



GRIEVE HEAL GROW



The Compassionate Friends Victoria AU Magazine

Supporting Parents, Siblings and Grandparents after a Child Dies



© The Tunnel of Grief - by Laura Tomei

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24 HOUR Grief Support

Phone 9888 4944 - National Number 1300 064 068

Phones Staffed by Bereaved Parents, Siblings & Grandparents

www.tcfv.org.au





The Compassionate Friends Victoria Inc

The Compassionate Friends Victoria is part of a worldwide organisation, which was founded in England in 1969 and established in Victoria in 1978. It is a mutual assistance, self-help organisation offering friendship and understanding to families following the death of a child, sibling or grandchild of any age and from any cause. The primary purpose is to assist them in the rebuilding of their lives after the death of their child, sibling or grandchild and to support their efforts to achieve, emotional and mental health.

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TCFV Victoria Membership

Being a member of The Compassionate Friends Victoria (TCFV) enables you to access many vital support services and attend social activities whilst demonstrating your support for a society that is aware and understands the impact of grief and bereavement following the death of a child, sibling or grandchild.

TCFV Membership is now open to both the bereaved and non-bereaved. Following an initial complimentary membership period, bereaved members have the option to remain

- Full Member (\$55 pa incl GST) or
- limited Keep In Touch Membership (\$22 pa incl GST).

Associate membership is open to any non-bereaved individual or organisation who knows about our important work and wants to show their support in a meaningful way. The non-bereaved membership levels include

- Associate Individual (\$55 pa incl GST) or
- Associate Organisation (\$110 pa incl GST).

The full details about all our different membership levels and their benefits can be found in the new Membership section of our website www.tcfv.org.au/getinvolved/membership
If you have any questions about TCFV membership, please call our office on 03 9888 4034.

Front Cover: © The Tunnel Of Grief by Laura Tomei.

24 HOUR Grief Support - Available on Telephone 03 9888 4944 / 1300 064 068
Bereaved Drop In Centre Hours 9.00am - 5.00pm Monday to Friday

Disclaimer: Unless expressly stated, the views expressed in articles, poetry etc. in this magazine are not necessarily the views of TCFV Board staff or the editorial team. The editor reserves the right to edit any contribution. Permission is given to Editors & Chapter Leaders of The Compassionate Friends to reprint material from the magazine. We request that credit be given to the author & their TCF Chapter.

The Magazine Team

Editor: Jane Moschetti / Staff Member: Sheryl Sazenis
Team Members: Harriet Clegg, Judy Dowling,
Rai Gioia, Sandra Green, Sanam Karamally, Steven Katsineris

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Notice Board

contributions to the next magazine...

Articles, poetry, artwork and stories about your child, sibling or grandchild are always required for every edition.

If you would like to contribute to an upcoming magazine, please send to

Jane via mail to:
The Editor, TCF,
PO Box 171,
Canterbury, Vic, 3126
or email to editor@tcfv.org.au



WINTER SOLSTICE GATHERING

In olden times, the Winter Solstice was a time of reflection and welcoming the return of the light.

Join us at the Centre on **Friday, 18th June** and find light and hope out of the darkness.

Fire Release Ceremony

Music & Readings

Refreshments

5.30pm to 9.00 pm

Register at www.tcfv.org.au/winter

Meaning of Peer Support

During the Covid 19 lockdown, like many others, we got into this habit of binge-watching various television series that we had heard of but never seen.

Last week we were watching West Wing, an American political drama.

In episode "Noel" aired 2000, there was a scene which made a big impression on me.

Without knowing the characters, you will still get a sense of the parable;

Leo McGarry : [after Josh finishes an intensive therapy session set up by Leo with a trauma therapist, Josh walks past Leo in a nearby hallway of the White House] How'd it go?

Josh Lyman : Did you wait around for me?

Leo McGarry : How'd it go?

Josh Lyman : He thinks I may have an eating disorder...

Leo McGarry : [bemused] Josh...

Josh Lyman : ...and a fear of rectangles. That's not weird, is it?

[pause]

Josh Lyman : I didn't cut my hand on a glass. I broke a window in my apartment.

Leo McGarry : This guy's walking down a street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep, he can't get out. A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, "Hey you, can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a priest comes along, and the guy shouts up "Father, I'm down in this hole, can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a friend walks by. "Hey Joe, it's me, can you help me out?" And the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says, "Are you stupid? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

[pause]

Leo McGarry : Long as I got a job, you got a job, you understand?

Many of our members receive professional counselling elsewhere (I myself have done lots of psychological sessions, grief counselling and, dare I say it, even a "reading").

I and many others have obtained a lot of support from various professionals. However, the medical profession and the mental health professionals struggle to agree on where grief sits.

Where the parable above sits is right at the centre of what The Compassionate Friends do. Our organisation provides the peer support that Leo McGarry above is talking about. We of course do grief sharing assistance through our support groups. However, we are also much more than this. We have people getting together for social activities including dinners, golf, art, walks, talks, discussions, volunteering options, guest lecturers, gatherings, barbeques etc. The Compassionate Friends offers a range of activities in which you can make friends with people who understand and, depending on your mood, who you can talk with about a range of issues, or just a friendly chat, perhaps just talk about your child/sibling – all in a warm and understanding environment.

Daniel Bendel
Treasurer

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Sunday, 19th September 2021 - 2.00 pm 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury (Melways 46 E11)

We continue to make our AGM another connection point for all members to meet and, be updated with what is happening within your organisation (Covid19 rules permitting).
All members and family welcome!

Please note that we may have to limit the number of attendees on a first registered basis.
We may also have to consider alternatives closer to the date.
Depending on Covid19 rules we may have a guest speaker and present the Harmer Volunteer Award.

Afternoon tea will be served after the meeting
More information to come!

NEW BOARD MEMBERS REQUIRED

TCFV is currently recruiting new board members.
If you are interested, please reach out to a present board member or contact the office.

Editor's Letter

Dear Friends

Welcome to the June/July magazine which is once again a bumper 32-page issue. As well as members' stories and the usual content, there is a lot happening at the Centre in the upcoming months that we wanted to share with you.

July. The month I dread, the 6th of July will be Joseph's 23rd birthday and the 30th of July will be the fifth anniversary of losing him. We spend these tough days with our close friends and some of Joseph's friends who continue to visit and offer their support and love to us. My counsellor always tells me to plan pleasant things to do during the month, so there is something to look forward to as well, sometimes easier said than done!

I hope you like the poem I have included on this page, "Belief." I recently came across this on Pinterest and the words really resonated with me as they are what I "Believe"!

Until next time, take care and stay safe.

Jane Moschetti
Bereaved Mother of Joseph (18)

NIGHT OF HOPE GALA BALL

Please register your interest online at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1WMc2rNATshKDB6wD6zusK1AT0gc9hl-DX_fylInnbcRg/edit or call the Centre on (03) 9888 4034.

Volunteers are required to help secure sponsorships and auction prizes.

If you are interested in helping, please contact Theresa Yeo at 0403842068 or email theresay@tcfv.org.au.

Belief

I have to believe
That you still exist
Somewhere,
That you still watch me
Sometimes
That you still love me
Somehow.
I have to believe
That life has meaning
Somehow
That I am useful here
Sometimes,
That I make small differences
Somewhere.
I have to believe
That I need to stay here
For some time,
That all this teaches me
Something,
So that I can meet you again
Somewhere.
-- Ann Thorp



WE'VE JOINED HANDS TO SAVE LIVES...
NOW YOU CAN JOIN US TOO

Night of Hope Gala Ball

THURSDAY, 28TH OCTOBER 2021
MELBOURNE TOWN HALL
6.30PM - 10.30PM

Register your interest for tickets,
corporate tables or sponsorship
opportunities



The Compassionate Friends Victoria
Supporting
parents, siblings &
grandparents after a child dies

News from the Centre

The Walk to Remember was held on the 11th of April at Princes Park. Please see the photos and article written by Bruce and Catrina Houghton on page 8.

The High Tea was a huge success with 48 beautiful Mums attending a lovely lunch and afternoon tea. Margaret Harmer (Founder of TCFV with husband Lindsay), gave a wonderful inspiring talk looking back on her journey and was especially assuring to newly bereaved Mums to have hope that things will get better. Susan Loch, who was visiting from Sydney also talked about her new book "Jessica's Gift" written after the death of her daughter. Please see the book review for further information. It was a lovely afternoon catching up with old friends and making new ones.

We are saddened to announce that Sheryl Sazenis has resigned from her position at TCFV and is returning to the corporate world. We thank Sheryl for all her hard work and dedication over the past months and wish her all the very best in her new position. Sheryl will be continuing on as a volunteer as well as continuing to help run the Bayside Support Group.

Upcoming Events

You are warmly invited to attend the Winter Solstice on the 18th of June at the Centre. Please visit the website to register or contact the office.

The AGM will be held on 19 September 2021, so please put this date into your calendar. If you would like to become a board member, please reach out to a present Board Member as they are currently recruiting new members.



We invite you to complete the survey TCFV has created to find out what is important to you and what we can improve.

Please scan this QR Code or visit the following address. www.tcfv.org.au/surve

If you require a paper copy of the questionnaire contact TCFV on 03 9888 4034 for a questionnaire to be posted to you, including a postage paid return envelope.

More than one person in each household can complete the questionnaire online. Please feel free to photocopy and fill in individually or contact TCFV to post you some extra forms.

Magazine Team

A big thank you to the entire magazine team for all the articles provided and proof reading.

Thank you to the Magazine mailout team Phil Jones, Sandra Greene, Margaret Doyle, and Paul Sessarego who all did an amazing job when we were short of help. They still completed this mammoth task with a smile on their face to ensure that everyone received the Apr/May 2021 edition.

LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

*The Burt Family
Box Hill North*

To Dear Ann and The Compassionate Friends many thanks for the lovely card and kind words and the verse (Something Beautiful Remains)

Thank you also for the wonderful work that you do bringing comfort to so many grieving the loss of loved ones.

