



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

SOUTH SHORE CHAPTER HINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

Sibling Newsletter

MEETINGS at St. Paul's Parish House, 20 Fearing Road, Hingham (across the street from Citizen's Bank) at 7:30PM on First and Third Mondays of the month (including holidays). Also, occasionally, there is a meeting when a month has a 5th Monday.

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Who Are We?

The Compassionate Friends is a non-profit, nonsectarian, mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings. Our primary purpose is to assist the bereaved in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings for those who wish to understand. Our objective is to help members of the community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers, and professionals to be supportive.

Meetings are open to all bereaved parents and siblings. No dues or fees are required to belong to the South Shore Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.



A Very Special Newsletter

This newsletter is special in that it is only for **Newly Bereaved Siblings**. The intent of this newsletter is to get information to siblings that will help them cope with these new and profound feelings that are very hard to understand upon the death of a sibling. You may want to attend our meetings when you feel ready.

The Compassionate Friends are here for you.

PHONE FRIENDS

If you are having a bad day, or need someone to talk to, call a friend below.

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The Compassionate Friends

Our Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them 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, creeds, and relationships. 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 they feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while 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 the children who have died. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to 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.

We Need Not Walk Alone.

We Are The Compassionate Friends.



The Surviving Children

By Ronnie Peterson

TCF, Star Lake, NY

Being a parent is never easy. When one's child dies, it is even more difficult being parents to the children who survive. In those first days and weeks, shock may cause us to make decisions (or allow others to make them) that we will later regret. We may wish later that we had included the children more, that we had not permitted ourselves to be isolated from them, that we had explained things differently.

Most of us never expect to face this situation, so we have never thought through in advance what the best course would be.

At some point in our grief, we do become more sensitive to these "forgotten grievers" who have lost a brother or sister. They are having struggles of their own. The first thing to remember is that everything going on with our other children is not caused by the death. They are still, through it all, growing up, going through

the various developmental stages that have always concerned parents. Any special problems they had before will not have magically disappeared. Just as we proclaim repeatedly that there is no one way for a parent to grieve, so each child has his own style and timetable for everything, and we cannot control these.

We can only try to understand and help when we can. We cannot make it "go away" any more than we can make any of the other harsh realities of life go away.

The very foundations of life has been shaken. The home, so sheltering and safe, has been invaded by forces our surviving children do not understand and parents, who seemed all-powerful and all-wise, may have been reduced to quivering, uncertain robots. Probably for the first time, death - whatever that is - has claimed someone who is not old. Worse, if there has been the usual quota of sibling rivalry and squabbling, the child may be afraid that he has caused the death by being "bad," or by wishing there were no such bothersome person to have to share with or "take a back seat to."

Just as every child is different, every relationship is different.

Feelings toward an older brother or sister who was protector, teacher, idol, and those toward a younger one who may have been a sometime responsibility, hanger-on, biggest fan, are not the same. They may have been best friends or rivals who didn't get along very well. Their responses to the death will be as varied as our own.

A child's place in the family system is changed. The second oldest finds himself suddenly the big brother. The buffer between the others may be gone. Most difficult of all, a child may have become an "only child." Any child younger than the one who died has to go through the scary years of being the same age.

Similar symptoms and situations are so frightening. Brothers and sisters often do look and behave very much alike, and these resemblances can be a source of discomfort or of pride. There may be efforts to exaggerate these, to replace the missing child, to make things the way they used to be.

What can we as parents do to help? Most of all, our children need reassurance and honesty. They need to know they are loved and that the family and the home will continue. They need all the facts they can understand. Part of this honesty requires that they know of your grief. By your actions, you can teach them it is okay to cry (even fathers!), it is okay to admit you are angry at "life" for being this way, that you too are confused about "why." Maintaining a "stiff upper lip" in front of the children only encourages them to suppress their feelings.

