGOW FILM THEATRE

MONDAY 9TH JULY 2018 – DERBY QUAD

WEDNESDAY 11TH JULY 2018 – GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL

THURSDAY 12TH JULY 2018 – TOTNES DARTINGTON HALL

TUESDAY 17TH JULY 2018 – TRURO THE PLAZA CINEMA



**Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds  
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#LoveNeverDiesFilm

Watch the trailer:

**[www.alovethatneverdiesfilm.com](http://www.alovethatneverdiesfilm.com)**



# Memory Corner

We remember with love all our children



From Jane Rock

I wrote these few lines earlier this year after stepping into my garden on a beautiful bright morning... the little robin's song was spellbinding and I stopped in my tracks to listen.

I heard a bird sing, in memory of my much missed dear son Nick,

You sang to me as I stepped outside

Into blue skies instead of grey

I know it was you, no other would it be

Just to say you are not far away

Your song was so pure it filled me with awe

That you can produce such a tone

Thank you for making me smile today

Just a song but for me pure joy

**Jane Rock**

From Sharon and Stephen Smart

**Our youngest Son, Sam, took his own life in November 2017 aged 22.**

We love and miss you every single second of the day.

**Ma and Pa**

From Christina Ford

**Remembering my dear son, Adam, on what would be your 30th birthday, May 9th 2018. You only got to live your life for 19 years but you're still touching hearts 11 years later.**

Love you and miss you so very much.

**Mum xx**

(If you'd like to read about Adam please go to [www.hunty.muchloved.com](http://www.hunty.muchloved.com) and turn the music up)

You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes. A. A. Milne

# What must I do? How Do I Cope?

These are two of the most asked questions by the newly bereaved. Not even the most experienced and best-trained counsellors have the answers. Our reactions to, and management of, grief are as individual as our fingerprints. What works for you may not help another, and alarmingly, what brought comfort yesterday is useless today.

Within any 24 hours emotions and their handling fluctuates. Controlling thoughts and behaviour seems no longer possible. This spirals from the disconcerting to the terrifying. Fears of losing sanity are not

unusual but they are unfounded. It's the trauma of losing a loved one that so unsettles mourners, depriving them of serenity and stability.

So, if there is no plan for coming to terms with tragedy and the new realities of life are there examples and models to help us? The following 'recipe' isn't the final or the complete aid by any means but it does offer some broad guidelines that in Churchill's words are not the beginning of the end but might be the end of the beginning.

**Rosemary Dirmeik**

## Survival Soup

Gently stir together equal quantities of the following ingredients. Some might be difficult to find but it is important to search for them as the soup is not as nourishing without them:

Courage – Compassion – Patience

Perseverance – Love – Empathy – Tolerance

Adaptability – Energy – Time

Commitment – Honesty – Gentleness

Forgiveness – Memories – Humility

Self-esteem – Balance – Support

Season with Humour and Sprinkle with Hope.

This dish is just as good as a main meal or a top-up snack. It tastes particularly delicious when shared with Friends.

**Rosemary Dirmeik**

**From the book String of Pearls**

# 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.

## **Bereaved Parents and Their Continuing Bonds: Love After Death** by Catherine Seigal

### **First Review**

This is a well written book of bereaved parents' stories. The main theme is the strong continuing bond of love between the parent and child after death which does not diminish with time. The author, who is not a bereaved parent, worked as a counsellor in a London children's hospital for five years. She wrote this book to pay tribute to the parents, to share their stories and to show how the counselling service worked to nurture and support that bond. She offered one to one sessions to one or both parents and also an open group where parents could listen.