*With love
Kathy, Chris, and Tim Burt*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

We wish to draw your attention to a research project that has been conducted by TCFV member Barbara Kessel (Grad Dip Family Therapy, BSW). Barbara has written an article on her findings, which appears on Pages 22-26 of this edition of Grieve Heal Grow magazine:

GRIEF UPON GRIEF

The Double Grief experienced by parents after the death of their adult son or daughter whose partner denies them access to their grandchildren.

TCFV wishes to express its great appreciation and support for Barbara in examining this important subject. Barbara is the bereaved mother of sons Gavin, Michael and Jeremy.

THANK YOU'S



Thank you to Michelle Loughhead for the donation in Loving memory of my son Greg Paterson for his 56th birthday in July.

Thank you to Steven Katsineris and family for the donation of stickers in memory of Chione.

Thank you to Pamela McGregor for the donation of stickers in memory of her son Mark.

Robert Ziemer called into our office on Friday 26 March, with two lovely cutting/cheese boards he had made for Jenny G and Mirella M as a thank you for their support and the anniversary card he received on the 3rd anniversary of his son Randall. The boards were made with love; Robert spent time chatting with me, mostly explaining the effort he put into making them and the healing experience it gave him.

By Theresa Yeo
Bereaved Mother of Clara (7)



Thank you Grace Sim who did a fundraiser in memory of Clara Sim & made the donation to TCFV in Dec 2020.

To all that contributed to my little rainbow mask & drawstring bag sales, thank you for doing this with me in memory of my cousin, Clara's 20th death anniversary last year.



WALK TO REMEMBER - 2021

The weather looked inauspicious on Sunday 11 April. It was grey and cold and rain was about; not especially encouraging for those of us who had registered for the annual TCFV Walk to Remember, (W2R). Some, including ourselves, wondered if W2R 2021 might even be cancelled. But a reassuring text message from Jenny Galati told us that there was a break in the clouds directly above Princes Park – our W2R location, as it has been in recent times.

Buoyed with optimism, we arrived to find perhaps 50 or more fellow TCFV members and volunteers; a good sign! And thus, began another moving and heart-warming W2R.

The familiar format of some short speeches, a quiet walk around the park, (social for some, perhaps meditative for others), the spectacular releasing of doves, the placement of flowers as to form a circle of love for those passed, and a relaxed BBQ, all gave us nourishment and strength.

Sometimes I think all we can do in honour of our children and siblings, is just to keep on walking, faithful to their memory. The W2R allows many of us to do this together and so it really is a shared and moving tribute to our lost children and siblings. It is quiet and mostly subdued just an opportunity where we can be in solidarity with others walking the same journey as ourselves sharing stories or just getting lost in our thoughts and memories.

Thank you to TCFV and the many volunteers who made this year's W2R happen. After a COVID hiatus in 2020 it was a welcome return to 'normal'.



*We gather for the lost, and wait until they are found
I feel my sister in every wind, and hear her in every sound*

*She knows what we went through
She, not mum and dad
And now that my sister's gone
Things feel insurmountably bad
I look at my parents and think
I wonder if they're forever sad*

*I speak your name and shudder; I really wish you were here
Some cried at the funeral sis, but some were beyond the point of tears*

*I'll hear your name in passing, and I'll try to carry on
You know that I've been weighed down for so, so, so long
For mum and dad, and for our little brother, you know I have to be strong*

*I was waiting for you, my sister, right down there by the sea
Where we used to meet, to share in our pain, and decry misery
I waited, I waited, I waited I swear
But when I got down to the ocean, I really wish I saw you there.*

By Paul Sessarego, bereaving brother

My Son Took His Own Life Here's Why You Should Stop Saying 'Committed Suicide.'

Our 21-year-old son died by suicide in 2019, a fact I tell people as soon as I can bring it into conversation, so that they will understand who we are as a family and as human beings. I bring the unmentionable into the light because it is a fact of our lives, and his, that we cannot ignore or deny. I cannot bring my son back. But as a bereaved parent, I can ask one thing of the rest of the world. I can, in fact, insist.

Do not say committed suicide. Please say, henceforth, that a person died by suicide.

We no longer presume people with schizophrenia are possessed by demons or that the chronically depressed are cursed. But suicide as the *felo de se* - crime against oneself - is still the ultimate taboo, even as we staff hotlines and share social media posts to prevent it. The prohibition persists.

I came into Austin's life when he was turning 6, when his father and I started dating. We blended our family of five children, four teen girls and a wee boy, but there were bumps along the way. Blended families are complicated, mental health is complex, and childhood traumas can develop into something bigger even with therapy and interventions.

As our boy went through his teen years, he struggled with a growing sense that adults were against him, that we did not have his back, and that there were conspiracies around him. We went through some rough years but hoped, as he turned 21, that he would grow out of it. Instead, he took his own life.

We were sick with grief. We barely left the house for months. We tried to grapple with his choice and what was left of our lives. One idea became clear to me: We would never let Austin's suicide be a source of embarrassment. We would speak of him openly and often.

But people get nervous when I talk about Austin. They seem shocked that I am not mortified or embarrassed. (I am grief-stricken, but not ashamed.) When I write about Austin on social media, my DMs are flooded with friends who tell me, "I wish I could talk about my sister, my father, my little brother, my cousin, but I can't." The heartbreak is doubled by people's shame, guilt, and

social awkwardness.

Still, if Austin had suffered from cancer or diabetes, or died in an accident, we would not have said he committed cancer, he committed diabetes, or he committed an accidental death. We do not say that our elders commit old age or commit death in their sleep. They die, of old age or heart failure. They die, by whatever cause. We do not blame the one who suffers the disease.

When Austin took his life, he planned ahead. He left letters. He said goodbye, in his own way. And he ended his intense pain in his own way. How can such a desperate decision be considered a crime or a sin? I think saying he committed suicide blames Austin and stigmatizes his death. Haven't we suffered enough by his loss without a side of ignominy and taboo?

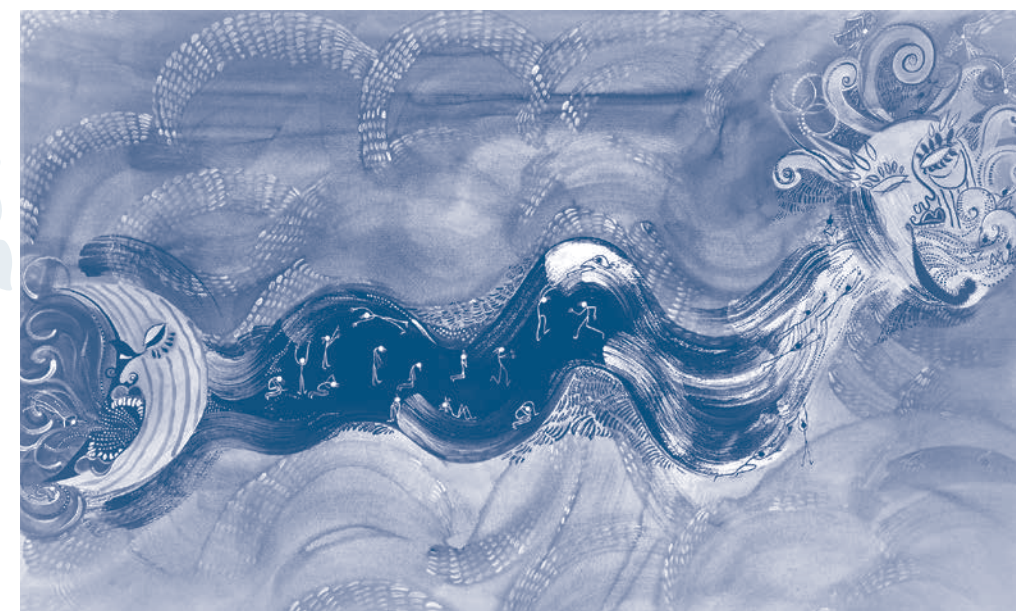
Although this piece is really about the semantics, it also comes back to how we can speak of our dead with love and deep compassion. Saying that your loved one committed suicide seems like the ultimate act of betrayal, blaming them for their own illness and suffering.

Bring them back to the light, your conversation, your family history, your mantel, or photo album, with loving compassion, by proclaiming that they died by suicide, of whatever sadness or desolation, lack of serotonin or missed synapses in their brains that forced them into a corner. They were ill, they ended their pain, and we mourn them.

It's time to stop hiding our suffering and to start blaming the disease instead of the afflicted.

**By Julia Park Tracey, HuffPost Personal
Taken from The Kamloops (Canada) Chapter, Spring 2021**

The Tunnel of Grief



**The Tunnel of Grief
(The story behind the June/July cover picture)
In Loving Memory of my adored only child
Alexander Tomei
23 September 1988 – 26 March 2007**

Losing a child catapults us into a surreal world of agonising pain. A world no one can imagine, a world no parent wants to imagine. Yet it happens ... too often. My son lost his life in March 2007. Alexander was my only child. I could have followed him, but something kept me here ... and so the journey began. I was violently hurled into the tunnel of grief. Head over heels I was sucked into the darkness of indescribable despair. Blindly, I had no choice but to feel my way through.

I went back and forth with all the emotions described by Elisabeth Kubler Ross in her 1969 book, "On death and dying". Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance ... Acceptance! Acceptance? I wasn't even able to think, let alone consider acceptance. Yet it came, eventually, to a degree, and in my own time. What other choice did I have? Denial, Anger, Bargaining and Depression taunted me, but not in that order ... not in any order. Those emotions and more came and went. At times I was stuck in one or another. Other times they all came at once, suffocating me in my fragile state of inconsolable grief and longing for my child.