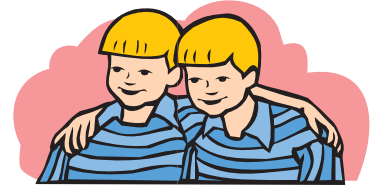
Try to be available when they want to talk, but be prepared for the possibility that they may not want to talk with you about their feelings. Many children hold back because they are afraid they might make you cry. You can try explaining that you are not worried about that, but they may still prefer to talk to someone else. They may be ashamed of some common reactions such as feelings of anger, guilt, jealousy, even relief. Perhaps you can help them find someone they can talk to comfortably. They may have already found such a person with out you realizing it



Alan's Room

Daniel Yoffee

After my twin brother Alan passed away I was constantly looking for ways to keep his memory alive. Soon after the funeral I helped design the gravestone. When the first anniversary neared I started the scholarship his friends had long promised.



I often worried that besides having his name on a cemetery stone that Alan would be forgotten. I wanted his nieces and nephews to be able to know him.

Alan, a Philadelphia resident, worked full time for the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging doing public relations. He also was a freelance writer and volunteered for many arts and AIDS organizations.

With another brother married we had an empty room, which I wanted to be about Alan. The room includes articles that he wrote and articles about him, posters for projects he promoted and some he helped design. Above the double windows are Playbills for shows he promoted, each listing his name. One had a post-it note "Save this, this is my first"; I saved them all.

Included are interviews with Phyllis Diller, Lucie Arnaz and a Diana Ross biographer. An article, with his picture, at a Special Olympics event he coordinated, publicized and wrote about is also displayed. One project he developed was the "Senior Great American Smoke out". All of the Philadelphia nursing homes participated on the same day the American Cancer Society had their annual "smoke out". At the time of his death the project was nominated for an award.

The one item I am most proud of is the press release announcing his last job. He was asked to write his own press release. He once said he couldn't believe he got paid for a job he loved so much! The room, 130 square feet, contains 55 framed items, which tell of Alan's career, interests, and love of life. His nieces and nephews will get to know their uncle, who-as his oldest brother said / did more in his thirty years than 95% of us do over an entire lifetime.

The Bitter Tears of Love Lost
Peter Smith, age 15
Sibling to Gregory Smith

Because of my status in society I can look below to poverty
and realize no matter how frustrated I get,
I will always be very lucky
to have a family who loves and cares for me.

But still the tears roll down my face,
and my cheeks are forever stained because I know as long as I live
my heart will always be pained.

I was left in shock, pain, and fear,
left with your unspoken words which I will never hear
But in my days of sorrow when I feel that I will fall
I can only repeat the phrase to myself,
"It is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all."



My Sister

In memory of Lezlie Dyane Davis

June 7, 1966 to October 1, 1997

By Kim Bernal

TCF, Sugar Land-Southwest Houston, TX

I am not sure where to start. My older sister, Lezlie, died on October 1, 1997. It has been a little more than 4 months and I still catch my breath and start to tear up when someone mentions her name. I am a private griever, I guess. When I heard the news that she was in the ER, I fell to my knees and prayed to God. I told him I was going to put this in His hands and that it was up to Him now, as if it was not earlier. "She did not make it."

These are the words that I heard my father say through a cloud of tears and pain. While holding my mother, he explained that she was gone. My immediate reaction was to cry. I really did not know what this would mean. I am slowly finding out just what it does. What do we do now? I wanted to take immediate action, calling relatives, the minister, and helping in a time when my parents needed someone to lean on. I was bound and determined to be the strong one for a while. And I was.

As we made funeral arrangements and memorials plans, I, like the rest of them, sat in silence as the tears and pain flowed from my eyes. It hurt. But I was determined to remain strong for my children and for my family who seemed to be crumbling right before my very eyes. A very difficult thing to do for a little girl who thinks her daddy is the strongest person she has ever known.