I recommend this book with confidence that it will inform and support parents, professionals, friends and families. It is encouraging to read a positive story of parents being supported in a sympathetic and professional manner when they needed it. Anne McAreavey

### **Second Review**

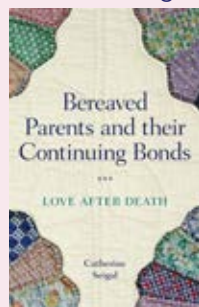
Catherine Seigal was a counsellor at a children's hospital for many years and this gave her the opportunity to talk with numerous parents from all walks of life during their child's illness and eventual death. Various issues are raised throughout her book which makes it an invaluable source, not only for bereaved parents, but for anyone considering working professionally in this field. She noted how differently parents reacted when faced with identical problems, and she relates

these throughout the book making it a very worthwhile and useful read.

**Jane Pentling**

Bereaved Parents and their Continuing Bonds is published by Jessica Kingsley (ISBN 9781785923265) and is available for sale from the TCF website (go to SHOP/BOOKS) and head office. I have received a great deal of positive feedback from our library readers and I would recommend it too.

**Mary Hartley**



## **Dear Isobel** by Georgiana Monckton (New edition 25 years after Isobel's death)

In the introduction to Georgiana's book about coming to terms with the death of a child she outlines two personally important points of view. The first is that she believes speaking openly about death would make society feel less awkward about it and the second her surprise that there were not more books on grieving, especially parental grief. This, she explains, was her motivation for writing Dear Isobel, to provide an honest, simple first-hand account of the experiences surrounding the death of a child. This is a book written by a mother grieving the death of her little girl Isobel, and her grief journey.

I think the author achieved what she set out to do. The book is split into two sections: before and after her, almost two years old, daughter's death. Without doubt, for me, the before section is the most compelling. In chapter one she describes a happy family life for herself, her husband and their two daughters, Isobel and Emily. In chapters two and three there is a detailed description of the discovery of a brain tumour, the devastating prognosis and Isobel's hospital care.

Then in chapters four and five Isobel's return home from hospital for palliative care gives the reader a powerful and emotional picture.

At this point I was reduced to floods of tears by Georgiana's description of Isobel's last weeks and up to this point, apart from my own son's funeral, I don't recall crying so much. I was left in no doubt about the love Georgiana holds in her heart for her dear little girl. Moreover, from reading her powerful account, I wished wholeheartedly that I could have saved Isobel. I don't view this negatively though, rather there is truth in crying being therapeutic and reading about another mother's experiences made me feel less alone.

A mother's, father's, sibling's, marital and societal perspective of grief are all considered in the latter half of the book. Georgiana's personal inner turmoil and the Monckton's strained marriage the months before, during and after the post-death 'firsts' are all covered. Personal coping strategies for life after Isobel's passing are acknowledged, including her strengthened faith. Isobel's father also contributes his important perspective to the book helping to illustrate how grieving is a very personal experience.

Jennie Salkeld's, (former Great Ormond Street Liaison nurse and author of chapter thirteen) contribution cannot be ignored;

in her role at Great Ormond Street she cared for patients and supported their families, including Isobel's, through hospital treatments and beyond. Her direct and uncomplicated way of communicating her understanding and advice, surrounding hospital experiences and grieving families, is quite simply striking. In this one chapter she clearly conveys how varied grieving experiences can be, advises on ways to support a grieving family, and explains that a grieving family's initial survival challenge will become a story of amazing resilience.

The republished edition of *Dear Isobel* has one additional chapter. Writing 26 years on from Isobel's passing, Georgiana briefly outlines her grief journey. Through throwing herself into mothering her younger daughter and her son, whilst fearing loving them too much, to finding a new purpose in life by discovering an aptitude for healing which helps her to understand that Isobel lives on through her. I found Georgiana's admission she no longer tells others she is a mother of three tough to read; I felt her initial perspective of openness benefitting everyone was more positive. However I do recommend *Dear Isobel* for being an easy to read book that covers a wide experience of topics and time. I doubt I'll ever forget Georgiana, and how she has come to terms with her daughter Isobel's death.

**Nataliya Hibberd**

**This book is available to borrow from the library.**

***Whatever you are doing, love yourself for doing it.***

# Week 188 by Maria Ahern



*"What are you doing ma?"*

Thinking.