This painting came to me spontaneously. I had no plan, no vision, my heart and soul guided the brush, and the images appeared and made sense to me. Through intuition, I was painting my journey. When I first entered the tunnel of grief, I felt trapped in a vortex of the deepest pain. I didn't think it would ever release me, but somewhere, stirring in my subconscious, I knew I had to find the light. I had to go through and process all of the emotions and frightening challenges the darkness held,

because I knew that if I was able to conquer my fears and trust in that elusive light at the end, I would find my son.

My Sun ... my son. He would be there safe and sound, held by the Angels with the orange curls.

No one can tell you how long you must spend in the tunnel, or what sequence of emotions you should feel. It is a personal journey ... your courageous journey into yourself. In your own time, you can resurface out of the dark and into the light. I know this, because I've been there, and I have come out the other side.

Artwork donated to The Compassionate Friends of Victoria by Laura Tomei

Author of "Footprints in the sand – a symphony of grief."

Angry with a Dollop of Guilt

In my early twenties I went through a period that lasted quite some years and then spilled over to a couple more, where I felt incredible bursts of extreme anger. This anger could be triggered by seemingly simple events, most frequently the slightest amount of physical pain like bumping into a wall or hitting my hand, could set off this difficult to control beast that lived inside.

Our walls may have suffered a hole or two in their time, my scarcely hardened knuckles felt the punches too.

As I began to write this, thoughts and memories flooding in, keeping me up, I realise I'm not entirely sure where I want to go with all this. I used to get angry. So what? I guess as I reflect on those times, I also feel the contrast of where I am at now. I feel so much more at peace. I am so much less prone to anger. What changed?

To be honest, as always, there were so many complex reasons back then for what I was feeling. But what made it even worse was the guilt that came constantly to top it off. Instead of honouring what I felt, I shamed myself further for feeling how I did. Feeling angry, I believed, made me a bad person, a dangerous person, volatile, wrong. The guilt of being so far from what is 'good' smothered me.

Guilt consumed me in everything. I was never doing enough, I was always behind, there was always more of myself I could have sacrificed, more I 'should' have done, more of others I could have served better, more things I could have cleaned, more study I 'should' have done. It was endless.

Years later, during grief therapy, I learned that guilt can also mask anger. And in general, if I summed things up in a neat little package (not that emotions or life are ever neat), if I was not feeling the intense bursts of anger, I was usually in a state of guilt. Fun. No, actually, not really.

My more recent readings have shed further light on the anger we can feel from unexpressed creativity and suppressed self-expression. This would have played into things too.

For all the things I have changed that have led me to a better place, one of the biggies I am learning is to stop judging the emotions that I feel. Anger is not wrong. In fact, it's a bloody valid emotion that needs the shit honoured out of it at times! Sure, how we express anger needs to be in a way that does not cause others harm. But hell, it needs to be expressed!



Like any emotion we suppress, it festers inside of us, until one day it finds an out, whether that be physical, emotional, or otherwise. But then top that off with some soul-sucking guilt for what we are feeling, and we have a cocktail made to self-destruct. And oh, I was destroyed.

Like severe emotional pain that eases with a desperate sob. Validating and expressing anger in a healthy way is vital. Scream and thrash about if you need to, it makes you a normal human, not crazy. In fact, honest movement is a powerful, healing outlet, something I look forward to exploring more and more.

Stop feeling guilty for what you feel. Honour it. Then find a way to start shifting it by approaching life in a way you haven't yet tried. Because "you cannot heal in the same environment you got sick."

Cited from @stopchasingpain on Instagram.

By Milla Samball

Mum to Eli-sha 11/01/2011 - 13/10/2014 and Jayden, may that date be endless.

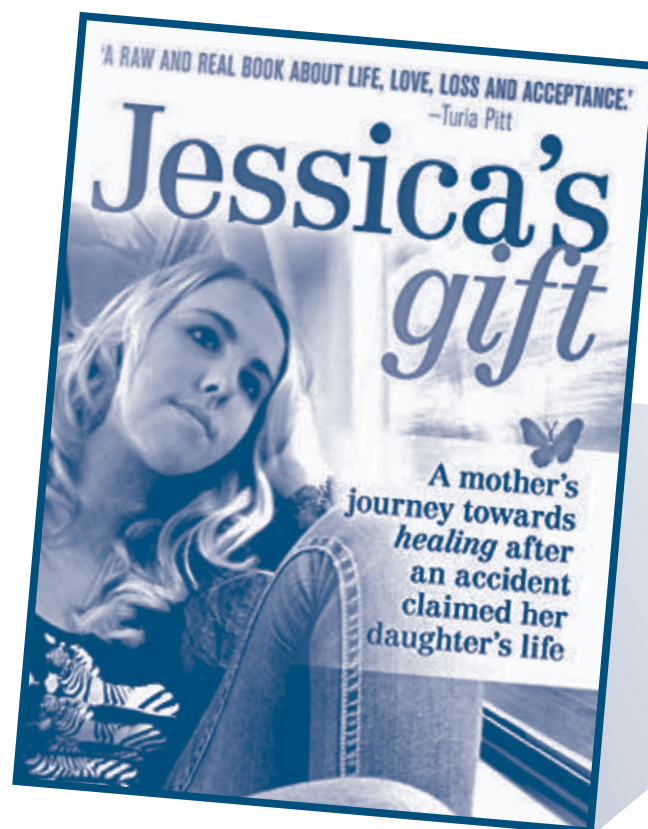
THERE ARE THOSE DAYS

*There are those stormy days,
With dark clouds that block the sun,
It makes it hard to see the light.
It will take time,
But be patient,
The sun will shine again,
And you will arise once more.*

Steven Katsineris. 2020
Bereaved Father of Chione (6) 16.10.92 – 14.10.98

BOOK REVIEW

"Jessica's Gift" by Susan Loch



Susan Loch lost her 19-year-old daughter Jessica in March 2011 on a treacherous stretch of the Princes Highway on the NSW south coast. This book tells the story of Susan's heartache and pain and how, with a lot of demanding work and determination, she managed to regain hope, peace and even joy back into her life.

When I first lost Joseph in July 2016, I read a lot of grief books. Many gave me a glimmer of hope or snippets of advice that I could apply to my own life and most were helpful in some small way. After a couple of years though I just could not read grief books anymore. Last year I heard about Susan's book through the TCFV Facebook Page and decided to buy a copy on my Kindle. It has sat there for months; I just could not pick it up.

Recently I finally decided to start reading "Jessica's Gift". I could not put it down and read a third in one sitting, however I was in tears throughout and it brought back many terrible memories and triggered my grief. I had to stop reading! Susan's writing is vivid, and her grief leaps out of the pages all too real. Of course, there are differences but also many similarities of how Susan and I felt after losing our beautiful children.

So, I read a detective novel and then decided I really wanted to finish "Jessica's Gift". I am so pleased I did.

Yes, the dark days of Susan's grief is extremely hard to read but that is what makes it a brilliant book, it's real and it's honest. Susan is also inspiring and hopeful, she talks of how she decided to bring happiness back into her life and the things that helped her do that, including a trip to Bali, Eastern spirituality, The Compassionate Friends and her support group, yoga and meditation, nature, and the beach close to her home. She talks of her relationships with her husband and two sons, her parents and extended family, her friends, and Jessica's friends. The good, the bad and the terrible comments and ways others relate to bereaved parents, this book has it all!

I would highly recommend this book not just for the bereaved parents but also for the non- bereaved. It may help others understand the lasting heartbreak we live with every day and how extremely hard we must work to bring peace and some happiness back into our lives. A copy of this book is available to borrow from the TCFV library in Canterbury

Jane Moschetti

Bereaved Mother of Joseph (18)

"This is a beautifully written and very challenging description of parental grief. It is a place of deep darkness, and yet ... [Susan] leads you to the dawning of a new day with the promise of hope. Tears flow, hers and ours, but those tears are the path to the healing of a broken heart."

I hope *Jessica's Gift* appears on the compulsory reading list for all those training for a full-time career in the Church or the social services. We all have much to learn from Susan's heartbreak—that we may in turn be more effective in our care of bereaved parents."

—Canon Simon Stephens,
Founder of The Compassionate Friends

"In a culture where death and grief are hidden, Susan's book tells it like it is—from shock and disbelief, to anger, guilt and hope—it's all here. We can't truly know what another person's grief is; however, Susan's intimate and candid account ... reminds us that grief is a wild place and we are irrevocably altered by it."

—Wendy Liu, Specialist Grief Counsellor

"Every person ... should read *Jessica's Gift*. Sometimes we think we know how to respond in times of grief, but do we? Susan's heartfelt, yet real and practical recount, offers support that no person or community should miss."

—Fiona Phillips, MP, Member for Gilmore

"The dark days of Susan's grief is extremely hard to read but that is what makes it a brilliant book; it's real and it's honest ... I would highly recommend this book ... it may help others understand the lasting heartbreak we live with every day and how terribly hard we have to work to bring peace and some happiness back into our lives."

—Jane Moschetti, bereaved mother of Joseph (18)
and member of The Compassionate Friends



Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation – The Joshua Bendel Fund

It is an unfortunate reality that only bereaved family members can understand the anguish of losing a child.

There are few things that can help family members afterwards. Perhaps with time we learn to cope and to regain some meaning to our lives.

One thing we continually must face is how many people (family and friends included) are often so careful not to mention our child's name in case they step on sore toes. The reality is that we are wanting to recognise and celebrate our child's life and have their name mentioned as much as possible.

In 2011 Theresa Yeo mentioned that the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (LMCF) operates and manages small charity funds. Theresa had started a fund for her daughter, Clara. I was aware that The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation has had a long relationship with The Compassionate Friends. LMCF has a reputation as a well-run and professional organisation.

I immediately decided to set up a fund for my son which is called The Joshua Bendel Fund. We went to a function in which we received our certificate of appreciation.

The LMCF charge a small administration fee and can allocate income to your designated charity depending on the value of the fund, which in our case is The Compassionate Friends.