I dreaded the viewing at the funeral home. I did not want to go to the funeral home and see her like that, not even one last time. My parents insisted it would be a good thing for all of us. As the time approached, I was more and more frustrated at the prospect of falling apart upon seeing her. However, as we entered the funeral home and went into the room where her body lay at rest, something happened. I could not shed a tear. It was as if my brain and body (and soul, for that matter) went on autopilot. I sat quietly on the first row watching my father fall to his knees and sob. My mother could not speak. My baby sister holding on to them both, in tears. I was on the outside looking in on the strangest and yet saddest heartbreaking moment of my life. But that's just it: I was on the outside looking in. I was the strong one, but not by

choice. I did not consciously decide to lock out my feelings and, yet, the entire episode was painful. I can't explain my reaction. I went through the memorial service with minimal tears. I greeted those wishing to personally offer condolences because I know my family was struggling with having to look them in the eyes and share their pain along with their own. But then I saw my friend, Julie. Julie has survived through the same experience I am going through. The key word is survived. As I hugged her, my strength lapsed and I started to cry, sort of uncontrollably. This was good. Julie told me that "things are never going to get better." I thought to myself, what a terrible thing to say to someone in my circumstance, but she was right. Her honesty now is appreciated. She was right. Things will never get better, we just learn to handle and cope. I am grateful for her kindness and friendship. We belong to a club that I hope no one will ever have to join. We have lost a piece of ourselves and our family will never be the same. This is a permanent state.

I still cry. I am able to get through a conversation using her name without crying, well, at least sometimes. But there are times, I call them "moments of truth," that I am starting to experience. The first occurred on December 1, 1997. I was sitting having lunch with my co-workers. We were not talking about anything related to my loss but all of a sudden, I blurted out, "Oh, my God, it's been two months since my sister died." I had to get up and run. It's odd I seem to have this need to get up and bolt frequently. I mostly control it and move on to something else, but the urge is still present and strong.

There are songs, music, books, and a little newsletter published by The Compassionate Friends that will bring me to uncontrolled grieving. I sit and hold my children as I totally let go of all the pent-up pain and sadness. It's funny, I have remained strong for them and in my weakest moments they are all I hold on to.

Anyway, these "moments of truth" come frequently. The closest analogy I can think of to explain this whole experience is that I am like a child whose nose is pressed up against the window pane of life when all of a sudden, the window shatters. I am so busy trying to pick up the pieces to protect the others and insure that no one else gets hurt that I do not realize until much later that my arms and hands are bleeding heavily. I can finally see the devastation and now feel the pain.

My First Five Years as an Only Child

Kristin Steiner

TCF, Staten Island, NY

I've been without my brother for five years. I guess the hard part is over now. Sometimes I think I have aged 30 years in the past five. In a strange way, these past five years have been the best and worst years of my life. I have accomplished the many things of a typical young adult learning to drive, graduating from high school, going to college, and starting a career.

Every one of my accomplishments has been clouded by the fact that my brother George is not here to share each milestone, and is not achieving any more milestones for himself. He was cheated of so many things. He will never graduate, get married, have children or travel. He will never grow old, and I will never have a brother to grow old with. I'll never have nieces and nephews. The sibling relationship, usually the longest relationship of one's life, has been cut short for us. In these five years, although I have learned to accept that he is not coming back, the difficult part is dealing with it day by day.

My relationship with George ended just when we started to become friends. The childish fights and other annoyances of having a big brother were changing to real conversations and to having an occasional ally. I am angry about all the things that we have missed and all the things that will never be, and I guess I always will be. Five years heals a lot of wounds, but the hurt will always be there, no matter how many years pass. In these past five years, I have been forced to grow up too fast. I have been forced into a new outlook on life. I have felt lonely and alone. I now realize that I will never be the same person as before. Maybe I am a better person because of what I have been through. Five years ago I never thought I would survive, but I am still here dealing with it every day. I don't know what the next five years will bring, but at least I have made it this far.