*"Oh. That explains the funny face. What are you thinking about so hard?"*

I'm going to be speaking to a group of newly bereaved parents this evening son and I'm thinking about what I should say.

*"Want some help?"*

I think they do, yes.

*"Not them... numpty! You! Do YOU want some help?"*

Oh... yes son. Yes please.

*"Ok. So Stephen Hawking can help too... Oi Steve, come over here a minute."*

Are you actually with Stephen Hawking?

*"No mum. Just teasing you. But he can actually help... He was a very clever man you know."*

Yes, I kind of know that James.

*"So tell the parents this... 'Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet.. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.'"*

Is that from you James?

*"No. It's from Stephen."*

Ok. It's a difficult concept though son. When there is so much pain that you can't see beyond it. Looking up and searching for answers. How do you find the answers?

*"The answers to what?"*

Well, the main question is, 'Why?'

*"Hmmm...Yes. I remember you screaming that a lot, in the beginning."*

So do I.



*"But what would you do with the answer mum?"*

I don't know.

*"So there you go. It's a pointless question then, isn't it. As a lawyer you should know that it's pointless to ask a pointless question."*

James, people whose lives have been destroyed don't think so logically.

*"I know, I know. But that's the point. In physical terms, what has happened is a total catastrophe. Of course it is. Now, standing still in the rabble and asking, 'Why', isn't going to provide any solace is it. Nor is it going to help. You must set about trying to adjust and rebuild. And, if possible, try and do it quickly before the storm breaks you completely. You must try and give the parents hope, mum. Tell them that while their life will never be the same, they have 'a life' and, while they do, with them, their children live on. So, looking down isn't helpful. Just tell them to look up."*

Like in the piece we wrote a couple of years ago?

*"Yes, exactly like that.. erm, I think it was mainly my work, but ok, I'll let you take the credit."*

Thanks.

*"Anyway, back to our task. There's another bit of good advice from my new mate."*

Joking?

*"Joking... but the advice is sound. It is simply this:-*

*'For millions of years, mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination. We learned to talk and we learned to listen. Speech has allowed the communication of ideas, enabling human beings to work together to build the impossible. Mankind's greatest achievements have come about by talking, and its greatest failures by not talking... All we need to do is make sure we keep talking.'*

Now that I can do!

*"Don't we know it! So it's really very simple mum. Just tell them to keep talking, and what seems impossible will become possible. See? You do it and you can help others do it too."*

Oh James. I wish no-one ever had to learn to live in this state. I wish that there were no bereaved parents anywhere in the world and that my only job was to be your mummy.

*"It's still one of your jobs mum. Being a mummy doesn't end. But you have other jobs to do as well and you must keep on keeping on."*

Ok son. I think I know what I'm going to say now. Thank you.

*"You're welcome ma. Cool. Now I'm off to chat about the Big Bang theory..."*

What!?! You? Talking physics?

*"No silly! The TV series...! See ya later ma. Hope your weekend goes well."*

Thanks mate.

**Maria**

# What Helps Me

**1.** My son Adam died at 19 and he would be coming up to 30 in May this year. Three months after he died I set up an online memorial tribute site with Muchloved.com and that really helped me to write down my thoughts for several years. I was writing directly to him really but because I left the tribute 'open', I have received many thoughts and prayers from unknown people all over the world who have read his tribute and been touched by it, and him. These thoughts and lit candles from people we will never meet have given me such comfort over the years and often have brought tears to my eyes also! If you'd like to have a look it's [www.hunty.muchloved.com](http://www.hunty.muchloved.com). You need the music turned up as it's all relevant.

**2.** I completely changed my career from senior management business support to re-training as a bespoke florist. This all started because, like so many of us, I was taking fresh flowers to Adam's grave each week and it's almost as if he was pushing me in a new direction, working with beautiful flowers, foliage, nature in general. I have now had my own designer floristry business [www.saffronroseflowers.com](http://www.saffronroseflowers.com) for the last 7 years and specialise in wedding floristry - celebrating life and new beginnings. I also teach floristry workshops which are really popular.