In 2013 we had held a special 30th birthday party for our son, Joshua and distributed special donorship cards that the LMCT had prepared for us at no charge.

Today I can see how over the years it is so easy to operate. We do not have to do much if we don't wish to, the fund just sits there, without any work or attention from my family. On special occasions we may channel some spare money into it.

On a completely different tangent, last year I was discussing this fund with a business client of mine who wanted to start an animal welfare charity. We investigated starting this with LMCT who enabled this in such an easy and professional manner. LMCF covers a wide range of charitable activities e.g. homelessness to family violence to



environmental protection. This flexibility means we are not locked in and could always redirect donations should we wish.

There are clearly differences between direct donations to The Compassionate Friends versus the setting up of a charitable Foundation in which the income is directed to The Compassionate Friends. Each method depends on the nature and purpose of the donation.

We have never regretted setting up the Fund and love the idea that the fund celebrates that we had a son who lived and breathed and who we shared some great memories with.

By Danny Bendel
Bereaved Father of Joshua (19)
Please see LMCF Ad on page 31

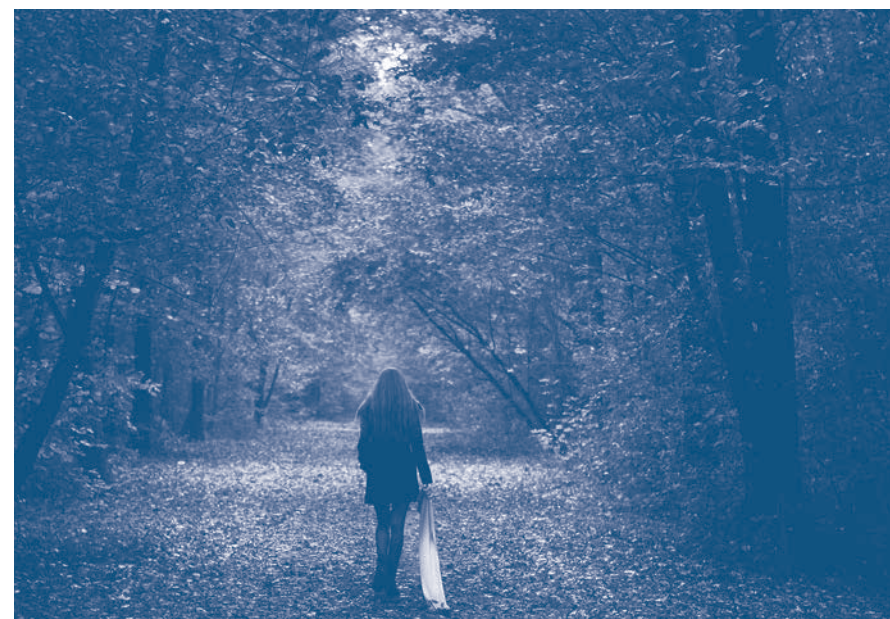


The Journey Begins



I started to put together some words for those parents who are facing the first weeks and months of a different life without a dearly loved child. I have had to ponder . . . taking myself back to the time when I first visited The Compassionate Friends centre in Canterbury, when I had my first inkling that I was on the very same journey as others. I did not imagine that in the hard world as I saw it, there could possibly be any softness, true compassion or hope for a future.

The Compassionate Friends will, should you wish, travel alongside you through these incredibly sad early times, until you can smile again. At present I imagine you may think 'early days' conjure thoughts that 'later days' will come, and you feel you must smile again when those tender 'early days' are deemed by the community to have passed. Yet in your own heart you truly believe the 'early days' will last forever and to consider your grief is 'getting better' or that you are 'recovering' is unthinkable to you. If and when these things seem to be expected of you, you feel misunderstood and full of hurt and pain. Nothing is expected of you, no timeline, no band-aid fixes, and no trying to please others.



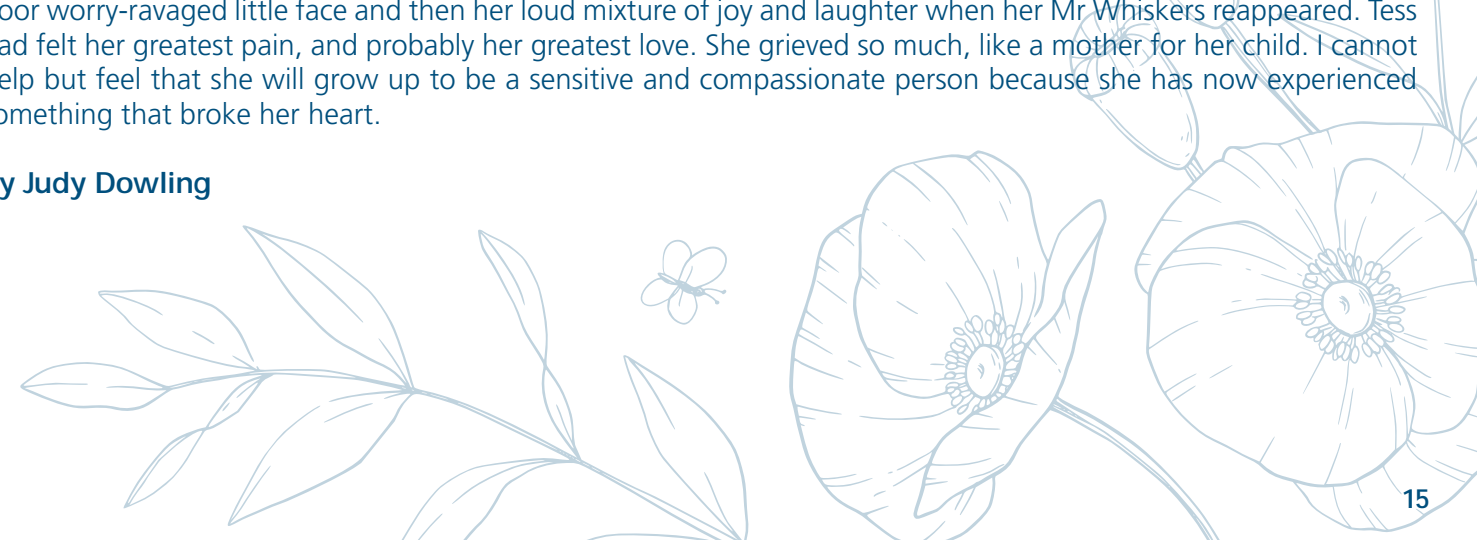
Your child is from your own flesh and blood and absolutely unique, incomparable, and so is your story. The best thing that each of us could be shown, is respect with acknowledgment that this is absolutely true. This devastation happened to your child and your family and yours alone and you grieve and carry your story in your own way. I am not simply assuring you that you will find some happiness again - that is something you will discover for yourself as certain things take place in your life.

Cuddle yourself in warmth and memories for now. Let the world go by for there is nothing more important to think about than your dear child.

.....

Tess is my neighbour. She is nine. She often appears outside over my fence as she repeatedly bounces on her trampoline. It squeaks. Her sweet little new longed-for tabby kitten disappeared yesterday. She was devastated and couldn't be consoled for hours. She refused to go inside and continued searching. I'll not forget her soulful crying, poor worry-ravaged little face and then her loud mixture of joy and laughter when her Mr Whiskers reappeared. Tess had felt her greatest pain, and probably her greatest love. She grieved so much, like a mother for her child. I cannot help but feel that she will grow up to be a sensitive and compassionate person because she has now experienced something that broke her heart.

By Judy Dowling



Some Thoughts for those Bereaved by Suicide (and for those bereaved by any traumatic loss)

By Jon and Sue Stebbins

Discoveries We Have Found Helpful

1. Our biggest discovery has been that in reaching out to help others like us, we have found we gain as much (if not more) that we give. There is something beautiful, even magical, and definitely uplifting in seeing a deeply distressed person slowly begin to regain control of the life ahead, and even begin to sense the hope of future happiness.
2. Inevitably, each bereaved person will follow a different, unique, grief path:
 - Each will act differently
 - Each will deal with people differently
 - Each will take different times for actions
 - Each will cry differently and at different times and in different places
 - Each will seek different avenues of help – or will seek no help from outside themselves – or will seek help early or late.
 - And each person will take a different time to reach a manageable “normality”. Sadly some very few struggle to ever reach this point, and require special help.
3. We live in a world that has limited understanding of death and grief. So expect those around you (family, friends, colleagues) to be as lost and confused as you are. Try to smile wryly at their weird comments (“It’s been 6 weeks. Shouldn’t you be getting over it by now?”). Gently correct them. The point is, if you let them know their lack of understanding is “normal”, in most cases they will take this on board, and the long term outcome is you will have someone who will work beside you, to help you on your journey.
4. If you know what will help you, help family and friends by telling them. Don’t expect them to know or guess.
5. Ultimately, we must determine and take charge of our journey and actions towards recovery. In this sense, we are alone, and this is scary. But, we do not have to travel alone. We have a choice in seeking out and asking for help. This is hard, but probably 90% of people are caring and want to help. It takes courage to hunt down people in the 90% group. But persistence pays off. Research shows that those who attend a (safe) support group for example (such as those groups attached to TCF) are much more likely to re-claim their lives faster and more balanced than those who do not.
6. Beware of those who give strong advice, or tell you “You should...” on your journey. Listen of course, but go away and think through whether such advice or “shoulds” are helpful. If not, ignore them.
7. Unfortunately to learn to handle the pain of our loss we must stay with the pain. This is the most difficult truth of all. But, it does not mean we cannot take breaks! What it says is that like it or not (and we mostly don’t like it!) we have no choice but to face and dig in on our painful loss – if we want to eventually manage it. The good news is that if we do this, slowly the intensity of the pain lessens.
8. Keep reminding yourself that your grief journey will always be somewhat “messy”. We do not grieve neatly. We do not follow a systematic, logical, one-thing-at-a-time journey. We jump backwards and forwards, from simple to complex, we have gaps, we have days of deep intensity, and days of “nothing”, etc..., depending usually on what is happening around us. Knowing that retrieving our lives is a roller coaster ride helps us better accept those really bad times.
9. Research suggests that we alternate between two types of “grief focus”:
 - (i) Working on aspects of the pain of the loss (pain of missing him/her, facing “should haves” &/or “could haves”, etc.), or
 - (ii) Working on practical issues or changes associated with the loss (getting school support for other children, going



back to work, reorganising money, etc.)
10. Remember, life goes on. We are always dealing with other issues, as well as the issue of the loss of our loved one. Try not to let the complexity of “life” overwhelm you. Stay with the “here-and-now”, try to deal with one issue at a time, and ask for help!

