



The  
Compassionate  
Friends



Supporting bereaved parents and their families



Compassion & TCF News  
Summer 2019

50th Anniversary  
Commemorative  
Edition



Your greatest gift from your child is the gift of love. Love is immortal, love is eternal, love is not a passive force within our lives. We can transform this world of ours, which is often so sick and sad, with the gift of love our children have given us.

Simon Stephens

# Board of Trustees and Other Officers

## Board of Trustees

---

### **Chair - Maria Ahern**

E: mariaahern.tcf@gmail.com

### **Vice Chair - Susan Hughes**

E: shughes@webmd.net

## Additional Trustees

---

### **Gina Claye**

E: compassioneditor@tcf.org.uk

### **Sheila Phillips**

E: sheila.phillips@zen.co.uk

### **Andrew Miller**

E: andrewmillertcf@gmail.com

### **George Burn**

E: georgermburn@gmail.com

### **Margaret Brearley**

E: zachor@btconnect.com

### **Gill Hardy**

E: gill.hardy@gkpharmacomm.co.uk

### **Nigel Taylor**

E: nigel.taylor77@btinternet.com

### **Sue Higgins**

suehiggins15@me.com

### **Jen Hughes**

E: jen\_hughes88@hotmail.com

### **Melian Mansfield**

melian.mansfield@btinternet.com

## Other Officers

---

### **Public Relations**

media@tcf.org.uk

### **International Liaison - Margaret Pringle**

E: tcf.uk.international@gmail.com

### **Web Administration**

webadmin@tcf.org.uk

## Other Contacts

---

### **Chief Executive Officer - Carolyn Brice**

E: carolyn@tcf.org.uk

### **Events Coordinator - Sharon Rose**

E: events@tcf.org.uk

### **Finance and Administration**

Buz de Villiers - E: buz@tcf.org.uk

Charité Nkusi - E: charite@tcf.org.uk

### **National Office:**

E: info@tcf.org.uk

Office: 0345 120 3785

### **Helpline Manager - Ruth Mercier**

E: helpline@tcf.org.uk

Helpline: 0345 123 2304

www.tcf.org.uk

 @tcf.org.uk

 @TCFcharityUK

### **Head of Fundraising - Stephen Armstrong**

E: stephen@tcf.org.uk

# Contents

Reflections from the Editor .....	4
Thoughts from the current Chair .....	5
A word from our CEO .....	6
Nostalgia ain't what it used to be by Joe Lawley 2002.....	7
My Dream by Iris Lawley 2002.....	8
Betty Rattigan, A Tribute from Joe Lawley 2004 .....	9
Legacy of love: getting to know TCF's founder, Dr Simon Stephens 2011 .....	10-11
50 Years of The Compassionate Friends by Shona Robertson.....	12
It really is all right to laugh again by Wendy Pye1992 .....	13
Poem, Illusion? by Audrey England 1992 .....	13
Thoughts from the Chair 2008.....	14
Poem, TCF Residential Weekend from TCF Newsletter 2017 by Irene Lee .....	15
The Grief of Men by Jimmy Edmonds 2018.....	16-17
Say Their Name 2013.....	17
Online Support Development 2019 .....	18-19
"Sometimes sad is very big. It's everywhere. All over me." 2016 .....	20
Book Reviews .....	21
The Compassionate Friends Timeline .....	22-30
TCF Creed .....	31
Compassion Magazine Contacts .....	Back pg

**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.**

TCF gratefully acknowledges all contributions to Compassion, including any from our TCF friends overseas and those for which we have not been able to find the copyright. Opinions expressed in Compassion by individuals are not necessarily those of TCF, the Editor or the Editorial Team.

**Editorial Team:**

Gina Claye, Mary Hartley and Carolyn Brice. Designed by Sam at Forbes Creative, printed by SBS Printers Ltd.

**Founder:** The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE. **President:** The Countess Mountbatten of Burma, **Patrons:** Baroness Sue Miller Of Chithorne Dorner, Dr Ann Dent, His Honour Christopher Compston, Anna Hunter, Michael Rosen, **Sibling Patrons:** Ruthie Henshall, Hon Timothy Knatchbull, **Honorary Associate Members of TCF:** Dr Gordon Riches.

Compassion is published by The Compassionate Friends (Ltd) - supporting bereaved parents and their families.  
Company No 04029535, Charity No 1082335 | Registered in England and Wales.  
© 2019 The Compassionate Friends (UK).



# Reflections from the Editor



## Dear Friends

**This last weekend I was at a gathering: the warm, welcoming Scottish Gathering. As you know this year is the 50th anniversary of our wonderful TCF and one of the things we did to commemorate this was to plant a tree - a snake bark maple - in the Heather Garden, Perth in memory of our children. A section of this park has been created especially for The Compassionate Friends and it is a beautiful, peaceful place to remember our children.**

A tree is such an apt memorial to our children. When it is planted you can no longer see the roots. But these invisible roots are what supports and sustains the tree just as our love for our children and our children's love for us, though invisible, are what supports and sustains us. Each spring, buds will form on this tree just as, after our winter of grief, buds of hope will form and grow in us, so that we, like the tree, will be able to branch out into new life.

What was the seed from which TCF grew? Fifty years ago Simon Stephens, a young chaplain, brought together two sets of bereaved parents, Joe and Iris Lawley, and Bill and Joan Henderson. They later met with another bereaved mother, Betty Rattigan, and decided to pass on the comfort and support they had received from each other to other bereaved parents. And so The Society of The Compassionate Friends was born.

During these fifty years, The Compassionate Friends has grown in the UK and has also taken root in many other countries. This year, at our 50th anniversary commemorative gathering, we are looking forward to greeting TCF members from abroad.

In this, our Jubilee commemorative edition of Compassion, we have shared with you poems and prose from past editions of our unique magazine written by bereaved parents for bereaved parents, as well as some of the key events in the years since the founding of The Compassionate Friends in 1969.

Dear friends, whether you are newly bereaved or have weathered many springs since your loss, I know you will join with me in remembering with thanks those early pioneers and all the volunteers who throughout the years have given freely of their time and energy, and still do, to ensure that our organisation of Compassionate Friends will continue to grow from strength to strength. We look forward to welcoming those of you who, in turn, will become volunteers, supporting and sustaining newly bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents, and planting within them through compassionate love and understanding, strength, courage and hope for the future.

**With my love,  
Gina (Nikki and Robin's Mum)**



# Thoughts from the Chair



Maria Ahern at Cadogan Hall

**50 years ago a small group of bereaved parents was brought together by a young Chaplin, now Canon Stephens, who recognised the enormous power of shared grief. They didn't know each other before their sons died, but strangers become friends very quickly in this world of grief. That is really the essence of this extraordinary organisation and how it came to be formed.**

I have had the privilege to meet one of this group, Iris Lawley. She explained to me how, (at a time when there was no internet, no instant communication, no social media), and at a time when their own grief was so very raw, this small group set out to comfort others similarly bereaved. "How did you do it"? I asked. "We just did", she told me. "We knew we had to, so we did". Unannounced, they knocked on doors and offered comfort and compassion. She vividly described to me the relief of the families; relief that they were not alone. Joe Lawley wrote some years later:- "We talked about an organisation which would try to help other bereaved parents. But the number of child deaths in the UK was dauntingly large — would we be able to cope with what might become an overwhelming demand for our time. We decided to try". I am grateful that they tried and even more grateful that they succeeded, though I suspect that they didn't imagine it growing to be an international charity helping thousands of bereaved families.

After meeting Iris, I reflected on how much fortitude was needed to carry this grief for 50 years. I thought about my own mother-in-law whose daughter, Jane, died 50 years before we lost our James. Of course I had always known that my mother-in-law had lost a child but I had never really understood her pain. Nor did I ever want to. "What do I do now?", I asked. The unimaginable had become reality and as I looked at her with different eyes, I turned to her for guidance. "How can I carry on without him?", I asked another

bereaved friend. "One day at a time" was the honest reply, "because you have no other choice".

I reflected on how Terry and I had been comforted by other bereaved friends in those early days. I hadn't considered how many bereaved parents I knew and I felt a little ashamed by that realisation. I had never given enough thought to the courage it takes to continue living in a world without your child. I understood more as I spoke to them and I was grateful that they had been able to pass on what they knew. But who do you turn to when you are lost in a world that you don't understand?