**3.** I have gone back to yoga after a very long break. For the last 3 years I have been doing classes in Iyengar yoga which is not the easiest of yoga practices but it focuses the breath, the mind and the body. It has really helped in so many ways, particularly

focussing on the here and now in yoga practice i.e. not dwelling on the past or being anxious about the future. Dealing with 'now' focusses the mind and calms both mind and body.

**4.** My husband and I moved from the London suburbs to the Kent coast. Walking by the sea each day brings comfort, peace and calm - even though my son died by drowning. How this is I don't know but I don't question it, I just accept. Likewise Country walks with friends, whether TCf friends or not - just being at one with nature.

**5.** Becoming a TCF group leader and local contact several years ago - hugely rewarding when you see bereaved families being able to open up and share their grief with others and to have hope where there was none. It can be harrowing work and in fact I am sharing my role later this year as our Hythe group has grown so quickly it's been physically and emotionally exhausting too. But I know I have made a difference and that to me is a gift that I have been given and can pass on.

**Christina Ford**

*Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronisingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.*

**Nelson Mandela**

# What Helps Me Get Out of Bed

**My daughter, Katie Button, died quickly and unexpectedly, aged 36, of Meningitis W on the 17th December 2016. There are many things that help to get me out of bed since she has died:**

## **My responsibility to and love for others**

My remaining daughter and two grandchildren - doing my best to help them with their grief, they have lost a sister, an Aunt, I do not want to inflict further pain or distress upon them. Their love for me. My cats - they need my care. My colleagues, they depend on me to turn up for work.

## **My belief, faith, hope and trust in God**

I WILL see Katie again - what will I be able to tell her, show her, what will I have done to make her short life count. I want to make her proud of the things I will have done because of and despite my heartbreak. God's love, support and guidance to me - of which I see The Compassionate Friends as being part. Knowing others are surviving this grief, knowing other parents have gone and are going through similar experience, knowing I am not alone.

## **My love for Katie**

To make her life count through me - I try to do good in her name. From small acts of kindness to some volunteer charity work. Examples being - when out, picking up a piece of rubbish from the street and putting it in the bin, offering to help someone carry a bag to their car, smiling kindly at others, letting people out of

junctions etc. whilst driving, not rushing to get away when someone has started a conversation with me - giving more of me to others. I also do bucket collections for charity when I can. When I do these things I say in my head, 'This is for you Katie'. With the bucket collections I tell the organisers why I am doing it and in whose name it is. I do these things to honour Katie; Katie herself did so much for charity and animal welfare.

In combination these things are mostly successful in getting me out of bed each morning. However, as I know you will be only too aware, sometimes the sheer pain and heart break is so all consuming that nothing will then work. Thankfully I have only had a few days since Katie died that I have not got out of bed or have had to go back to bed and just curl up, cry, give in. These days are so so horrible but I believe necessary, so in a way they also get me through.

## **Pauline Bevan**

### **Grief**

*I must be gentle with myself  
at this time  
Not beat myself up thinking of  
things not done*

*For it takes endless patience  
to grieve  
And all my energy today  
just to breathe*