A Grief All My Own **By Carrie Pueschel**

I was a freshman at Point Loma Nazarene College when my brother, Carl, died. The news reached me hours after he had been found at the base of the radio tower. Jim, a faculty member and family friend, stuck his head inside the door of my chemistry class as I waited for class to begin and motioned me outside. I was pleasantly surprised to see him, but my smile faded as I noticed the somber expression on his face. He took my hands in his as he told me of my brother's death. I searched his face desperately waiting for his expression to break into a grin as people will often do before they let you in on the joke, but there would be no punch line. I drew back instinctively and as I pulled away, Jim tightened his grip. I began shouting "No!" over and over until I became aware of myself once again and sunk into his hug. When I started to breathe more regularly Jim walked back into the classroom to get my backpack.

I began to grow physically and emotionally numb as he led me down the stairs to his van. He asked me if I had a friend who could wait with me until I could get to the airport. I nodded indicating I did. He drove over to her classroom and I carefully looked in to see if I could find her. Fortunately she saw me and dismissed herself. When I got to the dorm, the RA (resident assistant) for my unit was already waiting for me. She and my friend, Heather, followed me to my room after an exchange of somber glances between them. Without much thought as to what I needed I packed a suitcase hoping I had everything I needed since I would be going home for the week. I was nearly finished packing when one of my roommates came into the room. She heard the announcement in chapel and came to see how I was handling the news. I was suddenly aware of how closely I was being watched. It was as though I had taken up residence in a fishbowl. The girls sat silently watching me, not quite knowing what else to do. I could feel their unease at not knowing what to say; afraid of saying something that would



cause me to have some sort of nervous breakdown right in front of them. I desperately wanted to be alone. It was as though I was a hostess at a boring party needing to entertain my guests, but I was afraid to act anything but somber. Would they think Carl meant nothing to me if I tried to strike up meaningless conversation? I felt an emptiness growing in the pit of my stomach. I wanted to crawl in bed and curl up against the wall. Yet, all I could do was sit uncomfortably while they watched. I was the elephant in the room. My brother had just died, yet no one could state the obvious: something horrible had just happened. I didn't know it at the time, but I had experienced for the first time a reaction that was to become all too familiar to me.

After a draining week at home, I was unprepared to face my friends, roommates, and acquaintances at school. I could feel the tension as I walked into my unit. The girls watched cautiously as if waiting to see if it would be OK to approach me. I wanted to tell them about the week and about all of the painful memories my hometown triggered of my brother. Actually, I needed to talk about it, yet I knew it was better to keep it to myself. I don't know how to explain it, but people react very strangely when they hear about someone's death. I couldn't count the frequency with which I was purposefully avoided or had someone quickly change the subject if I happened to mention my brother. I soon discovered a positive reply when asked how I was doing avoided many uncomfortable situations. Most of the time people merely asked out of a sense of obligation, not concern. Few wanted to hear how my stomach turned when I walked up to his casket and saw the bruises, which ran down alongside his head and neck beneath the makeup the mortician applied in an attempt to conceal them. Nor did they want to hear how my heart skipped a beat when I thought I caught a glimpse of Carl riding his skateboard down the street, only to have it break one more time when I realized it couldn't have been him. They didn't even want to hear how I found comfort in memories of him such as the time we were just little kids and had been sent to our rooms because somehow we had managed to irritate Dad. Unwilling to accept our punishment and allow our fun to come to an end we recorded

ourselves giggling and set it behind our dad's chair knowing we were sure to get a reaction. We laughed hysterically when our dad heard the recording and sprang from his chair to catch us out of our rooms. I found I was truly alone in my grief aside from what I could share with my parents. I try not to get angry when I think of how others reacted to me in my grief. I, myself, reacted toward others the same way before I lost my brother. Yet, it was difficult to be forced to create a mask for the comfort of others when comfort was what I sought. Each day I "put on a happy face" and tried my best to appear together.

A few weeks after I returned to school the other girls in the unit no longer tolerated my grief. I could sense their irritation when I failed to get out of bed as they prepared for class. No longer was it necessary to try to comfort me. They had accepted my brother's death and were done feeling bad. It would not have been a great shock to learn they had forgotten I had a brother. I was forced to stuff my grief for the remainder of the semester. I cried only when I was sure I was alone and knew no one would be back for a while.