In TCF I met people who understood and who shared a passion for helping other bereaved parents. They gave me strength, hope and the ability to slowly acclimatise to my new life. "I can't believe that I have survived five months" I remember saying to another mum. "Yes", she said. "You have survived 5 months and you will survive another five, and another five until you start counting in years". I just smiled at her. I couldn't imagine "years" even though I had seen it in my own family. I didn't understand how a broken heart could continue to work for "years". But it did, and it continues to work as I find myself now in the fifth year.

We were consumed by pain and despair after James, our amazing 22 year old son, died. Like Betty Rattigan's Jimmy, James is our only child. See? I said "is" not "was". Through TCF, Terry and I have learned how to continue our relationship with James. We are both passionate about the work we do with bereaved parents and I was deeply honoured when I was asked to become the Chair of Trustees in 2017 and to take my place in what I call the "Chain of Compassion". It's a powerful image; all of us linked by this very unique bond. I didn't choose to be here and I would change it in an instant if I could, but that option isn't available to me. I therefore chose to follow the example of Canon Stephens, and the Henderson, Lawley and Rattigan families and to help continue the work that they started 50 years ago. I am so proud to be a part of this charity and to have been involved in commemorating this Jubilee and I am deeply grateful to those who took their place before me and who gave me so much encouragement and support. The power of shared grief is, indeed, enormous.

Billy Henderson, Kenneth Lawley and Jimmy Rattigan will be spoken about often this year. And so they should. Just as our James continues to be a part of our lives, they will be remembered 50 years on, by people who never met them, as we commemorate the enormous achievement of their parents and this truly extraordinary and marvellous organisation.

**With warm wishes, Maria Ahern**



# A word from our CEO



## Dear Friends

I hope you enjoy this 50th Anniversary commemorative edition of Compassion and TCF News. We wanted to publish a magazine you could keep as a memento and that would showcase some of the best writing from and key events in our wonderful charity's first 50 years. This has been lovingly put together by Trustee, Gina Claye, and TCF's librarian, Mary Hartley. Of course, we could not include every event or every piece of writing over the 5 decades, but we hope to have given a flavour of the very beginnings of our charity and its development in the years since its founding.

Thank goodness I found TCF so soon after my daughter, Rosie, died in 2004. She was 9 and collapsed suddenly with a fatal brain aneurysm. I started attending a wonderful TCF group in South West London, then run by Margaret, Andrea, Rita and Sonia – joined later by Sarah. Like for many of you, that group and the people I met there, were a lifeline. I remember one bereaved mother saying she liked being in a group as 'no one changed the subject'. I've never forgotten this and the many other wise words from group members that helped me in the following months and years. I was also a member of Meeting Point (what is now the Online Community Forum) – I didn't post anything for years, but reading posts from others became an obsession and I would check the Forum many times a day for months – possibly years – to know that my feelings and reactions were 'normal' in the abnormal world into which I had been catapulted. I would wait avidly every quarter for my copy of Compassion – and as soon as it arrived run upstairs to find a quiet spot (usually the loo!) to read it from cover to cover. I would always find a few pieces that resonated with me and gave me comfort that I wasn't alone with the unbearable pain and grief that I was not sure I would ever survive.

Fast forward 5 years, and I became a volunteer on TCF's Helpline – under the wonderful training and guidance of Ann Holloway. And then in 2012, when the national office moved to London, I started working for TCF in the stunning Jessica's Heart in Deptford. What a wonderful place that was to be and we are hugely grateful to the Jessica Mathers Trust for allowing us to base our charity there for 5 years until our move to a larger space in Kilburn in summer 2017.

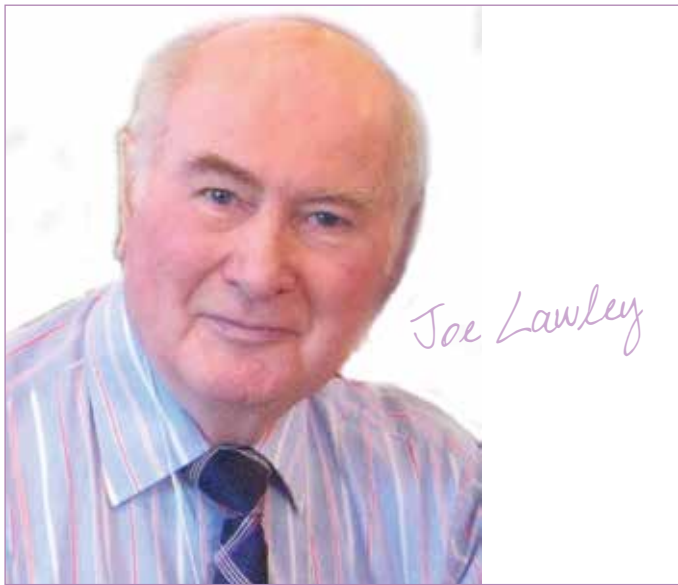
When I was asked to take on the role of CEO in the summer of 2016 I had clear aims and ambitions for TCF and have tried, with our hard-working small staff team and volunteers, to work towards making tangible progress on them all...

- Every bereaved parent and family should, if they choose, be able to access support from TCF
- To create an environment where our volunteers feel valued and well supported in this vital work offering support, understanding and hope to others
- To continue to grow and develop our support and services to bereaved parents and their families
- To promote the visibility of TCF nationally so that it is the first charity that parents and the public turn to after the loss of a son or daughter of any age from any cause.

Our charity's activities and future plans are all within our Annual Report – available from our website at [www.tcf.org.uk/annualreport](http://www.tcf.org.uk/annualreport). Please do take a look to see what we have been up to and what we plan!

In this special 50th Anniversary Year, I want to finish by saying how proud and privileged I feel to work for Compassionate Friends – with all our wonderful volunteers and burgeoning staff team. In the last couple of years we have welcomed Stephen, our Fundraiser, and Sharon, our Events Coordinator – and they have joined Ruth, managing our Helpline and Charité and Buz in the engine room of the national office. If you are thinking about volunteering with us please do get in touch – we are always looking for parents, siblings and grandparents wanting to make a difference to others. I feel absolutely passionately about the work that we do and hope to continue to build on the firm foundations of this charity in the years to come to ensure that all bereaved parents and families can access the unique peer support and friendship that The Compassionate Friends offer.

**Sending you all love and strength, Carolyn**



## TCF's Founding Chairman puts the word 'grow' into 'growing old'

Two delightful incidents happened to me at an otherwise stormy AGM. Some time after I had spoken at the podium, a young man described me as 'the old gentleman'. No beef about that, I was 74 years and four days old on the day of the meeting. Then a young woman got to her feet to speak about abseiling down cliffs as a way of fundraising; and she asked where I'd be..... not at the top of a cliff for sure! I may be old but I'm not daft.

'Old gentleman' is an improvement on 'old dinosaur', and although abseiling is no longer an attractive option, Iris and I, and friends, have done our share of fund raising through the years. We held a Christmas Fayre, where Simon Stephens persuaded local shopkeepers into giving us, amongst other things, oranges so that some young ladies could parade about as Nell Gwynnes. We made and sold soft toys, held jumble sales, leased charity shops, ran fashion shows, dances, quizzes. We auctioned Frankie Howard's tie, Cilla Black's necklace, a picture painted by Simon's boss, the Bishop of Coventry. We also donated our own money to a fledgling TCF, encouraging it to thrive and grow. We gave it a worldwide name, a logo and a charity number.

In more recent times parachuting out of aeroplanes, as young people say, 'been there, done that, got the tee shirt - or as this 'old gentleman' would put it, 'I've

done more fundraising than you've had hot dinners.' What did we do with the money? We were able to spend all donations on bereaved parents, helping with transport costs, bringing back the body of one poor lady's son to Coventry for burial from another part of the country, giving presents to the children of poor parents, paying gas bills, taking flowers when visiting recently bereaved families. There was no need to wait for referrals; we just found out who they were and went to see them.

We put television sets in children's wards, aquariums and rocking horses in the play areas where parents were waiting anxiously to hear whether their children had leukaemia or other dreadful illnesses. We wrote to bereaved parents all round the country, travelled to set up other groups at our own expense, gave talks on the radio, to newspapers, to professionals, church groups, mothers' groups, wrote publications and met every week. We virtually gave our lives to TCF, because as Bill Henderson, one of the other founding parents and now deceased, said, 'The Compassionate Friends is our memorial to our dead children.'

I hope the young abseiling woman is careful and safe. Whoever you are, you seemed a very nice person who has also experienced the loss of a beloved child. Remember that you are also someone's beloved daughter. You might even try raising money without jumping off cliffs someday.