**Gina Claye from  
Don't Let Them Tell You How to Grieve**

# Things That Keep Me Going

- 1.** The dog - he is the same all the time - has not been affected by our loss and still wants to go for a walk, be fed and have company and is always, always pleased to see us!
- 2.** Being in beautiful natural landscapes - very early on we went to spend time just looking at beautiful countryside near us and it was soothing.
- 3.** Meeting others who have experienced losing a child. I didn't know how true that saying was that your address book will change - mine has a LOT of bereaved mums in it now! I have a particular friend who lost a daughter a few months after we lost our son and we meet up every couple of months or so and it is SO healing.
- 4.** Exercise - I play tennis and I can take out all my frustrations on that small yellow ball. It also gives me the chance to concentrate on something else which gives me a momentary break from the grief, plus the social side of seeing some friends and also getting some fresh air. There is something about using my body as well as my mind which helps too.
- 5.** Fundraising and charity work - I have organised a Hope Walk for Papyrus for the last 2 years. I make filled rolls for my local pub's quiz night in exchange for donations to them too. I have become an area contact and started a support group for TCF. Helping others helps me.
- 6.** Working less - although this was on the cards before Stephen died, it helps me to have the time to be able to just do nothing sometimes, to acknowledge my grief and to spend time thinking about Stephen.
- 7.** Friends and family - seeing more of these important people in my life and making more effort to do so as I now REALLY appreciate just how important they are!
- 8.** Therapy - I found myself bursting to talk to someone neutral a few months after Stephen's death. I went to see a psychotherapist for about a year and it really helped me understand my grief more and to give myself permission to handle it the way I need to and not to worry about pleasing anyone else. It's also given me the confidence to express my feelings much better.
- 9.** The TCF Facebook page which has been a huge source of support, and the retreat which I attended last year with my husband.
- 10.** Writing down memories and sorting out photos etc. - I was terrified of forgetting things so I have a book where I just jot down memories as they cross my mind. I'm no writer so it is very much in note form but it's nice to look back at from time to time. Also making photos montages to hang up round our house and sorting out the childhood drawings, videos, photos etc. has been therapeutic. Somehow it makes me feel a bit better that these are now organised so I can look at them when I want. I had no idea how precious they would become!
- 11.** Laughter - retaining a sense of humour has been essential.

**Liz Farnilo**

# Seija Knight, Love, Loss and Lament (CD)

'Art thou troubled? Music will calm thee.' These words by Handel are I would say for most, if not all of us, so very true. I was recently at Covent Garden Market, meeting a friend for lunch in the well area where musicians perform, when a young girl Seija Knight, started to sing. I was so entranced by the beauty, purity, kindness and calmness of her voice that I could neither talk to my friend (whom I hadn't seen for ages), eat my delicious lunch or drink my wine! She had the most lovely personality which definitely came over.

At the end I bought her CD which is, most appropriately titled Love, Loss and Lament.

She sings ten songs and includes Mozart's Laudate Dominum', Pie Jesu and, for all those of who have suffered the loss of a child, the very poignant Danny Boy, which while being about the terrible sadness of loss, also points out that there will be a coming together again. The Last Rose of Summer is also very affecting.

Although it is forty years since our son died, and our loss has been bearable for much of this time, the music has a very calming effect in times of great sadness (the child to whom we were to be godparents has, so sadly, just died pre-term at five months) but also when I am feeling stressed, and yet again, in times of happiness, so it covers all eventualities! In the notes to her CD she says that her childhood dream was of 'affecting the emotions of others' and this I think she has done very successfully. I hope, if you decide to borrow it from the library or buy it, it will do the same for you.



**Margaret Smart**



## Flowers for Lee

I take a lot of flowers to my son, Lee's grave: Tete-a-tete miniature double daffodils and snowdrops are what I call 'young' flowers because he was young, and blue primroses in the spring and blue Echinops (globe thistle) in the autumn because he had the most lovely blue eyes. Lee spent a lot of time in our garden and over the years, picking flowers, mostly from our garden, and taking them to him has helped me greatly.