(Taken from TCFV Grieve Heal Grow June/July 2017)

FINALLY, IF YOU ARE SUPPORTING OTHERS:

- (i) Listen, listen, listen – but actively. When people feel heard, they feel less alone, and more confident about facing their loss, and the issues involved.
- (ii) Stick with listening to where they are in their grief NOW (that is, stick with what they want to talk about)
- (iii) Limit advice giving (unless they ask for specific information). Advice giving tends to put you in control, and takes away their autonomy.
- (iv) Slow your responses, and encourage silences of reflection. Slowing things down enables them to reflect and create their own answers, and become more in charge of their own journey.

Night

*Night! My bedside clock shows the time.
It is 3:16 a.m. and I stare into the blackness of another desperate night.
Tears roll off the sides of my eyes, into my ears, out onto my pillow.
Silently my husband moves, and I know he is not asleep ...
His breathing isn't regular.*

*He stirs and I know what he is remembering.
He moves out of bed and out into the kitchen.
The lights there snap on.
I hear crockery noises as he makes himself tea.*

*Should I go out to see how he is ... or stay quietly in bed
Letting him have some time alone?
His days are so full at work and he has no place to be by himself
except now, alone at 3:30 a.m. in the morning.*

*Oh God ... WHEN are we going to be released from this desperate longing
for our little boy ... our only son?
How long does it last? How long does it take?
So many months have gone by and we are not feeling any better ...
... only WORSE!
Help me God ... I just can't handle this all alone.*

*The lights turn off ... He stumbles back into bed, cold and spent.
We lie apart ... both wide awake, desperate for rest ... relief.
He moves, and I turn towards him, reaching for his hand.
He turns towards me and holds me closely.
No words are needed ... we are together.
We feel so much for each other ... We KNOW
No one else in the world can share my pain ... but him.
“Thank you, God, that we still have each other.”*

But I am still so alone.

Margaret E. Harmer
Bereaved Mother of Rhys (11)
Co-Founder of TCF, Australia 1978)



Why The Death of a Sibling Is Like Losing a Part of Yourself

If you're anything like me, you grew up in a fairy-tale surrounded by siblings who stood 10 feet tall. You grew up with parents who were as brave as superheroes. You grew up naïve to the world around you. Do not get me wrong; I was well aware of what the news never failed to talk about. I knew mothers and fathers could lose their battles with cancer. I knew children could be kidnapped. I knew houses burned down, and car accidents happened almost every day.

But, I had created a world where my family was untouchable, where nothing could ever happen to them because they were mine.

Five years ago, a police officer knocked on our front door. It was 10 pm, and I had just gotten ready for bed. "There's been an accident. You need to come to the hospital right away."

By this point, I had seen enough TV shows to know this was not what you wanted to hear from a police officer, especially not at 10 pm, and especially not when your older brother still hadn't made it home. I lost a brother that day. I lost a cheerleader, a mentor and a best friend. The safe space I had created so easily disappeared, and I was left to tackle the world without the one person who had always paved a path before me. There is no word to describe the loss of a sibling. If you lose a spouse, you're a widow or widower. If you lose your parents, you're an orphan. But if you lose a sibling, you just become the girl who lost her brother.

My therapist described it as losing a limb. If someone tells you it gets better with time, the person's lying to you. Yes, cuts get better, and wounds do heal, but when you lose an arm, it's foolish to await the day it "gets better." You simply learn to live with one arm.

I learned to do the things I know he would have liked. I learned to listen to the songs we sang together in the car without breaking down in tears. I learned — and am still learning — to function normally without him just a phone call away. However, "normal" has lately been like a blanket too short for a bed. Sometimes it covers you just fine, and other times it leaves you shaking in the cold. I've come to find the worst part is I never know which one it's going to be when I wake up.

It's been almost five years since that day. Some days the ache is a little less than before, but other days it makes me want to lock myself in my room. And some days, I still feel like I am stuck in a void. There is no statute of limitations on grief. There is no time limit to waking up crying or having to leave the grocery store because you see your sibling's old friends. There is no special cure for those dull aches in your heart that don't seem to ever go away. But, coming from a sister who thought she would never find the light again, know there will come a day when the thought of that loved one brings a smile to your face instead of leaving you gasping for a breath you cannot find. There will come a day when you find yourself talking about your sibling and you do not feel uncomfortable.

There will come a day when the universe sends you a sign to let you know your sibling is doing OK. And there will come a day when the 19 years you were able to have with your sibling becomes enough for the 19 more, you'll never have. There is no other love like the love for a brother, and no other love like the love from a brother. And if you're lucky to have a brother who was also your best friend, that love is going to cover you during the best of times and hold your hand through the worst.

This article was written by Kady Braswell for Unwritten
Taken from The Johannesburg Chapter of Compassionate Friends (April 2021)

Calendar of Events 2021

Social Events	Date	
Winter Solstice	18th June	Centre
Sibling Zoom Trivia	July	Zoom
Men's Only Cook and Chat	27th August	Centre
Gala	28th October	Melbourne Town Hall
Dia de los Muertos	1st November	Centre
Members 15 years+ Afternoon Tea	5th September	Centre
End of year Volunteer Celebration	27th November	Centre
Service	Date	Location
Topics around Grief	Third Sat. each month	Zoom
Express Yourself Through Art	Each Monday	Zoom
AGM	19th September	Centre and Zoom
Newly Bereaved Connections	Sept	Centre
Candlelight Service	12th December	To be confirmed and on Zoom
Volunteer Training	Date	Location
Regional Group Leader	4 Weeks across June/July	Zoom
Phone Responders Training	July	Centre and Online
Chat Responders Training	July	Centre and Online
Metro Group Leader Training	September	Centre
Introduction to Volunteering	19th September	Centre

Please check the TCFV website closer to the time to see specific dates and arrangements.

To attend activities, book online at <https://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au> or telephone the Centre on 03 9888 4034 to register for Volunteer Training.

TCFV MEMBERS SURVEY, CAN YOU HELP US?

In this challenging time post Covid 19, TCFV wants to better understand our members' needs and if there are ways that TCFV can improve support to members in this 'new normal'. We welcome your suggestions and encourage you to share your views openly. The survey will take between 5 -10 minutes to complete.

1. You can complete this questionnaire online by going to this address www.tcfv.org.au/survey or scanning this QR code.



2. If you require a paper copy of the questionnaire contact TCFV on 03 9888 4034 for a questionnaire to be posted to you, including a postage paid return envelope.
3. More than one person in each household can complete the questionnaire online.
Please feel free to photocopy and fill in individually or contact TCFV to post you some extra forms.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The TCFV questionnaire does not require any personal identifying details. All questionnaire information will remain confidential and no identifying data will be disclosed.

Please complete the questionnaire no later than Monday July 12th.

When Memorable Days Approach

When the Anniversaries, special or memorable days approach, we inevitably feel the stomach churn, the heart rate hasten...but as time goes by, even "those memories," the horror ones, the ones that took their lives, become less intense. Do not be fooled into thinking you're past the ferocity of the suffering. All memories, both beautiful and distressing, are a part of us, embedded in our hearts, minds, and bodies.

Sometimes we think we can get through those days without too much emotional pain... but can we? Yes, as time goes by, we learn to live with tragedy, but the scars are there forever, and like the scabs we older folk used to get on our ankles when learning to ride our bicycles, they are sometimes scraped, and they bleed all over again.

But can we laugh in the face of tragedy? Can a distraction from the grief we live every day be a blessing? Yes, it can and yes, it's OK to crack a smile, or see and feel the beauty life also has on offer. Deepak Chopra once said in an interview, "Laughter is a device the body utilizes, to help alleviate pain."

My son's Anniversary is on the 26th of March. Do I feel the pull at the heartstrings? Of course, and I cry, the same tears, with the same intensity I did 14 years ago, when the weight of the world became too heavy

for his beautiful heart to carry. He was crushed, both emotionally and physically.... My boy! ALEX I salute you; I thank the heavens for the privilege of having been your earth mother. My Spirit child, I adore you.

Mamma

Laura Tomei
Bereaved Mother of Alexander
23/09/1988 - 26/03/2007



estate means summer in Italian



The Sun Will Shine Again.

*When you fall,
 Don't despair,
 There's always hope.
 So never ever give up,
 Just keep on going,
 A little more each day will do.
 In time the sun will shine again,
 And some beauty will return.*

By Steven Katsineris 2020.
Bereaved Father of Chione (6) 16.10.92 - 14.10.98

Fifteen Years A Volunteer You can do it too ...

My connection with TCF started 18 months after I became a "Bereaved Mother" of my second born daughter Kerrie-Anne Morrow, age 29 years and 6 days. Born 8/4/74 - 14/4/2003.

I was often told that I needed help during the first months. Who could help me, who could possibly know what I felt, this is my grief. I did get counselling with a grief counsellor, who gave me a leaflet with the emblem of TCF. She had trained with the organisation. Not that any of it registered at that time.