**With love, Joe Lawley**

## The Coming of Wisdom with Time

*Though leaves are many, the root is one;  
Through all the lying days of my youth  
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;  
Now I may wither into the truth.*

**William Butler Yeats from TCF Newsletter Winter 2002**



'Every day isn't a step away from Kenneth, it's a step closer to Kenneth.'

Iris Lawley

**Kenneth died following a road accident where he was knocked off his bicycle on his way to school, leaving me in despair and crippled with grief. Every night he came to me in a dream with his head bandaged, saying, 'My head is sore, Mum.' I awoke distraught every morning and prayed for him to come to me and give a sign to let me know that he was now safe and happy.**

After a very long and painful first year I had this dream - more than a dream, it was so vivid and clear. Kenneth was standing by the window in the hallway of our house in the school uniform in which we had him buried, he so loved his school. He no longer had bandages on his head and was just as he was in life, smiling his beautiful smile. He said, 'Look Mum, you don't have to worry about me anymore, I'm fine. You know, Mum, I don't have to go to school anymore.' I replied, "Don't you son?" And he said, 'No, because now I know everything.' This has helped me through all these years without my beloved son.

The second visit came when I was rushed into hospital in an emergency following complications at the birth of my baby, Lisa, 22 months after Kenneth died. Lisa was drowning in the afterbirth and as they were sticking needles into me, I heard Kenneth say, 'Take my hand, Mum,' and I felt the pressure of his hand as he took mine. I know he saved us both, and Lisa, who never knew him in life, has a special closeness with him and she is his spitting image. These are the only two times in 32 years he has been back but on these occasions he saved both my sanity and my life.

**Iris Lawley MBE, parent co-founder of The Compassionate Friends.**



# Betty Rattigan, A Tribute from Joe Lawley

# 2004

**It is perhaps fitting when we are beginning to talk about an International Council for The Compassionate Friends, that we should speak, however sadly, about Betty Rattigan, a dear friend who was involved at the very beginning and one of our Founder Members. I say 'sadly' because Betty has died. Betty leaves behind a legacy of tireless work for TCF at the outset and for a considerable time afterwards.**

Betty and Jim's only child, Jimmy, was killed in a motor scooter accident when he was seventeen years old. Jimmy was a gifted academic boy who was, like his father, fascinated by motorcycles and cars. On one occasion, under the supervision of Jim, he was tuning his scooter and as the evening drew on, his friend unsuccessfully tried to start his machine. In the way of friends Jimmy offered to take his pal home. Off they set with his father's reminder, 'Take care now', ringing in his ears.

Tragically there was an accident. Jimmy was injured and later died in hospital. His friend thankfully was unhurt. Betty and Jim came to know Simon Stephens in the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital, and Betty responded to Simon's invitation to meet with other bereaved parents on the 28th January 1969. Betty was joined by Bill and Joan Henderson, Iris and Joe Lawley and the Revd Simon Stephens. Together they founded the Society of The Compassionate Friends, as it was then called.

During the early days when we were sorting out a strategy to get in touch with recently bereaved parents as soon as possible, we settled on the direct approach - home visits by couples. Betty said almost immediately, 'I cannot do that, but I'll type, take shorthand and be the secretary!' This necessary skill was so important, being able to deal with all the correspondence which amazingly quickly soon made its way to our 'office', housed at Simon's flat in Columba Close Coventry. Betty typed the newsletter, which we started almost at the outset, using the old Gestetner method. We were determined to become known!

Her next big project was the typing prior to the printing of two documents of 'The Aims and Purpose of The Society of The Compassionate Friends' and 'The Operating Procedures of The Society of The Compassionate Friends'. Jim then joined us on our early committee and Betty felt able by this time to make house visits with him. After the first four years we were all suffering burnout, and stood down from the initial committee. Jim took on the post of Vice Chairman of the Coventry Branch which also served as the National Committee, at which time Betty enjoyed a well-earned break, handing over the secretary's job to Daphne Bayford from Rugby.

Active for many further years in the now renamed 'The Compassionate Friends', Betty and Jim finally retired and relocated to a smaller house in Coventry. It came as a dreadful shock when Jim died of a heart attack in the 1990s. We had continued to see them from time to time, but after Jim's death, Betty became almost reclusive. Even earlier in 1981 when we mounted the plaque in The Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital commemorating TCF's founding there, she was modest and reticent about the inclusion of her name, but we persuaded her! Betty will be with her son and husband now. Goodbye, Betty and thank you for everything and for your part in making The Compassionate Friends work.

**With much love, Joe and Iris Lawley MBE, Parent co-founders of The Compassionate Friends**

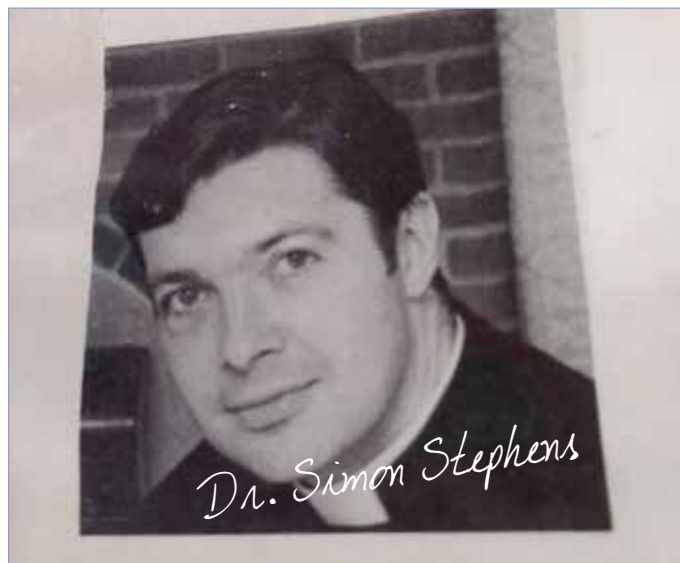


Who was I angry with all those years ago? Angry with God. If God was almighty, surely he could control the situation. Why did he permit a drunken driver to mow through the family car? Surely somewhere along the line he could have made the lorry driver drive into a ditch, why did he choose that road and our car?

Then I was angry with the emergency and medical services. Surely they could have saved at least one life apart from mine. And what about the lorry driver? If I could have killed him I would have. The courts sentenced him to two years imprisonment, six months for each life, which was reduced on appeal to three months. I saw him 14 months later in an Esso tanker driving through our town. So anger was a major problem in my life. Then I moved on, still nursing my anger, to guilt. I wonder how many of you find that guilt is squeezing your heart?

Guilt, because my parents did not wish to go to that meeting. 'We don't want to go, Simon'. My mother was a French nursing sister and had had a heavy day on the wards. My father had had a busy day and wanted to work in the garden. The evenings were getting lighter; rhododendrons were out; spring was in the air. But I said, 'We've got to go otherwise we shall not be accepted for our grades for university next year'. So I almost opened the car's door and pushed my family in and within half an hour of doing that, four of them were dead. So guilt certainly squeezed my heart as much as anger.

Initially, after I buried my family, I had a great chip on my shoulder. I was a thoroughly unpleasant person. Nobody wanted to know me. The educator said, 'Grow up and forget'; the parish clergy said, 'Say your prayers and you'll be fine'. I wanted to climb to the top of a mountain and scream my family's names, but I was denied that and told to 'carry on'. Grief is a very powerful emotion in our lives. It is the price we pay for love. I loved my family dearly and always will; they always play a major role in my life – but I believe that if we can exorcise from our hearts anger and guilt then the crown of thorns which is unresolved grief becomes the victor's laurels. The loveliest people I've ever met have been men and women who've been to hell and back again because they have buried their dearly loved children and have found comfort



and strength in TCF. They've been able to put their hands out in the darkness to others who are lost in the deep darkness of that valley.

I also believe that grief can be creative – when we begin to do the hard work of grieving. My doctor said, 'Simon, Valium will help. There's no need for you to cry – take Valium'. But we all know that when we are walking through the Valley of the Shadow, when we shed our tears, we are purging the wound of grief and we are beginning to find an area of healing in our lives. So as we go through our valley, we consider our anger, what we are doing with it or what it is doing to us.

I suspect that many of us have said to ourselves, 'We could have prevented the death from taking place. If we had done this, done that, those whom we love would be with us now'. Some of us, when we think like this, never move on to the next step in the valley, and if we don't we will never see the butterflies dancing on the valley's rim. We have to move forward. But many of us can only do that when TCF is holding us by the hand.

Anger, guilt, disbelief, rehabilitation. Some professionals say, 'Simon, grief is six weeks long and if after six weeks people are still grieving, then they need to see a psychiatrist'. But each one of us has a different valley to walk and for some the valley is life-long, while for some it is a much shorter distance. But we do not have to walk alone in that valley. As

our creed states, 'We do not walk alone; we are The Compassionate Friends; we walk together'.