I carefully watched what I said as not to let anything about my brother slip into conversation. I found even sharing a good memory of Carl could set off a series of uncomfortable events.

The mere mention of his name would cause my listeners to freeze. Would I break down immediately and fall to pieces at his memory? I didn't know at the time it would have been OK. No one had to understand my emotions, nor did anyone have to deal with them. I was the only one able and willing to carry myself through my grief. I had to realize I could only do what I could as I struggled with my grief and had to remind myself I would be able to do more as time passed and the impact of his death gradually became less painful. It was necessary for me to understand if I never got over his death I would also be all right as the death of a sibling is not something anyone ever truly gets over. Everyone deals with grief differently. If I were to only allow myself to grieve as much as others around me felt comfortable I would be quite miserable today.

It has been four years since his death and I continue to miss him. I still watch

what I say to others, but I don't worry so much about their reaction. I know what to expect from someone when they hear about Carl for the first time and have found ways to keep the evil of discomfort for all parties at a minimum. When Carl died I struggled with what my answer would be when someone asked if I had a sibling. I didn't know how to answer. Would I say I did have a brother or would I say I had a brother? Neither answer seemed quite correct. Today I can answer the question. Carl was and always will be my brother. My memories of him are mine to share if I wish. My grief is also mine to deal with, as I need to. It is not open to the criticism of others.

The Legacy

When I leave you,
give what is left of me to others.
If you need to cry,
cry for those walking beside you.
Put your arms around anyone and
give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something.
Something better than words or sounds.

Look for me in the people I've
known and loved.
And if you cannot live without me,
then let me live in your eyes, your mind, and
acts of kindness.

You can love me most by letting your hands
touch the hands of others
who need you.

Love doesn't die, people do.
So when all that's left of me is love
Give that love to others
for me and you.

Courage
Patricia Kelley
TCF Richmond, VA
In loving memory of my brother, Sean
8/24/76 - 8/28/93



One

Michele Mallory

It was only one second, one thought, one decision, one action in a lifetime of seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions. It was so fast, so permanent, so irreversible, so hopeless. This moment, this thought, this decision, this action do not define him, do not honor him, do not immortalize him. It is the preceding 946,080,000 seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions that define him, that honor him, that immortalize him.



I remember my brother in all of the other seconds, and thoughts, and decisions, and actions that preceded this one. I remember him coming home from the hospital, lip synching in the basement, falling out of the tree, biking across campus, coming home from school, from boot camp, from war... I remember him hiking, and skiing, and running, and laughing, and crying. I remember how safe I always felt when he was around. I knew he would take care, protect, defend.

I don't remember exactly when my brother became an amazing human being, I just looked at him one day and knew he was. I knew that nothing would make him change his mind about me. He was without judgment, without prejudice, without preconception. I knew my brother because we talked and he listened. I respected my brother most for his humanity, for being so sensitive, so vulnerable, so honest. I loved my brother for sharing the load when it was too hard for someone he loved to carry alone.

I knew my brother because he left so much of him in me. I trusted and respected my brother's decisions in the preceding 946,080,000 seconds, I have to trust and respect this one decision the same. I honor my brother by honoring myself. I do not dwell in that one moment, instead I celebrate and cherish all of the others. In that

one second, one thought, one decision, one action, I found the strength he had given me and I will not let him down. I will not let that one moment be the only one.

Why???

I'm weak. I try to cry but the tears don't come. I want to scream! I want to break something! I'm so tired. I'm tired of feeling like this. I'm tired of waking up every morning. I'm tired of pretending to be okay. I'm tired of being strong. I'm scared. I'm scared of what just happened. I'm scared of what will become of us. I'm scared of the future. I'm scared of losing someone else. I'm scared to live. I'm scared to love. I find myself living in constant fear. The fear of what? Of life and all life has to offer. I just want to be happy. I want to laugh again. I want us to be normal. I want this horrible feeling deep inside just to go away. I wish I could understand. I want to know why! I want to understand it. I wish I could have him back. Why? Why him? What's the purpose? When will the pain go away?