**Eileen Foreman**





## Life After Loss

*Life after loss, I've read many a counselling book  
They quote it similar to divorce or wrong route in life took  
I have to disagree that grief for a lost life  
Is much different to bad choices or breaking up with your wife*

*You can choose a better route or meet another mate  
But when life is gone, you're out of time, it's too late  
I've experienced loss following illness, when it's expected  
Watching a loved one die, doesn't leave you unaffected*

*I recently lost my father and as grief falls into place  
I can close my eyes and still see his smiling face  
Being with him and making the most of every day  
I knew it would help me when he finally slipped away*

*Holding his hand, stroking his hair, whispering I love you  
Fearing the end would come soon, it was all I could do  
But I had the chance to show my love before his death  
Wanted him to be at peace when he took his final breath*

*My daughter's death was a tragedy, too shocking to bear  
Her young life taken too soon, wasn't right, wasn't fair  
It was difficult to grasp that she would never come home  
I would never see her face, or hear her voice on the phone*

*No chance to hold her close to me, or my love to declare  
Couldn't even say goodbye, because I wasn't there  
This is torture, a life snatched without you knowing  
It's mentally exhausting and difficult to keep going*

*This loss is not overcome, it stays and torments your soul  
Your heart broken forever, your life never again whole  
The only time I will find peace from this ongoing wretchedness  
Is when I am finally reunited with her, after my own death*

*You cannot quote redundancy or broken marriage as a loss  
I've experienced both, tough times, but life comes at a cost  
You lose faith, you lose friends and your own will to live  
It saps your energy, empties your feelings, nothing left to give*

**Jo Pearce**

# TCF One-to-One Support

## Would you like a grief companion/befriender?

Grieving for a child can be a lonely path. The whole philosophy behind TCF is putting bereaved parents in touch with each other to facilitate peer-to-peer support.

We are now launching a new service to provide more one-to-one support. So if you would like to be put in touch with another bereaved parent for some one-to-one support please let us know.

Your grief companion/befriender will be another volunteer bereaved parent who will offer you informal support and friendship. He or she will probably be a little longer from their bereavement. They are not formally trained but will offer you an opportunity to share your grief and experiences together, to 'walk alongside' one another and to be a listening ear and an understanding 'friend'. The contact you have may be by phone, in person, email and/or Skype/Face Time etc.- whatever suits you both.

**If you would like us to try and find you a grief companion/befriender please email the TCF office at [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)**

## Would you like to be a grief companion/befriender?

If you would like to be a grief companion/befriender please also get in touch. You would be providing informal support and friendship to another more recently bereaved parent. It offers you and another parent an opportunity to share your grief and experiences together, to 'walk alongside' one another and in this way be a listening ear and an understanding 'friend'. The contact may be by phone, in person, email and/or Skype/Face Time, whatever suits you both.

**If you feel you would like to do this please contact us at [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)**

## Find your own grief companion/befriender

If you would prefer to find your own grief companion/befriender we are starting a page in Compassion where people can write a short profile - just a few lines about you and your loss (maybe where you live, your child's name and age and how they died) and the kind of person you would like to communicate with. If you include an email address then other bereaved parents can contact you directly.

**For example:** "Hello. My name is Jane. I live in London and lost my son, John, aged 19, two years ago in a car accident. I'm finding life very difficult. I would like to befriend someone who has lost a child of a similar age. It would be great if we were near enough to meet but I'm also happy to email and talk on the phone. My email address is XXXX."

These profiles would only be circulated within TCF to other bereaved parents.

**Sue Hughes (TCF Vice Chair)**



## The Heartstone: Making a (mini) pilgrimage

**Both Martin Sheen's film, *The Way*, and the BBC TV series before *Easter*, *Pilgrimage: The Road to Santiago*, show one of the reasons people undertake the increasingly popular Camino to Compostela in the aftermath of bereavement.**

While I certainly feel the attraction of such pilgrimages (I hope to do the Camino myself shortly) and see the point of taking oneself completely out of one's normal environment to process grief, I want to write here about how making a walk my wife, Margaret, and I do several times a week, both together and alone, into something meaningful enough to be called a pilgrimage, and, I hope, may encourage others to do similarly with their favourite walks.

Shortly before our younger son died on 21 November 2000, we had acquired a puppy, Dora. Even in the depths of grief in the immediate aftermath of Hugh's

death, Dora had to be taken out twice a day, which was a blessing when all we wanted to do was hunker down. We live just behind the Promenade at the western edge of Portobello, 'Edinburgh's Seaside', where the Figgate Burn enters the Firth of Forth and so there were few days we didn't go on to the beach, extending about a mile in either direction from our house. It became a place of healing.