How do we enter the process of rehabilitation? Well, I believe in the 'Legacy of Love'. Your greatest gift from your child is the gift of love. Love is immortal, love is eternal, love is not a passive force within our lives. We can transform this world of ours, which is often so sick and sad, with the gift of love the children have given us.

What are you doing with your child's legacy of love? TCF world-wide has taught me that the legacy of love is being put to good use. I've been greatly humbled and heartened travelling the world as I do, whenever the Navy says I can, that bereaved parents, instead of holding their child's love and clasping it to their hearts, have opened their hands, taken the legacy of love and shared it with parents who are walking through the valley of the shadow.

We all have tremendous potential. I know from my own experience when I buried my family that for a long time nobody wanted to know me. I was an emotional cripple in so many ways. I was so bitter and twisted. But the community in which I eventually found myself in Africa took me to one side, sat me down and for the first time, 18 months later, let me talk through my anger and guilt and they let me shed my tears.

Are you stuck on stage one? 'God why me... Why the church... Why did the world... Why did medicine fail my child? Are you angry with the person who took your child's life, or have you moved on perhaps one step and find yourself looking at guilt in your life? Every time you see an empty chair or a photograph, do you find them an indictment? Have you moved on beyond your guilt? And if you've moved on beyond both, have you come to terms with your child's death? And have you begun to invest their legacy of love? When did you last see butterflies at the end of the valley?

Every day of my life I talk to my family. When I was anchored in Sydney harbour, I went up in the early hours of the morning to get some fresh air from the smells of a naval ship. A sailor found me talking to my family on the flight deck and said, 'Padre, are you OK?' and I said, 'I'm talking to my family'. He looked astonished and I said, 'They are with us here this morning'. Do you talk to those you have lost? If you do, you're well on the road to rehabilitation and acceptance. Do you discuss with them all the major decisions you make? Certainly before I joined the

Royal Navy I said to my family, 'Do you know where I'm going next? I'm going to join the Royal Navy!' and I'm sure they were as amazed as I.

You know the church has some marvellous phrases – 'the whole company of heaven', 'the whole crowd of witnesses'. Our children are with us; the legacy of love, which our children have given today, is given so we may transform tomorrow. Our children have an active role in our lives. And we betray them, without any doubt, if we do not invest that love in the coming years.

I have been humbled beyond measure by my wandering around TCF world-wide. I have met people whose hearts have been broken, whose marriages have fallen apart, people who have on their hearts suicide attempts – and yet they have been able to work through their guilt and through their anger. They realise their children are with them and they have made a significant contribution to the beauty of the world in which we live.

The Compassionate Friends, world-wide, is a monument to our children. We represent every race, every culture and every colour. In Africa I went to a mud hut on the shores of Lake Victoria and there was a TCF logo stuck on the mud door. We are a large family and I believe that together we can make it, for their sake.

**Simon Stephens**

**From TCF East Rand Newsletter, August 2011**

## This Burden

*I can not carry this burden alone  
The road is too steep and the pain too great  
I shall only get to the top of the hill  
If I am able to lean on a firm shoulder whose strength  
Lies in the reality of the feet which bear its weight.*

*The sharing of grief is the only solution  
To the crisis that surrounds bereavement in our age.  
To share a person's sorrow is to accept their reality  
And to acknowledge the fact  
That none of us is immune from death.*

**Rev Dr Simon Stephens**



# 50 Years of The Compassionate Friends

**26th May 1968 is a day that I remember very clearly, even though I was only six years old. I remember the sun was shining, but our Coventry home was in darkness, the curtains were shut tight. The back room was full of grown-ups who were all very upset. I remember not knowing where to put myself, I couldn't even have a bath, as it was full of flowers!**

**My older brother Billy had died, but I didn't really know what that meant.**

Over the following months, things started to change in the Henderson household. We seemed to have a lot of visitors, namely Iris and Joe. We're having a meeting for 'The Society' I was told. I didn't have a clue what 'The Society' was, but never mind, it seemed to keep the grown-ups busy.

My memories of 'The Society' are mainly of the fund raising. Preparations for the Christmas Fete always seemed to take weeks, maybe even months. Tablets of soap were wrapped up and decorated with fancy ribbon, and covers for toilet rolls were knitted in abundance. These were obviously 'best sellers'!

One year my Mum produced dolls dressed in national costumes, which she had knitted. She was so proud of them, I think she really wanted to keep them, but onto the stall they went. My Dad, he was always in charge of the bottle stall. The 'star prize' was his very special, home-made junk bottle. The making of this involved paying a visit to the 'off licence' for a fancy shaped bottle, onto which he glued small items of tat. All your keepsakes had to be hidden away, otherwise next time you saw them they would be stuck to this bottle and sprayed with gold paint! I dread to think what the lucky recipient of this 'star prize' actually did with it.

One year, Anita Harris was appearing at the Coventry Theatre, and she came along to open the Fete. I remember that being very exciting. What was all the fund raising for? Well, Mum wrote many letters, always on best quality writing paper with matching envelopes.

I also remember calling in on Simon, this was quite a chore..... He only had one chair! I can't imagine what he thought when a family of five turned up on his doorstep!

Fast forward fifty years. My mother, Joan, is now approaching her ninetieth year, and is a Great Grandmother. Sadly in 2011 she was diagnosed with a terrible illness that has robbed her of her memory. In a weirdly wonderful way, she has been relieved of her grief, as she no longer remembers that Billy has died. My sisters and I now take responsibility for that. Mum can now be left in peace to smile... as she does every day.

**by Shona Robertson**



**Billy Henderson,  
8th Dec 1955 – 26th May 1968,  
tucked away in our hearts forever.**

*It was the day, my son,  
When I knew you would die.  
It was the day I asked Simon to pray for you.  
It was the day he said, "and for Billy"  
It was the first day of  
The Compassionate Friends*

**Joe Lawley - TCF parent co-founder**

**Whilst trying to decide what I was to write, I happened to have telephone conversations with three bereaved mums who all said the same thing - 'Do you know, I believe I laughed - properly - for the first time the other day - what a relief!' These words took me back to Harriet Sarnoff Schiff's excellent book 'The Bereaved Parent' in which she says:**

*"One of the major obstacles is this inability to accept pleasure. It is almost a feeling of 'how could I laugh?' or 'how will I ever laugh again now that my child is dead?'. Yet, enjoyment is, after all, one of the most important survival tools we possess. It is one of the things we can do in our fight to endure after the loss of a child. We took our first big plunge back into the world of enjoyment with a weekend trip to Las Vegas four months after Robby died. I remember sitting in a nightclub listening to the uproariously funny routine of a well known comedian and laughing until my sides ached. The laughter and its intensity felt also cleansing. Certainly I paid for my pleasure because, once we returned to our hotel room, I cried as violently as I had laughed just hours earlier. But the important thing, then, was that a step had been taken, a beginning made."*

This reminded me so much of the first occasion that we 'laughed' again after Mark had died. Four months after his death we were invited to a surprise farewell party for a friend who was returning to New Zealand the following day. We viewed the occasion with fear and trepidation because we were still very much in the throes of early grief and 'parties' were the last thing on our list of activities, yet we wanted to wish our friend well. The evening among friends was a huge success and, believe me, I have never laughed so much before or since. It was a complete release of four months of stress and tension - but it taught us that - yes - it was all right to laugh again - it was not disloyal - it did not hinder our grieving process - in fact, it cleared away a lot of tension which enabled us to move forward a little.

That is one kind of laughter; the other is the more gentle, truly-felt laughter of happiness and peace - the laughter described by those three mums on the

telephone. They had managed, at last, to find some true meaning in life again. It can and does happen - if we allow it to. Just because we laugh, it doesn't mean that we are forgetting our child. Just because we laugh, it doesn't mean that we won't cry again. Just because we laugh, it doesn't mean that we are 'over' it. Oh no, just because we laugh, it means that we are giving ourselves permission to heal; little by little, we are learning to live with our grief more comfortably.