Get Well Soon Poem

By Alyssa Flora, age 13

In memory of her brother Bryson, age 9

I know our loss is very great
but I'm sure many people can
relate
I know its hard to say good-bye
don't hold back your tears! It's ok
to cry
Just hold my hand and we will
stand up high
We will gather strength from one
Another
hugging and holding each other
we will find each other and
together we will be
once again, a family

Like the Butterfly

Lezlie Langford
North Platte, NE

It fluttered there, above my head,
Weightless in the
soft breeze.
I reached up my hand,
It lit upon my finger.
Waving glistening wings gently,
It looked at me for timeless moments.
I smiled, reaching deep, and
Finding all those cherished memories.
As it flitted off through the sunlight,
I knew we had said
hello once more.



A Journey to the "New Normal"

Karen Snepp
Frisco, TX

from the TCF Stages Newsletter,
Summer 1995

May 31 marked seven years since my only sibling, Dave, died from cancer at age 32. This June 28 we would have been celebrating Dave's 40th birthday with a big party, and I'd be kidding him about going bald, just like all the Snepp men before him. Instead, I'll be getting ready for the TCF National Conference, at which I'll share memories of his brilliance, great smile, and sense of humor with those who will never have the pleasure of meeting him in person.

At this point in my grief journey, most will be good memories of how Dave lived, rather than bad memories of how he died. I can't recall the moment when that shift of perspective occurred, but I would like to

share a few memories and milestones that have marked the way:

- Months after Dave died, I went to see the movie "Big," starring Tom Hanks, and "lost it" when his mother stared out the window wondering if she'd ever see him again. I watched the movie again recently and didn't lose it.

- It was three months before I felt up to sharing with anyone the details of the day my brother died at his home in Bellevue, Washington, in the company of Mom, Dad, and me. On the way home from that emotional conversation, I drove the wrong way down a one way street in downtown Chicago, it might be smart to have a friend drive you to your first few TCF meetings!

- I discovered that the grief path is not a straight line. A few good days can be followed by several bad ones. I've heard other TCF members call this their "roller coaster ride."

- For a year, I couldn't keep the radio on if "Wind Beneath My Wings" came on. For the next year, I kept it on but cried through it. Now, I can usually make it all the way through without any tears!

- With the help of TCF, I realized that despite friends expecting it to be possible, I'd never be "back to normal." My focus instead shifted to finding my "new normal." While I can't point to a time when that happened (probably after the 1990 TCF Conference), THAT was a milestone.

- For three Christmases after Dave died, I didn't put up a tree in my condo. For Christmas, 1991, as I was getting out ornaments for my first tree since his death, I came across a bunch of ornaments that he had had in his apartment. I came totally unglued then, but now I look forward to seeing those ornaments each Christmas.

- It was three years before I felt that I had enough emotional energy to pursue a relationship. Even now, I don't have a lot of tolerance for guys I go out with that gripe about their brothers or sisters. My most vivid "landmark" to date along my grief journey came in February 1993. Following my Dad's father's death in December, 1992, we were in Atlanta cleaning out my grandfather's apartment, and I came across a pile of post cards and letters that Dave had written to my grandparents through the years. Earlier

in my journey, a "blind side" such as that would have sent me into a tailspin. In this case, though, my immediate reaction was one of happiness, for I had found a part of Dave that I didn't know I still had! I saved a few of the post cards, sent a couple to my cousin who was referenced in some of the letters, and (amazingly) threw the rest away. It was fun to share the memories, but I didn't feel the need to hang onto them. It was at that point, nearly five years after Dave's death, that I truly felt as if I was closing in on that "new normal."



To My Sister

*By Cindy Keltz
Arlington Heights, IL*

You touched us all,
You loved us all.

Forever giving, forever caring,
Forever forgiving.
Never wanting in return.

Blessed are those who shared your life
Rich are those who carry your memories.

Please rest now;
your chores we will finish.

Till we meet again . . .