Turning right (south-east) we can walk to the Joppa end and from there it's about a quarter of a mile inland to Portobello Cemetery where Hugh is buried. It's a lovely cemetery and being able to walk to Hugh's grave has been a comfort, but it's not easy to walk unimpeded along the beach in that direction, except at the lowest of tides because of groynes (barriers). So you usually have to keep coming out of autopilot to calculate whether to clamber over them (while lifting Dora), or to risk getting feet wet round their seaward end or to walk up towards the Prom and get through the gaps at the landward end. It's also the more popular bit of the beach and there is more chance of meeting someone, which, given our fragile state of mind at first wasn't always what we wanted in the early days.

So more often we would turn left (north-west) from the house and walk on what is the less frequented bit of the beach. It feels wilder with more seabirds and waders and the sand unbroken apart from a few scatterings of boulders, so that one can walk deep in thought, without much fear of walking into something, and stretches at low tide as far as the seawall protecting Seafeld Sewage Works (one of the reasons this is a less popular destination).

Sometimes we would walk that far, but, at high tide, we would walk on the Prom instead and would look down, about three quarters of the way along, at a little indentation ('cove' seems too grand a word) with a patch of shingle and a few boulders, which only got submerged at the highest spring tides. It looked interesting and eventually we made our way to this little beach at low tide to poke about the flotsam and jetsam. One of the boulders, slightly detached from the rest, was perfect for sitting on and it became our habit to pause there on the walks to have a few moments contemplating the sea or remembering Hugh, while Dora would sniff around for disgusting things to eat.

After a few visits, we noticed that this stone was heart-shaped and so christened it the 'Heartstone', and the beach, the 'Heart Beach'. Then we spotted a vertical line running across the stone and so thought of it as a broken heart, giving it a significance relevant to our bereaved state. Finally we discerned a faint horizontal line, making a cross, and so it became, inevitably for us as Catholics, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On some occasions we visited, there would be stones and shells left on it by the receding tides or dropped by seabirds. They looked like offerings and we began at first to place either a stone or a shell

in memory of Hugh, and then gradually added more – for ourselves, our older son, Thomas, our two dogs, Dora and her daughter Bella, and the cat, Fluffy (Hugh's last birthday present). Sometimes we would place others for people in our thoughts and prayers at that time. We don't do this every time as we don't want it to become an ossified ritual, but nevertheless, even now both dogs have died, we still walk there frequently.

I don't know whether anyone could do similarly with a walk they do regularly but I am very grateful to have experienced the gradual unfolding of this as a meaningful destination on our doorstep, investing what could have been a pleasant but routine walk with the significance of a pilgrimage. The only drawback has been that I came to feel it would be irreverent to sit on the Sacred Heart and none of the other boulders has proved so accommodating.

**Ian Campbell**



# Compassion Magazine Contacts

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

## Articles, poems and letters to the Editor

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

## Memory Corner

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

## Support in Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters

The Compassionate Friends SIBBS,  
Kilburn Grange, Priory Park Road, London  
NW6 7UJ

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

## TCF Catharine Pointer Memorial Library

The Compassionate Friends Postal Library  
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T: 01634 666353, E: [library@tcf.org.uk](mailto:library@tcf.org.uk)

## To find out more about TCF visit

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

## Leave a legacy to The Compassionate Friends

Help us to continue to support others after the loss of a child of any age from any cause.

## Final Date for Contributions is 18th JULY 2018 for the next issue of Compassion (Autumn 2018)

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.

## Donating membership enquiries

The Compassionate Friends  
National Office, Kilburn Grange,  
Priory Park Road, London NW6 7UJ  
T: 0345 120 3785, E: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

## Talking Compassion

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

*Beautifully read -  
always wonderful to listen to.*



The  
Compassionate  
Friends