**Yes, my friend, it is all right to laugh again.**

**Wendy Pye From TCF Newsletter, Summer 1992**

## Illusion?

*Did I really smile just then?*

*Or was it just the usual pretence?*

*And the rose I noticed over there -*

*How did I see it as rich red?*

*But... I heard a bird sing yesterday,*

*And listened to the song,*

*And I recognised that special menu*

*By odours wafting through the air.*

*Hello, you senses, long forgotten*

*When grief strode in and claimed  
our lives.*

*Goodbye, pretence, it's really happening...*

*Real smiles and sights and sounds  
and touch,*

*Like blinded seeing for the first time,*

*Or paralysed begin to walk,*

*The faltering steps - the past accepted*

*The signs I'm learning to live again.*

**From 'Newsletter' Summer 1992, originally from  
the book 'Helping Ourselves'  
by Audrey England**

## My dear friends

As I write this we have already gone through Easter, an unusual situation to say the least at this time. We have experienced snow on Easter Sunday while we were able to have a walk in the sunshine on Christmas Day. I have lost count of the number of people who said how they felt thrown by Easter being so early, and how much they liked things to happen at the right time but as bereaved parents we know already that things don't always happen at the right time. We know that the normal order of things says that our children should bury us, not the other way round. It will certainly take more than an early Easter to throw me after experiencing such a drastic event as losing my child. The amazing thing is, though, that in spite of events happening at the 'wrong' time, some things still continued to carry on as normal. The baby birds still shouted in the hedgerow for their food, the daffodils sprang up though the frozen earth, and the world in general moved on as if nothing different had happened.

This reminded me of our feelings immediately after Nicholas died. Walking out from the hospital our whole world was suddenly different and things were not happening in the right order, and yet all around us the rest of the world continued as if nothing had changed. We felt that we would forever remain isolated in this strange world that no one else could possibly understand. Then we found The Compassionate Friends and with the love and understanding of people who had already been through this trauma we were able to pick up the threads of life again. We learned that although our lives would never be normal in the way that they had been, we could find a new normality - one which would still include Nick because he had been part of our lives for almost seventeen years, and would continue to be part of our family. In time we have even learned to pass on this hope and friendship to others who have had to tread this dreadful path.

So, although things have happened in the wrong order, they are things we cannot change. We would all give everything we own, even our own lives, to have our child back again, but this is not possible. The only thing we can do is to offer love, support

and understanding to each other, knowing that our children live on in our care for each other. Soon the butterflies will be about again in the warm sunshine to remind us that our children are never more than a thought away.

**Compassionate thoughts to you all, John Norris.  
From TCF Compassion Summer 2008.**



***We can't turn back the clock  
but we can help start it ticking  
again.'***

A saying heard and affectionately remembered by Catharine Pointer when she was in Stoke Mandeville Hospital, paralysed after a car accident in which her daughter, Rachel, died.





I've chosen the poem below by Irene Lee because it sums up exactly what I felt when I first went on a TCF residential weekend or 'retreat' as a newly bereaved parent, and also how I still feel now, many years on, looking after newly bereaved parents as a member of the volunteer team. (Ed)

## TCF Residential Weekend

Come, join with us, they said,  
And we shall welcome you with open arms.  
Come, join with us, they said,  
And we shall greet you with love and understanding.  
We were hesitant at first,  
But yes, we decided we would come,  
We needed to be welcomed,  
We needed to be understood,  
We needed to be loved.  
So we went, still hesitant,  
And yes, we were welcomed,  
And yes, we were understood,  
And oh yes, we were loved.  
But we never expected the warmth of the welcome,  
Or the measure of the love and understanding that greeted us.  
We found so many people,  
We would have recognised them anywhere,  
For each person reflected our own pain, our own sorrow.  
Each person had their own story to tell,

And we listened, as they listened to ours.  
We cried with each other  
And we laughed with each other.  
There was no shame in crying,  
No guilt in laughing,  
There was no pretence,  
Our very souls were laid bare for all to see,  
And we were proud.  
Proud of our children who had brought us here,  
Proud to be part of this group of people,  
This very special group of people,  
Who had taken us in their midst so easily,  
And had embraced us in their love.  
We left with tears of farewell and, 'See you next year'.  
We were drained and exhausted,  
And yet, strangely revitalised and refreshed.  
We shall come again next year,  
And we shall say to others,  
Come, join with us .....

**Irene Lee, from TCF Newsletter 2017**



The dads' group led by Andrew Miller, at a weekend for parents bereaved by suicide or substance use.

## Jimmy Edmonds shares his thoughts about the group for bereaved dads he led at a TCF retreat weekend for parents in the early months and years of bereavement in 2018.

I've been leading the fathers' group at various TCF retreats for a while now and it's good to see our numbers gradually increasing. The session at TCF weekend for those in early bereavement was well attended by dads who were much newer to grief than I. It had taken me a full two years to be comfortable enough to come to a TCF gathering, or to talk about my grief with other men. There were fathers here who had lost children within the last few months!!

I wonder whether there has been a gradual shift in social attitudes in the way men are expected to manage their grief or whether it is charities like TCF that are making a big effort to accommodate more fathers into its midst.

In any case for one dad this was the first time he had had the opportunity to meet other bereaved fathers since his daughter had died. *"In any other situation"* he told me afterwards, *"we would get criticised for making such a stereotypical comment, but I am convinced that in general, dads grieve differently to the mums."* Not surprisingly this was one of the main topics of our conversation – mum's and dads do grieve differently just as we all, whether father or mother, grieve differently – we all have (or we all find) our own way to grieve. It is important to recognise that there is no rule book for grieving. At the same time it's clear that the opportunity to share feelings with others in similar circumstances or from similar social groupings (i.e. bereaved dad's) is important as we grapple with the task of coming to terms with the death of our child.

This father commented further, *".... it was good for me to meet other dads and realise that I've been behaving similarly to them: keeping busy; trying to 'fix' things; struggling at seeing our wives crying constantly; at times suppressing our emotions so as not to upset them further; feeling guilty over the odd bit of enjoyment we allow ourselves, etc."*

I suspect many if not all dads will recognise these thoughts. Yes, we do want to try and fix things, yes we do hate to see our partners dissolve into floods of tears, and yes we do try and hide our own grief in a vain

attempt to remain strong. Owning up to these fears (if that's what I can call them) is also difficult which is why sharing them with others in a group that is both safe and non-judgemental is so beneficial.

As another dad commented, *"Too many men (are) not able to deal with what's happening to them"*. Like others he found reassurance from the way we all opened up on these common issues. In particular the way he was beginning to feel 'a little isolated at home as friends drifted away'. Personally I can relate to this though I'm not sure what the answer is. Many of the emotions that come with grief are not seen as befitting a full grown man. To break down and weep in front of work colleagues is something we all fear (even if in actual fact it would bring out more empathy than we ever suspected). But to hide our feelings also has a cost as friends and family find themselves more and more unsure (and afraid) of how to respond to what could become an ever more 'silent grief'. Yet to know this, to know that other dads have and do face the same dilemma is also to find comfort that you are not alone.

What I like about the fathers' groups at TCF is that they aren't so much about trying to find answers to problems (or trying to fix things), more they are simply an opportunity to remove the mask and just be who we are – dads who are desperately trying to come to terms with the death of their child and to accommodate it into the rest of their lives. For most this is stuff we have never done before. We didn't learn how to mourn as kids, grief is not on any school curriculum, and everything we learn about being a man and a dad leaves us totally unprepared for death, least of all the death of our child.

I like to see these fathers' groups at TCF as a kind of bubble where we can learn from each other and practice expressing our grief in a safe environment all the better to deal with what may or may not be conscious insensitivities of the outside world.

And as another dad said the dads' group *"probably more than anything was an occasion where I made friends with several dads and I aim to keep in touch with them. I learnt that there is light at the end of the tunnel."*

**Jimmy Edmonds, April 2018**

## Say Their Name

# 2013

**The film, 'Say their Name' was made for TCF in 2013 by Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds whose own son, Joshua, died aged 22 in 2011.**

In this film, bereaved parents and siblings talk frankly and openly about their feelings on the death of their child or sibling and how TCF supported them.

'Say their Name' will give comfort to the newly bereaved and understanding to their friends and family. We say a huge thank you to Jane and Jimmy for all the skill and energy they put into making it for us.

Say Their Name can be viewed on the home page of [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) and purchased on DVD from the SHOP on the website or by contacting our National Office.





The Compassionate Friends now has very active online peer to peer support including an online Forum and several Facebook groups. All these groups are closed – meaning that only those bereaved parents in the groups can see who is in the groups and the posts and comments.

## Online Forum

The Online Forum is available to join via the The Compassionate Friends website [www.tcf.org.uk/forum](http://www.tcf.org.uk/forum). We ask you to complete a short form online (just so we know who is in the group to keep it safe for everyone) and you can then access The Forum to “talk” with other bereaved parents. Posts are organised into topics so can be easily searched and conversations often continue for weeks or months.