I would get into my car and go for a drive during this time, not going anywhere, just somewhere. On one of these drives I was coming down Canterbury Road and spotted the emblem on the side of a building. It was something I'd seen somewhere, so I went back to take a second look. TCF. The light bulb went on, so I called in, and all I can say is it became a big part of my scrambled life. This was a place I felt I belonged, where people understood me, gave me comfort and support. I even laughed at times, although there were more tears than I could think possible. I became a volunteer on a regular basis, writing cards, helping with filing, sending out packages, whatever was required to help those that were giving support to the many that had been brought together in grief. I could never believe that I would be in this position.

It was suggested that I do a listening course to assist with the phone calls, which I completed. There are many beneficial programs offered with TCF, which I took part in. I have now been taking calls for 15 years. People often ask, "Is it beneficial to your wellbeing?" Yes, Kerrie still lives within me. I can speak her name with TCF. Why? I know how it feels to go through those first months and years.

It may be 18 years that have passed, but that doesn't mean I'm better. It means I've adjusted. Being a volunteer, for me, is rewarding. I have friends that support me and I'm not alone. It gives me confidence and if anyone reading this says, "I wish I could do it," you can. Try it. You can stop anytime you feel it's too much.

Thank you. The Compassionate Friends, both past and present.
 The group nobody chooses to be part of ... what a special group we are.

Pat Morrow.
Kerrie's heartbroken mum.



Grief Upon Grief

The Double Grief experienced by parents after the death of their adult son or daughter whose partner denies them access to their grandchildren.

The Author

BARBARA KESSEL (Grad Dip Family Therapy, BSW). Barbara is the bereaved mother of Gavin, Michael and Jeremy, and is a member of The Australian Association of Social Workers and TCFV.

Acknowledgements

I would sincerely like to thank all those who participated in this study. They opened their hearts to me, revealing all their sorrow and loss hoping their stories would help others caught up in this situation. Many thanks to Dr Michelle Meyers (Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner,) Dr Jon Stebbins (TCFV,) Dr. Andrew McNess (TCFV) and Alan Baker (Senior Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner Catholic Care) for their invaluable assistance helping me collate the information and do justice to everyone's story.

Introduction

Since the death of my sons I experience abiding sadness. Although they all had partners, they didn't have children and therefore I have no grandchildren. Last year, watching television during the Covid lockdowns, I became aware of how grandparents and grandchildren missed seeing one another. Friends with grandchildren voiced the same sadness and some were quite distressed. Other friends who have had an adult son/daughter die and have been unable to see their grandchildren for over ten years told me the Lockdown had accentuated their loss. They said it gave them too much time to think about the double loss: the loss of their child and their inability to see their grandchildren. They still found it incomprehensible that their son or daughter's partner would deprive them of the joy of being involved in their grandchildren's lives.

Hearing this, I wondered how many other bereaved parents had been or were currently in this situation. Researching the area I found many articles written about divorcing and separating parents and access issues, but very little where an adult child had died. I then approached TCFV to ask if I could conduct an informal study of grandparents who may have been in this situation grandparents involved with the organisation who may have been in this situation.

The following information results from interviews I conducted with eight grandparents; six females and two males and one male sibling who helped me understand

the impact of the double loss on his family. The grandparents and one sibling signed Informed Consent forms and interviews were carried out by phone and Zoom.

The subjects covered were :

- Family
- Grief
- Family relationships
- Anger and its Impact
- Attempts at Resolution
- Legal options



Like a rock tossed into a pond the death of a loved one, especially that of a child creates waves that spread far and wide. Therefore, in this study I have chosen to not only look at the grandparents and their family, but also the remaining partner and his or her family.

Family

The term Family means different things to different people. Over the years, whom one regards as Family has changed. For many it's their immediate family: parents, husband, wife, children and grandchildren. Others who arrived on these shores as migrants and have few or no family members living in Australia have created their own version of family, their 'Family of Creation'. As one participant recounted, "these are people and communities, who welcomed me when I arrived in Australia". Another said, "The people I grew up with and those who are there for you." These friends have become their family. Therefore, when tragedy strikes every member of the family both those connected biologically and those regarded as family are affected.

The Importance of Family

Those interviewed all spoke of the importance of family connection; as one grandparent so eloquently expressed it, "They are my past and future...they hold me up and are the reason I get out of bed every day." Another said, "Family is my world," and another, "There is nothing closer in life." Family became even more important to them after the death of their child. They expressed sorrow over their loss and also the deep pain they felt at not being able to see their grandchildren. The grandchildren were considered the living embodiment of the son or daughter who died and proof they had existed in this world. They also expressed sorrow that the grandchildren were "cut off from their cousins, aunts and uncles who loved them and their heritage." Several commented they wanted their grandchild to "know" their mother or



father and "keep their memory alive." Two, whose sons had died by suicide wanted to reassure the children that their father loved them and one stated they wanted to tell the child "what a good man" their father was.

Importance of the Grandparent/Grandchild Relationship Most parents find as their children reach adulthood and partner they look forward to having grandchildren. Research shows proven health benefits from this important family relationship. A 2014 study from the Journal of the American Gerontological Society found that spending quality time with their grandchildren benefited the grandparents by giving them a sense of purpose and also kept them mentally sharp.¹ Further, it improved their mental health by lowering the risk of suffering from depression.²

Another study suggests that having an intergenerational identity helps children see where they fit within it and can "make them more resilient and help them feel more in control of their lives, even when the world outside their family seems out of control."³ Grandparents also were seen as the "purveyors of family traditions, providing children with a sense of roots and family" and a link to their cultural heritage.⁴

Grief

It is incomprehensible to stand at your child's graveside when it should be the other way round. Speaking with the parents in this study they all expressed the difficulty they had coming to terms with the death, asking Why? "Why her?" Why him? "She didn't smoke or drink or take drugs." "Why did she have to die and leave her children and husband by themselves?"

Grief is the name we give to the sorrow and pain we feel when we lose anything or anyone we love. The more we love the more we grieve and there is nothing more devastating for a parent than the death of their child, whatever their age or whatever the cause. The death of one's child is like no other loss; it defines the past, torments the present and deprives one of the future. A grandchild is a fragment of tribute, proof to not just you, but the world, that your child was present, here on earth, and left their mark for generations to come.

One grandparent movingly expressed her sorrow saying, "We have all lost so much more! The children lost their mother, their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. We lost our daughter and the future we would have had with them and now also our future with our grandchildren!"



Children and Grief

When a caregiver dies even very young children experience grief. Often they have seen death on TV or in cartoons and they are "aware of death," even if they don't understand it. They can go from crying to playing in the blink of an eye. These mood swings do not mean they aren't sad or that they are 'over it'. They can also exhibit signs of depression or anxiety or show anger. Others might start wetting the bed.⁵

A grandparent in the study whose son had suicided said her grandchild cried out "Did Daddy love me?" Another grandparent witnessed her grandchild become distraught and stated he suffered "separation anxiety" and another expressed a very common fear children have if a parent dies "Who will look after us if Daddy dies?" During this exceptionally emotional and stressful time all the grandparents wanted to do was give their grandchildren love and support. They were extremely upset when denied the chance to do so. One father forbade the grandparents to mention the mother to the grandchildren saying it "unsettled" them too much and then gave this as a reason to stop involvement with them.

Family Reactions


As each family member is an individual with a differing personality, in grief they will all respond differently to their loss. The emotional roller coaster that accompanies loss often creates a whirlpool wherein frustration, sorrow, anger and withdrawal may result in family members being unable to see or hear the viewpoints of the other.

Complicating grief further is that patterns of interactions and a family's style of relating to one another have been established from childhood. Each will have found their own way of coping during a crisis. This way of coping applies not only to the parent whose child has died, but also to their son or daughter's partner.

This combination of: heightened emotions, different coping mechanisms, contrasting cultural and religious beliefs around death can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication and animosity.

Relationship with their son/daughter and their partner before and after the death of their child


Before the death of their child: All the parents stated they had a close or reasonably close relationship with their child and their son or daughter's partner. Some were closer than others. One mother shared that the relationship with her daughter and son-in-law could at times be conflictual, describing it as "running hot and



cold.” When asked to rate the closeness to their child and their partner on a scale: 1 Being not at all close - 10 Being extremely close, the average score was 7. In fact, one rated her relationship with her daughter-in-law a 10 as she regarded her as a daughter. She knew these feelings were reciprocated as her daughter-in-law had said, “You are more like a mother to me than my own mother.” Those with low scores on the child partner scale were as involved with their grandchildren as those with higher scores entailing: picking them up from school, babysitting and attending birthday parties. They also felt they were welcome to drop in.

After the death of their child: five reported noticing an almost immediate distancing. For two families the closeness lasted over a year until their child’s partner remarried. They stated the new spouses put obstacles in the way of their seeing their grandchildren and the one who previously rated their relationship 10 before her daughter-in-law remarried, now rated it - 10. Another scored it - 1000.

Anger



Grieving over the death of one’s child is emotionally complex and draining. Among the many feelings one may experience anger. Research shows parents can become frustrated and irate by the insensitive things said to them. Sometimes they are furious with God or even the child who has died. The loss of the connection with one’s grandchildren, due to their child’s partner’s behaviour towards them, can lead to frustration, deep hurt and anger. Other research shows that those whose partners have died may wonder why or what they have done to deserve this. They may find themselves taking out their frustration on family and friends, or feel overwhelmed with a deep sense of resentment directed at the person who has died and left them. Anger towards a loved one may be more likely if the death was the result of self-destructive behaviour.⁶ These differences create conflict between individuals and families and the hurt and pain increases everyone’s suffering.