### Some quotes from current Forum users:



*“The comfort I've found on here has been the best thing. When things are especially hard I come here and write down how I feel, always getting a response and I realise I am not alone. To everybody at TCF Thank You.”* **Vera**

---

*“After 7 numbing months of family and friends saying all the wrong things, I needed to seek solace from people who ‘got’ me. Having a Forum to put down your thoughts is of great comfort, and whilst nothing can truly ‘make it better’, through the compassion of such caring lovely people who find the time to comfort others whilst dealing with their own grief, has gradually made this new life more bearable.”* **Aly**

---

*“Living in the ‘normal’ world after the death of a child is immensely hard, How was it that many of these people, who I had known for most of my life, had not the slightest idea how crushed I was. I felt completely and utterly alone ... until I found this amazing Forum. When I made contact, I was made to feel most welcome. It felt as if I had ‘come home’. There were people out there just like me. Through their own shattering heartbreak they reached out to me offering unconditional love, warmth and care at a time when I wondered if I could go on.”* **Linda**

---

*“The support I have received is truly amazing. There is no judgement. Only concern and genuine love. When we lose a child it can become so isolating, but the need to express our innermost feelings is so important. I feel this is my safe place. My lifeline. I have made so many friends here. I simply don't know how I would have survived without them.”* **Deborah**

---

*“After my first post I received so many replies, some from people further down the line who were surviving and having happy times. It gave me hope. I was able to write down my darkest thoughts, and always someone would come back and say they'd had similar experiences. It was reassuring to know that other people also had days when they were too exhausted by grief to move. The Forum has truly been a lifeline and I don't know what I'd have done without it.”* **Margaret**

**“You can draw strength from this group.  
They are always here so you are never alone.”**



## Facebook Groups

We have a whole host of Facebook groups where bereaved parents and siblings can communicate - a bit like a 'virtual' support group. They are safe, secret groups, moderated by trained TCF volunteer bereaved parents/siblings. These groups offer support, encouragement, hope and friendship.

We have groups for all bereaved parents; parents with no surviving children; parents bereaved by suicide; parents bereaved by drug or alcohol use; bereaved dads; parents who have lost children to cancer or other long-term illness; loss of a baby, toddler or preschool child; and for brothers and sisters (over 18 years only). We also have two Facebook groups (Compassionate Pals North and South) where bereaved parents can make arrangements for informal social meet ups.

### Current members of the Facebook groups have commented:



*"I've been using TCF Facebook page for almost a year since my 7-year daughter died. My particular favourite elements are Photo Saturday (I deeply need to share my beautiful daughter with everyone) and Wednesday Wisdom - a very welcome chance to hear tiny snippets of positivity from people about what helps them get through this painful new life we all lead. Above all I am reminded that I'm not alone and that has been really helpful. It's like a new family where we stand shoulder to shoulder, honouring our wonderful children."* **Clare**

---

*"Here are the only ones that truly understand you. They are nonjudgmental and offer unconditional positive support. You can draw strength from this group. They are always here so you are never alone."* **Gail**

---

*"I know that within the TCF Facebook group I will find a sympathetic ear and a shoulder to cry on. My online friends and I share the pain of losing a child and, as such, understand and feel for each other. Often within minutes of writing a post, I receive feedback - words of wisdom, wrapped up with encouragement and love. Sometimes a simple virtual hug or kiss is all I need to remind me that I'm not alone in my grief. TCF is truly all about friendship and support."* **Anne**

---

*"I am new to this group. I was feeling so sad and didn't know who to talk to about it. Reading about other people's experiences has helped me to realise my feelings are normal. It's good to be able to talk to others about thoughts and to be able to share photos without worrying about what people may think."* **Kirsten**

---

*"On the Facebook page I see the empathy shared between people. I see the sharing of memories and photos and experiences. I feel I can share things on that page without judgement and will always be supported. It's been a lifesaver for me."* **Sharon**

---

**Details on how to join the Forum or the Facebook Groups can be found on the TCF website, [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk). Click on "Find Support" then "Online Support."**

# “Sometimes sad is very big. It’s everywhere. All over me.”

# 2016

**It was wonderful to hear children's author, poet and broadcaster, Michael Rosen speaking to a full theatre at The Compassionate Friends AGM on Saturday 5 November 2016.**

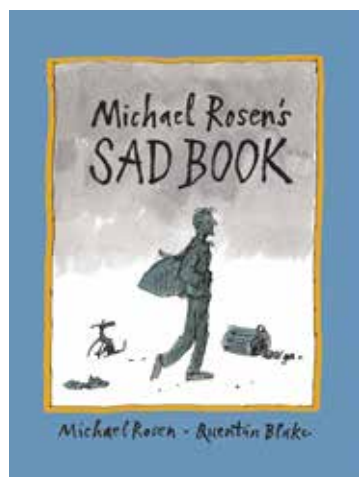
Michael spoke openly to the bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents assembled there about his talented and funny son, Eddie, and his sudden death from meningitis at the age of 18. Talking candidly about his own and others' reactions at the time of his son's death, he also told us about the rituals and events he and his family organised as they tried to make sense of the loss of Eddie. A wonderful storyteller and inspiring speaker - all in the room were spellbound.

Michael stayed after the main business of the afternoon to sign copies of *The Sad Book* and his *Selected Poems* (which includes wonderfully simple and honest poems about Eddie and his death)... he spent over an hour with a queue of parents and siblings talking with each as he signed and dedicated his books to their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

Our guest speaker was warmly thanked and presented with a gift by our Chair of Trustees, Margaret Brearley.

A great afternoon, and our huge thanks to Michael for taking the time to speak to and be with us.

**From TCF Website, November 2016**



Copies of Michael Rosen's Sad Book are available to buy from our website at **[www.tcf.org.uk/shop](http://www.tcf.org.uk/shop)**



# Book reviews

**These reviews are taken from past editions of Compassion. Often written decades ago, these books are still helping people today.**

## Our Children

**edited by Ena Mirren (1995)**

This book is a compilation of the accounts of nineteen parents, including Ena Mirren herself and Countess Mountbatten, whose children had died at different ages, and from various causes, and the forward was written by Joe Lawley. Also included is the account written by Irene Baldock, who was by then the contact for parents bereaved by murder both in the UK and internationally, about her son Stephen. The stories were sent to Ena after she had 'advertised' in the newsletter during 1993 and 1994.

This book was written for, and by, members of TCF and all of the profits from its sale came to us. Writing in the newsletter of summer 1995 Ena says, *"Our Children is dedicated not only to those whose stories are within the book but to all parents who have lost a child, of whatever age. They prove there is life after death"*. A review written by Jane Renouf comments, *"To any parent for whom bereavement has brought a sense of isolation, or whose overwhelming pain defies description, Our Children will bring the saving comfort of shared grief and will provide the link by which we can identify with others and discover the common bond which unites us all as we reach out and support each other"*.

This book is one of the most popular, and most read, in our library and I doubt if there are many of us library users who haven't been sent a copy. We have about nine or ten copies of the book and it's not unknown for every single copy to be out on loan at once.

**Review by Mary Hartley (2019)**

## Now Childless

**written, and edited, by Don Hackett and Kay Bevington, and published by the Compassionate Friends USA. (1990)**

Now Childless addresses those bereaved parents who have lost their only child or all their children. Those left without living children have unique problems and issues with which to cope and this booklet, written by two such parents, attempts to point the way.

Many of the topics covered are applicable to all bereaved parents with an added dimension to those

left without children. Perhaps the most important issue is simple re-investment in life now that so many past activities and future goals are altered, and the role as parent has changed. The authors are quick to assert that *"we are still parents; we are simply no longer practicing parents"*.

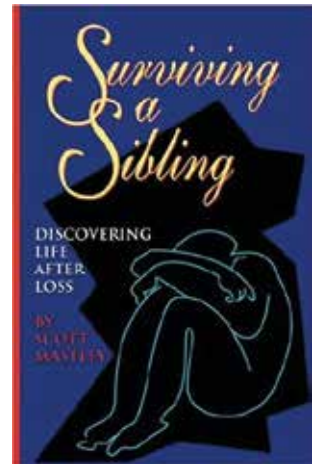
As with the loss of any child there are no easy answers, no painless way through the grief. This booklet simply offers the hope that it is possible to face life again as a parent with no living children.

**Review by Mary Stringer (1991)**

## Surviving a Sibling

**- discovering life after loss by Scott Mastley (2001)**

I read and reread Scott Mastley's book because, although written by a sibling for siblings, there are so many observations which apply to us, the parents. Sensitively and carefully written, it comes from the heart and I identified with how my own two surviving sons must have felt, and how difficult it must have been for them to have had so little support and sympathy as opposed to their parents.



When your child dies it feels like a form of 'selfish madness' and I see, with hindsight, that I thought the loss and grief were mine, mine, mine. More than five years on, although I can't change things now, I valued the book highly. I need to learn. I will always need to learn from the experience of others, as well as my own. We feel the loss is ours. Not true! Like ripples on a pool death touches so many other lives as well as our own.

Ultimately the greatest, greatest loss is that which our child has lost; life, love, future. We have to live on, living with that loss, caring for the survivors, creating a new life as best we can, knowing only that we carry them with us until it is our turn. Maybe our perception of love is clearer? Maybe. Maybe we can more fully value and savour the moment. I will always be grateful for the chance to see through the eyes of another whatever the relationship.

**Review by Diane Shepherd (2004)**

# The Compassionate Friends Timeline

A Walk Down Memory Lane - some of the key dates in the last 50 years.

## 1969

### 28th January

The Society of the Compassionate Friends began in Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. For a full account of the foundation of TCF go to our website at [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) or order from the Library.

### 12th December

Iris and Joe Lawley and Simon Stephens - founders of TCF - are Interviewed on BBC Radio's 'Woman's Hour'.

### January

The first copy of SCF news was published. The document starts with an editorial by Simon Stephens, honorary president, in which he talks about the "deep friendships (which) in themselves have become the means whereby the Society has become more effective in its ministry to others".

Other articles include an appeal for a new name for the newsletter (obviously unsuccessful because it was called 'The Newsletter' until 2002!) and a report on a successful fundraising Christmas fair.



## 1970

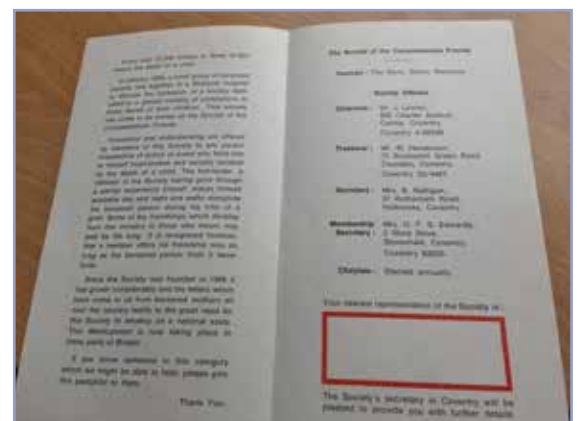
### 28th January

The first AGM held in Coventry.

### Spring

The first Compassionate Friends leaflet titled The Society of the Compassionate Friends was published.

It seems to have been created in response to the many letters received after the interview on Woman's Hour and tells the reader that every year 27,000 homes in Great Britain mourn the death of a child.



# 1971

## Autumn

Bill Henderson's definition of Compassion published in SCF News:

*"Only when you have walked through the children's ward of your local hospital, when you've seen the pain pinched face of a (sick) child or watched your own child dying... do you understand the real meaning of compassion. Compassion demands that one sacrifices one's time, one's material possessions and even one's personal ambitions in order to care for others whose lives have been broken by grief and misery. Under these circumstances one's own personal sorrow becomes a talent which, if so used, transforms not only he who gives but also he who receives and both are, in time, healed and made whole-even though the scar may remain."*

## October

After months of negotiations the Society became a registered charity.

# 1972

The first governing document for The Society of the Compassionate Friends was published, titled The Rules and Operating Procedures.

There were two types of membership: full membership which is restricted to 'those parents who have suffered child loss', and honorary membership 'open to people who wish to associate themselves with the society'.

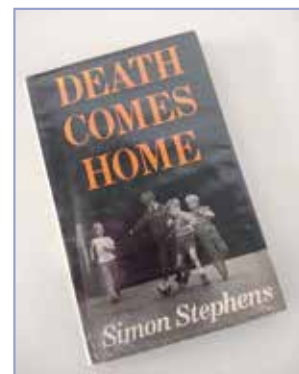
## May

1st National Convention, Arts and Crafts Exhibition and Buffet Dance held in Coventry.

## September

Simon Stephens' groundbreaking book, *Death Comes Home*, was published, bringing the depth of grief parents feel for their child, and the isolation child loss often brings, out into the open.

The author first tells the story of Margaret and Peter Robinson, an ordinary couple, whose son Joe dies suddenly. (A true story but the names were changed). The book goes on to discuss grief, and its symptoms, and to look at the ways support could, and should, have been provided for this couple as well as their surviving children. There is a wonderful chapter describing the beginnings of TCF, by someone who was actually there, and there are sections covering the death of an only child and the grief of siblings.



# 1975

The TCF logo was created. The original logo of two hands with a child in the distance was drawn by John Fisher whose daughter Clare had died in a road accident.

The TCF Library came into being when Daphne Bayford and her husband gave twelve books to TCF. The first librarian was Dorothy Crooks and, under her stewardship, the number of titles grew to over 60.





## 1978

---

The Compassionate Friends jumped across the Atlantic and was established in the United States, incorporated in Illinois.

## 1979

---

### July

Increasing concern for bereaved siblings voiced with the publication of an article entitled '*What about bereaved brothers and sisters?*'

## 1980

---

Concern began being expressed about bereaved grandparents.

Joan Willis wrote, "*Parents often feel guilty at being alive [when their child is not]. How much more must grandparents, who may be quite elderly, feel this?*"

Information leaflet called, 'to the bereaved grandparent' published.

## 1981

---

Plaque mounted in The Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital commemorating the founding of TCF there.

## 1984

---

### September

Start of the group for parents bereaved by murder.

## 1985

---

### June

Opening of the first TCF Office in Bristol by Simon Stephens who initiated the proceedings by cutting a very impressive looking cake.

## 1986

---

### June

The First Meeting of the 'Shadow of Suicide' Group at the AGM in Manchester. TCF had been part of a BBC programme entitled 'The Shadow of Suicide', and had helped man the helplines afterwards.

Catharine Pointer, professional librarian appointed to manage the TCF Library. Catharine had become a member of TCF after the death of her young daughter Rachel and she also suffered a spinal injury which left her paralysed and necessitated



a year-long stay in Stoke Mandeville Hospital. In the past Catharine had been a medical librarian and was used to a library that was efficiently and professionally run. Her first task as librarian was to get all the overdue books from the TCF library back, which she seems to have done in pretty short order, and to introduce a system for readers to refund the library's postage when they returned their books.

## 1987

---

The Memorial Book Scheme began where parents could donate a book in memory of their child to the library of the Compassionate Friends. This was an inspired concept which has allowed the library to grow to the unique and amazing resource it is today.

### Autumn

The start of the Helpline. A rota was established but, until the year 2000, callers would be put through to an answerphone which would then give them the number of the TCF member manning the phone at that particular time. This was far from perfect because, as so many of us know, it can take a lot of time to work up the courage to phone in the first place and many people were hanging up when they heard the answerphone message and were not calling back.



## 1988

---

The first book reviews were written and continue to be a regular feature of 'Compassion' magazine.

## 1990

---

Group for parents bereaved by murder split away from TCF, becoming a registered charity in its own right.

## 1992

---

### Autumn

Our Patron and President, Countess Mountbatten was interviewed on radio by Jan McLaren. She talks about the IRA bomb, which killed her father and her son Nicky, and says she doesn't feel bitter, *"because that does no good at all"*.

### Lady Mountbatten also commented

*"You don't want to forget, you are desperate to remember, you like to remember, it gives you pleasure to remember and Nicky is very much a part of our family circle still. We talk about him and remember funny little stories and say, 'wouldn't he have liked this or that?' in the normal way..... but sometimes even now, 13 years on, suddenly there is something that will bring tears for some reason; I don't mind because it keeps Nicky's memory green for me".*



## Winter

Start of the SIBBS Newsletter, with Kate Hill as first editor, and the SIBBS support group. Sadly Kate died from a cerebral haemorrhage in 1994 but she has left us a legacy in the form of her book *The Long Sleep*, which explores the grief surrounding the death of a sibling from suicide.

The SIBBS group has had some ups and downs over the years, and collapsed completely for a brief period in the late 1990s, but it is very strong and supportive today. The focus has moved from the grief of younger children, to the grief of young adult siblings, probably because of the growth of other charities who offer support to children around loss.



## 1994

Group for parents bereaved by murder came back under the TCF umbrella in 1994 represented by John and Irene Baldock whose son Stephen had been murdered.