Impact of conflict on the Grandparents grief


Some grandparents in this study were angrier than others. One commented that her daughter’s partner wouldn’t let them tell her child’s friends she was ill and they only found out the day before she died. She felt her daughter was “deprived of the support” she could have had from them. Others were excluded from being involved in the funeral arrangements. To this day one grandmother does not know the whereabouts of her daughter’s ashes. However, all the study participants managed to contain most of their anger when around the grandchildren and the remaining parent. Although

the anger was suppressed, they all said it had an impact on their grief. One stated, “It made it harder and any kind of happiness harder to feel.” Another said, “They were my only family in Australia and it made my grief harder to bear” and another responded, “It compounded the grief and made the whole issue confusing... my anger grew as we had helped him (their son-in-law) in so many ways, it made the grieving much more difficult. It caused me to keep it in my head and not talk about it”. However, all the grandparents chose not to alienate their grandchildren’s remaining parent and reported they, “kept those feelings under wraps,”

Support

The bereaved parents found support from many sources. Two said their support came from their religious beliefs, the majority spoke of their friends and a few mentioned their son/daughter’s friends. One said her family was her main support but others reflected they didn’t get any help from their family. The one sibling found his wife and her family to be very supportive. Also, his workmates and his work had a specific support programme.

Other sources were:

- 
- Beyond Blue
 - Support After Suicide
 - Grief Counselling - in particular The Centre for Grief and Bereavement.
 - The majority found belonging to The Compassionate Friends and other bereavement support groups focusing on the death of a child really helped as they were with others in a similar situation.

Seeking a Resolution

When the remaining partner made it clear they no longer wanted the grandchildren to spend time with their grandparents they attempted to resolve the situation by enlisting the help of friends and family members. The brother whose sister died tried to help his parents by acting as a ‘go between’ between them and their son-in-law with no success. A few had ministers of religion speak with the father or mother of their grandchildren. All to no avail! One sent a Text message respectfully asking to see their grandchild and the reply came back “it’s not going to happen!” Another said there was nothing she could have done, “except give him complete control.”

Taking the Legal Path

Grandparents have the right to apply for a court order to communicate with or spend time with their grandchildren. However, the legislation is based on the best interests of the child.⁷ If grandparents take the matter to court they will need to explain to the court that what they are seeking in their application is in the best interests of

the child.⁷ (For more information see the Family Law Act 1975- Part V11 Sect 60B(2b) 60B(2e) 60CC)

Family Dispute Resolution Service FDR (Mediation)

Alan Baker, Senior Family Dispute Practitioner Catholic Care, wanted to advise grandparents on the basis the Family Dispute Resolution Service and the courts make their reports and judgement. He stated both are always based on the “best interests of the child not the wishes of parents, grandparents or anyone else.” The three main considerations are:

- The child’s safety
 - The benefit to the child of having a meaningful relationship with each parent
 - Additional considerations include relationships with grandparents, but specifically in the context of what is in the best interests of the children.
- The law is not about what grandparents want or about justice for grandparents (It is also not about justice for parents.) It is about the best interests of children

Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) - Mediation

Three sets of grandparents accessed the Family Dispute Resolution Service. If someone (a parent, a grandparent or anyone else) wishes to make a court application concerning spending time with children, they are required (with limited exceptions) to resolve issues via a Mediation process first. Although there is considerable consistency between FDR practitioners, there are some differences, so it is always sensible for a person to have a clear understanding of how a particular service works. FDR is a requirement before court but no one can be forced to attend. The mediator considers all the factors and decides on the process. They take into account the parties’ preference and provide the most effective approach in all circumstances. Consideration is given to a support person.

- If a Court Order is instructing the parties to meet together and one party refuses to be in the presence of the other party, Shuttle mediation is an option. Shuttle is where the two parties in dispute are placed in different rooms and the mediator ‘shuttles’ between them, to try to help them reach an agreement.

- However it is not always simply a matter of following the preference of a client. If one side wants a ‘shuttle’ and the other insists on face-to-face, the mediator (whether there is a court order) decides how the mediation is run to provide the most effective outcome.

In one case a grandparent had a court order for a mediation between herself and her daughter-in-law. The new husband insisted on being present and the mediator

told the grandparent that her daughter-in-law “needed his support.” The grandparent rejected this as there was a lot of friction between her and the new husband. The mediation did not proceed.

One set of grandparents in this study felt they weren’t sufficiently prepared before attending the mediation. It appears there are no standard suggested questions to help family members and it is up to the individual mediator to help the client to identify options for discussion.


Family Court

When mediation was unproductive, three sets of grandparents went through the Family Court. One set of grandparents led me to understand the cost would be in the region of \$25,000. However, I have been informed it can be more than \$100,000. On considering whether to go to court or not, grandparents should be aware that as Jeffrey Robertson QC said in a Television interview, “People go to court expecting justice, but what they get is the law.”

One grandparent who went to court managed to get limited access. Another spoke to a lawyer, but decided that in trying to cope with her daughter’s death and the illness of her remaining son, the process would prove to be too stressful, as it was already impacting her health. Two found the cost prohibitive. One was not eligible for Legal Aid. Another spoke to a Seniors Rights Lawyer and found it helpful. Of the two who went to court, one got limited access and stated, “You should fight to see your grandchildren...mortgage your house if you have to.” On the other hand she said “there is no justice in the courts.”

The other grandparents in the end did not get any access. They haven’t been able to see their grandchildren for over 10 years. On reflection, they felt going to court was a “waste of money.” Their impression was the Family Court was overwhelmed and the stress of the process put a lot of strain on their marriage.

Other Options



Some participants have been told in mediation to wait until the children are older and can make their own decision. However, one grandparent is over eighty and has been waiting for ten years to see her grandchild. The last time she had contact with him he was six years old; he is sixteen. As a therapist, one technique I use to bring comfort is to encourage people to write a letter which would be to their grandchild. The letter would tell him how much she loves him and has missed him being in her life. Also, she could tell him about his father and relate the family history. The letter should not have any



recriminations regarding the remaining parent, or the new partner if there is one. When finished it could be put with her will and the executor informed.

Grandparents Reflections

The grandparents noticed it was getting more difficult to see their grandchildren, but couldn't believe they would be denied contact. Some of their reflections included:

- Watch for early signs of estrangement and if considering court action, prepare early on by recording dates, times and reasons given, for being denied access. Others suggested saving SMS messages as part of their evidence
- For some a solution was to ask family members or religious figures to intercede on their behalf
- Two sets of grandparents said they would like to have had a Support Group to meet with other grandparents who had or were having difficulties getting access to their grandchildren.
- As this process can be extremely stressful they felt one should take care of oneself and get support
- Some found it helpful to take up voluntary work and be of assistance to others
- Others said "don't give up". One said that she felt she should have been more "accommodating" and she has since "changed tack". Now when her son-in-law drops off the children she hides her true feelings, welcomes him in for a cup of tea and asks how he is doing. This has led to her seeing her grandchildren more often.

3. Personal Thoughts

How does one begin to understand the remaining partners' attitude towards the grandparents? Possibly, the partner has little or no understanding of the depth of grief one lives with after the death of a child and that the intensity of that grief is immeasurable. After the sudden and unexpected death of my husband at just 40, I was left the sole parent of three sons, I thought I 'knew grief.' We grieve for every loss in our lives and I certainly knew the intense sorrow of losing a beloved partner, however it was only when nine years later my eldest son died that I discovered the immense breadth and depth of sorrow of losing a child.

Four months after my husband died my seventy year old mother-in-law who lived overseas arrived in Melbourne. Embarrassingly, I have to admit I was so consumed with my loss and trying to cope with my children and their grief that although I felt for her, I did not give her a lot of

support. I was too overwhelmed with my own grief and with concerns about how I was going to survive and how I could provide for my young family on my own. This happened to one grandparent in the study, who when trying to explain his struggle over the loss of his daughter to his son in law said, "but it's my daughter who died," His son in law retorted "It's my wife that's died!" implying his loss was more significant. It would seem in his own grief he was not considering the devastation his father-in-law was experiencing. Another told the parents, "She is dead and I want to "move on."

It is true that the majority of parents and their son and daughters partners eventually "move on," but the relationship with one's child doesn't end after death, but continues until they die. In trying to understand those who have remarried where the new partner insists on cutting ties with the grandparents, it could be they don't want the ghost of the children's parent hovering over their new relationship.

This study focussed solely on grandparents, (apart from a sibling,) who were denied access to their grandchildren and in the case of the sibling, his sister's children. Therefore, in another study, it would be interesting to explore with those parents, where access has become an issue, the reasons behind their decision not to allow their children to see their grandparents.

Footnotes

1. Katherine Kopp, Carolina Parent Benefits of being Grandparent, cited in Journal of Gerontological Society 2014, grandparent.com/helath-benefits-of-being-a-grandparent
2. See 1 Katherine Kopp, cited in Boston and University, June 2016
3. Heather Marcoux, Motherly website, Oct 11 2018 <https://www.motherly.ly>
4. Edward Kruk Grandparent Visitation Disputes a Multigenerational Approach to Mediation 1994 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>
5. Child Mind Institute Helping Children Deal with Grief (New York) <https://childmind.org>
6. Marie Curie, "Why we need to Talk about Grief" <https://mariecurie.org>
7. Justice Family Lawyers, [https:// justicefamilylawyers.com.au/family-law](https://justicefamilylawyers.com.au/family-law)



Hobart TCF Unveils a Memorial Bench

Enjoying a fortunate break in a showery day, Hobart TCF members gathered around our memorial bench at the Cornelian Bay Cemetery on Friday, 6th April to unveil the bench. It carries a plaque with the TCF logo and the 24/7 helpline phone number. The plaque bears a statement composed by the bench project 'working bee':

*In memory of our children
Loved beyond words
Missed beyond measure*

Cornelian Bay is the most central of Hobart's cemeteries, close to the CBD in New Town, overlooking the Derwent River. Two of the working bee members' sons are buried there. The idea for a memorial bench came from Judy originally, and was followed up by the other member, Rosie. We decided to be ambitious and to see if we could raise enough for three benches when we found that the recommended bench was not as dear as expected. There are now benches at two other large cemeteries in Greater Hobart managed by Millingtons Cemeteries. The manager, Tamara Whitehead, was an immense help in every stage of the project. The Company attached the plaques and cemented the benches in place. Tamara met with members frequently to oversee the project and decide on the locations.