### August

25 years of The Compassionate Friends was celebrated in Coventry Cathedral. It was part of the first International Gathering, which had the theme of 'Walking Together' and was attended by 454 delegates from 14 different countries. A Book of Remembrance, compiled by Joe Lawley, was carried to the altar by Jim Pringle and inscribed with dedications to Kenneth Lawley and Billy Henderson. This, together with four baskets full of 'rose cards' with children's names on them, were blessed and dedicated that day.

During this Gathering, Margaret Pringle became the first International Coordinator for TCF in the UK and an International Council was established.

The first edition of 'The Story of The Compassionate Friends 1969-1999' by Philip Clarke published. An updated second edition, with added chapters, was published in 1998.



Nearly 700 hundred titles made up the TCF Library, housed in Catharine and Michael Pointer's home.

## 1995

The first mention of the Childless Parents group in the TCF Newsletter, set up by Barry Bridges and Rita Henshaw. Their first meeting was on the 2nd September 1995, in Kingsteignton, Devon.

## 1997

The National Gathering was hosted for the first time in Scotland - in Glasgow

Two new leaflets for bereaved grandparents published: 'When your grandchild dies' and 'Helping your grandchild when your child has died'.

The first weekend retreat for the childless parents was held on Dartmoor.

The 2nd International Gathering was held in Philadelphia, USA.



# 1998

---

The first Scottish Gathering (then called The Scottish Forum) was held in Perth. Joe and Iris Lawley were the keynote speakers.

First TCF website developed and launched.

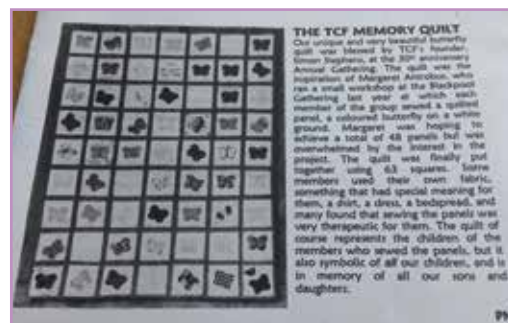
# 1999

---

30th Anniversary of TCF. A whole series of events were planned to fundraise and bring parents together including a national coffee morning planned for the spring.

## January

The first memorial quilt was blessed at the annual gathering at the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham. Each of the 63 panels was made in memory of a beloved child, and was often made from the child's clothing. The quilt was also dedicated to all our children. There have been at least two more quilts since that one and the Medway TCF group is producing another to be dedicated and blessed at the 50th Anniversary Gathering this November.



# 2000

---

## Summer

A TCF member donated a PABX, 'a new piece of telecommunications equipment,' revolutionising the helpline. Now, instead of getting through to the answerphone callers were automatically diverted to whichever volunteer was manning the phone at that particular time. If the helpline volunteer was already on the phone, or it was out of the helpline hours, the caller could leave a message and a volunteer would phone them back.

# 2002

---

'Meeting Point', an open message service and precursor to the Online Forum, began on the TCF website.

# 2003

---

## October

The actor, William Roach MBE, well known as Ken Barlow in Coronation Street was keynote speaker at the 17th Annual Gathering. His daughter, Edwina, died suddenly at the age of 18 months after a short illness. He spoke of his search for answers about the meaning of life and the purpose of suffering, and how his philosophy had sustained him in coming to terms with the death of his daughter.

# 2005

---

The TCF Library moved into a rented location in Chatham under the stewardship of Linda Haines, one of Catharine Pointer's assistants.

## 2007

---

Online Community Forum began. Bereaved parents could now talk together in a virtual, private and safe 'chat room'. Prior to this an online open message service called 'Meeting Point' had been running on the website. This was now moved to the safer and totally secure Forum.

## 2009

---

40th Anniversary Gathering held at Bosworth Hall Hotel in Nuneaton (close to Coventry where it all started). Patricia Knatchbull, Countess Mountbatten of Burma was the guest speaker.

A TCF plaque dedicated to all our children was re-sited and re-dedicated in the newly re-built Coventry Hospital during this 40th Anniversary Gathering. A commemorative bench donated by Britannia Hotels was placed alongside a butterfly shaped rose garden planted with the TCF rose.

### June

Dedicated Helpline for Northern Ireland established.

### October

The Compassionate Friends Australia was incorporated and registered in Victoria.

## 2011

---

The TCF Library moved to Suffolk and was housed in the home of Gil Roberts; it 'lived' in her beloved son Sam's room, a beautiful peaceful space overlooking a lovely garden. In Spring 2011 Gil wrote in Compassion about 'living with a library'. She talked about the way she'd been getting to know the books, and getting to know everyone's children, from the photos and bookplates, and how much the library had helped her after Sam died in 2007. She finished by saying the library was open again for business and 'keep reading'.

## 2012

---

The National Office moved to the wonderful office space in Jessica's Heart in Deptford, South East London, donated to TCF by Stephen and Jannet Mathers, in memory of their daughter Jessica.

## 2013

---

The short film, Say Their Name - where bereaved parents and siblings talk openly about the death of their child, or brother or sister, and how TCF supported them - was made for TCF by Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds.

## 2014

---

The TCF Library came to reside in the same building as our National Office: Jessica's Heart in Deptford at first and then Kilburn Grange in 2017.

# 2015

## October

First fundraising concert by the UK Doctor's Orchestra held at the Cadogan Hall, London. A second concert at the same venue, given by the European Doctor's Orchestra, was held in October 2018. Both were organised by Margaret Brearley and were huge successes.

# 2016

## January

First weekend retreat for parents in early bereavement held in Derbyshire.

## March

New private Facebook group for bereaved parents – called 'Loss of a Child'. Followed by several other groups for parents bereaved from various causes and also for bereaved adult siblings.

## June

Death of founder member of TCF, Joe Lawley.

## June

New website launched, a project spearheaded and organised by then Trustee, Vicky Joseph. The site took 12 months to develop and offered hugely improved navigation and ease of use – including facility to join TCF as a donating member, donate online, search for local support, online booking for supportive events, downloadable resources and much more.

## July

First retreat weekend for parents bereaved by suicide or substance use at Woodbrooke in Birmingham.

## November

Poet, author and broadcaster, and bereaved father of Eddie, Michael Rosen speaks to a packed audience at the AGM in London.



# 2017

## June

Death of Patron and President, Patricia Knatchbull, Countess Mountbatten of Burma.

## July

Move of National Office to Kilburn in north west London.





# 2018

## May

Memorial Garden for The Compassionate Friends made by the charity, Beautiful Perth, unveiled in Perth at the Scottish Gathering. A rowan tree was planted with a small marker stone at its foot. A bench was sited for quiet contemplation and a beautiful, carved commemorative stone stands at the entrance to the garden.

In May 2019 a new tree to commemorate the fiftieth year of TCF was planted in the garden.

## August

New supportive leaflet for parents bereaved by drug or alcohol use published.

## Summer

Lady Penelope Mountbatten, The Right Honourable Countess Mountbatten of Burma becomes President and Patron of TCF in the UK.

*"To be asked to become President of The Compassionate Friends is indeed an honour, but what touches me deeply is the fact of being invited to join all of you who share our common bond of having a child who has died."*

*Each of us has known great sorrow, yet, The Compassionate Friends offers the comfort that we are not alone, the assistance to live through the pain, and the opportunity to go on to help others in due course".*



# 2019



The  
Compassionate  
Friends

Supporting bereaved parents and their families



You are warmly invited to The Compassionate Friends

## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Supportive Gathering

for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents



**Final few places remaining!!**

**When:** 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2019

**Where:** The beautiful Horwood Estate in the heart of the Buckinghamshire countryside.

For more details or to book your place visit  
**[www.tcf.org.uk/50years](http://www.tcf.org.uk/50years)**

Click on the **BOOK FOR THIS EVENT link** and follow the instructions on the page. A non-refundable deposit of **£40** (early bird) or **£60** (after 30th June 2019) is payable per person to secure your place.

Booking online wherever possible would be greatly appreciated, however, if you are unable to please contact the National Office on **0345 120 3785** (9.30am - 4.30pm) and we will take your booking over the phone and help with any questions or queries.

**\*Book before 30th June 2019 and pay £40 deposit instead of £60 per person.**

**Early Bird  
Special Offer  
Save £20\*  
per person**



# 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.

## 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  
Service, Kilburn Grange, Priory Park Road,  
London NW6 7UJ

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)  [@TCFcharityUK](https://twitter.com/TCFcharityUK)

## 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.

## 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.*

## Final Date for Contributions is 19th July 2019 for the next issue of Compassion (Autumn 2019)

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