Donors quickly came on board to support us with a wonderful and varied array of raffle prizes, making it the easiest 'sell' of any raffle I've ever been involved in. It was a cause that people were happy to support. In the end, we raised \$1,810. This covered the cost of the benches

and plaques, and enabled us to make a contribution to TCF Victoria, which has been providing us with practical and moral support, as well as covering our 'back office' costs uncomplainingly since we began in 2009. It was a project that gave us a practical way to lift the spirits of our members and to honour our lost loved ones.

We were able to attract some media coverage too, with group leader Maxine rising at a hideously early hour to be interviewed on ABC Local Radio the day before the unveiling. This resulted in attendance on the day by a Mercury newspaper reporter and photographer, and a reporter from the suburban newspapers. We hoped to raise awareness of the existence of the Hobart group, and were successful in this quest. The benches will continue to bear witness to the help that is available for bereaved parents in greater Hobart.

Maxine Barry



GREETINGS TO ALL MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS VICTORIA,

We wish to thank all those supporters of TCFV who made an end of financial year donation in 2020. It was without doubt a most challenging year in all aspects. This year our operations have begun to return to something approaching normality. Many of our significant events have been able to take place in person – the Walk to Remember, the Mother's Day High Tea and other such gatherings have given us the opportunity to meet together again. At the core of our operations, it has been great to see a number of our support groups returning to face-to-face meetings. While many of us adapted and even benefitted from the digital meetings on platforms like Zoom, it is great to be able to gather in support of each other personally.

As the end of the financial year approaches once again, we wish to remind you all of the opportunity to make a donation to The Compassionate Friends Victoria. A tax-deductible donation at this time significantly helps us to continue providing our support services to bereaved families across the state. We continue to explore meaningful ways of supporting parents, grandparents and siblings who are bereaved. The development of the Sibling Support on line chat service has been a great initiative over the past year or so. The organisation greatly values the work of all the volunteers and staff who provide the energy and compassion which is as the heart of who we are.

If you are in a position to make an EOFY contribution, please use the donation link below. We appreciate any donation you can make. This past year of pandemic conditions has meant that many people have struggled to cope. Our services in supporting those who are bereaved continue to be a vital link in the chain of community compassion. Please support us if you are able. With our thanks,

The Board, Staff and Volunteers of TCFV.
<https://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/become-involved/end-of-year-appeal-2021/>

Photo Love Gifts



*Dear Joseph,
happy heavenly 23rd birthday,
we love and miss you so much,
we are forever heartbroken.*

*All our love,
mum, dad, Harry & Milly XXXX*



Dear Clara,

*thank you for the signs to show
that you're still watching over
us.*

*We look for them each and
every day.*

We miss you.

*Grace Sim
(Clara's cousin)*



*In loving memory of
Randall Ziemer*



Photo Love Gifts

Photo Love Gift messages can be made on the back-cover leaf that comes with the magazine or by filling in the form on the

TCFV website at:
www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/become-involved/photo-love-gifts/

Please limit your Photo Love Gift message to no more than 30 words, counting the date as one word. Photo Love Gifts can be included in the magazine for a minimum donation of \$30.00. Any photo you would like to include please email to editor@tcfv.org.au

TCFV SUPPORT GROUPS & SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUPS

COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS: In recent months, a relaxing of Covid-19-related restrictions has occurred. This, in turn, has permitted us to run meetings without face masks. As we know, there is the always the possibility of restrictions tightening again, if only for a short time.

If/when this is the case, please visit the following webpage to be up-to-speed on latest safety requirements:
<https://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/need-support/support-groups/>

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP FOR SUICIDE-BEREAVED REGIONAL VICTORIANS: We are pleased to announce we held our first bimonthly meeting of this online group in April this year. We encourage regionally based suicide-bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents to use this excellent peer support. Next meeting is Thursday evening, 21st June. If you would like to attend, you can register to attend here:

<https://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/event/regional-online-june21/>

This group is made possible by the involvement of established TCFV leaders: JENNY PURVIS (Canterbury Bereaved by Suicide Support Group), ROBYN REEVE (Ballarat Support Group) and JEFF & KAREN LYELL (Lakes Entrance).

Prior to Covid-19 entering our lives, there were a number of new groups still establishing themselves, and we wish to re-draw your attention to these...

YARRAVILLE SOCIAL GROUP (run the third Saturday of each month, 11am, Mantra Studio Kitchen and Bar, 10a Campbell Street, Yarraville):

Run by bereaved mothers, Deb Boundy and Karen Philippzig, and held within a beautiful, spacious upstairs room, the Yarraville Social Group provides an opportunity for bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents to come together in a safe social atmosphere.

LAKES ENTRANCE SUPPORT GROUPS:

Held in the Utility Room of Lakes Entrance Baptist Church (141 Princes Highway, Lakes Entrance) and run by bereaved parents, Jeff and Karen Lyell, the Lakes Entrance Support Groups provide essential peer support to East Gippsland.

- "Bereaved Through Any Cause" Group Meetings:
7pm, on the first Thursday of the following months (March, May, July, September, November)
- "Suicide-specific" Group Meetings:
7pm on the first Thursday of the following months (April, June, August, October, December).

Keep in mind...

SUPPORT FOR MEN: TCFV offers a number of "special focus" peer support groups: suicide-specific support, siblings-specific support and MENSACE, a support group specifically for bereaved fathers, brothers, and grandfathers (run the third Wednesday of the month at 7pm, TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Road, Canterbury).

Please note: the listing below outlines when/where meetings were held prior to COVID-19.
Where possible, we will keep to those dates & venues.
For the status of your group's present operation, please call us on 9888 4944 / 1300 064 068.

GROUP	When Is Meeting Usually Held?	Where is Meeting Held?
Ballarat	1st Tuesday 7pm (no meeting in January)	Mt Clear Church of Christ (Church Hall), 1185 Geelong Road, Mt Clear
Bayside	4th Wednesday 7pm (no meeting in December)	Highett Community Centre, 2 Livingston St, Highett
Bendigo	1st Wednesday 1pm	For details, please contact Cathy Smith
Camperdown	4th Monday 7.30pm (excluding December)	Camperdown Uniting Church, cnr Leura & Barkly Streets, Camperdown
Canterbury Daytime	4th Wednesday 11am (3rd Wednesday in December)	TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury
Canterbury Evening	2nd Tuesday 7.45pm (no meeting in January)	TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury
Canterbury Siblings	3rd Tuesday 7.45pm	TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury
Canterbury Suicide-bereaved	4th Monday 7.30pm (excluding December)	TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury
Castlemaine	Last Thursday 7.30pm (no meeting in December – call leader for date of Xmas dinner)	Maternal Child & Health Centre, Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine
Eltham	1st Thursday of the month 11am	Eltham Library Community Room, Panther Place, Eltham
Geelong	Last Tuesday 7.30pm (no meeting in December – call leader for date of Xmas dinner)	Noble Street Uniting Church, 26-42 Saffron Street, Newtown
Hobart	2nd Tuesday bi-monthly 7.30pm (Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec)	McDougall Building, 9 Ellersie Road, Battery Point
Horsham - Wimmera	Meetings held: Mar, Jun, Sep, Dec	Contact leader for dates and venue
Lakes Entrance (Bereaved Through Suicide)	7pm on the first Thursday of the following months (Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec)	Lakes Entrance Baptist Church (Utility Room), 141 Princes Highway, Lakes Entrance
Lakes Entrance (Any Bereavements)	7pm on the first Thursday of the following months (Mar, May, Jul, Sep, Nov)	Lakes Entrance Baptist Church (Utility Room), 141 Princes Highway, Lakes Entrance
Menspace	3rd Wednesday 7pm	TCFV Centre, 229 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury
Mildura	2nd Saturday 11am (no meeting in January)	MADEC Community Centre, 133-137 Madden Avenue, Mildura
Portland	3rd Tuesday 7pm	Star Theatre, 40 Julia Street, Portland
Rowville	1st Friday 1pm (no meeting in January)	Bridgewater Centre, cnr Fulham Road & Bridgewater Road, Rowville
Sunshine	3rd Tuesday 7.30pm	Salvation Army Drop-In Centre, 42 Devonshire Road, Sunshine
Sunshine Bereaved Through Suicide	1st Tuesday of the month 7pm	Salvation Army Drop-In Centre, 42 Devonshire Road, Sunshine
Warragul	4th Wednesday 7.30pm (no meeting in December)	Warragul Community House, 138 Normanby Street, Warragul
SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUPS		
Bayside	2nd Tuesday 10.45am	Public Grind, 316 Highett Road, Highett
Bereaved by Suicide Dinner	2nd Thursday 7.00pm	Box Hill RSL, 26-28 Nelson Road, Box Hill
Geelong	2nd Tuesday 10.00am (no meeting in January)	Brioche Cafe, 175 West Fyans Street, Newtown
Hobart	Social meetings (Mar/May/Jul/Sep/Nov)	Contact leader for dates and venue
Southern Peninsula	1st Tuesday 12 noon (no meeting in January)	Contact leader for venue
Yarraville Social	3rd Saturday 11am	Mantra Café, 10am Campbell Street, Yarraville

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Karen Philippzig	Weatherhead Family

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Queensland	07 3254 2657	505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm 4005
South Australia	0456 820 133	
Western Australia	08 6107 6257	54 Simpson Street Ardross WA 6153
TCF Mandurah	08 9535 7761	Mandurah Lottery House - 7 Anzac Place, Mandurah 6210
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The Compassionate Friends Victoria
229 Canterbury Road, Canterbury VIC 3126
Po Box 171 Canterbury, Vic. 3126
Support Phone: (03) 9888 4944 **Administration**
Phone: (03) 9888 4034
National Number 1300 064 068
Email: support@tcfv.org.au **Web:** www.tcfv.org.au