Dealing with Grief: A Sibling Viewpoint

Rick Edler

TCF, LA/South Bay, CA

Two things happened to me on January 11, 1992. I lost my brother to death, and I lost my parents to grief. My dad, the one who seemed to always have the answer to my questions, the "rock" in the family, the one whose job was to fix everything, completely lost it. The fear, anger, and shock in his eyes when told that my brother had died are engraved into my memory. He fell limp in the arms of my mother and me in the emergency room at UCLA medical center. This was the first time I had ever seen my parents lose control. At that moment our roles switched.

"I'll take them," I said to the nurse as she handed me a bag labeled "EDLER." It was the personal belongings of my brother. I quietly took them and placed them in my car. For the next three months, I seemed to make many of the decisions. It was not a courageous leader rising up to the occasion. I was the least common denominator. My parents, although they tried, could not help me. They were trying to deal with the tremendous grief themselves.

For this reason, I put off dealing with Mark's death for many months. I cried and felt sad, but never addressed the issue. My friends were concerned and asked how I was doing. But no one, unless you have been there, really wants to hear the true answers. Mark was the only other person in the world who was a combination of my mom and dad. My friends could not relate nor would I want them to. I would never wish this upon anyone. But this left me alone to deal with it and I chose to put it off.

After three months I met a gentleman at a family retreat with a group of which my dad was a part. Kevin had lost his brother to suicide about nine months earlier. He was farther along in his "coping" than I was. I could talk to him about Mark, mention Mark's name and share stories without making the whole room uncomfortable about the subject.

I saw someone who was dealing with it and it gave me hope. There is a certain vocabulary that you learn after going through this that no book, no story, and no amount of explanation can do justice. I don't talk about certain things with my friends because

I do not have the time or energy to explain (or try to explain) the many feelings I am having. Kevin understood. He had the vocabulary.

This was the first step into healing. I came to grips with the reality of my new life—different than the one before, but there was no going back. At this point, I went on autopilot. I remember many events of the three years following the death. My girlfriend and I broke up. My parents changed houses. I went through the many firsts, but just kept moving forward. I was not depressed, however. My lows were not very low. But my highs were not very high.

I became involved with The Compassionate Friends sibling group of our local chapter in the third year. I did it half out of responsibility to my parents and half out of the knowledge that if I was running the meeting, then I was in control of how much sharing I needed to put into it. Kind of a control thing. To my surprise the meetings have become so beneficial to my healing that I am surprised at myself. By sharing with others, I feel that I help them and in turn myself. Many feelings, thoughts, or emotions that I may have thought were just mine, I have found are universal with others. After three years I began to come "out of the valley." I can only say that by looking back. Hindsight has allowed me to see my steps of healing. I stepped into the role of being strong for our family because I felt that was best. Many others I have talked to mention a similar reaction. Your parents are barely able to deal with their own grief. The last thing you want to do is bring more pain on them, so, you don't share with your parents.

Last July at The Compassionate Friends conference, many parents walked up to me and asked, "How do I know if my son (daughter) is dealing with this? I am concerned since they do not tell me anything." "You don't know," I answered, "and neither do I, but unless you see something obviously dangerous, they are dealing with it in their own way at their own speed and you may not be a part of their grieving."

I now have a different outlook on life. It is precious. I feel that in my new life I am closer to my parents. Each one of us has to live our lives 1/3 better in Mark's memory. I value my friends and time more. I can handle stress much better. Just think of the alternative. I have become a better person by helping others. I like the new person I have become.

I would trade it all in a second!



It's the Music that Bonds the Souls

Stacie Gilliam

TCF, N. Oklahoma City, OK

The room you once lived in,
Doesn't look the same. The people who
used to call you, Never mention your
name.

The car you used to drive,
They may not make them anymore; And
all the things you once treasured, Are
boxed behind closet doors.

The clothes you set the trends by,
Are surely out of date.
The people you owed money to,
Have wiped away the slate.

Things have changed and changed again
since you went away,
But some things have
remained the same
Each and every day ...

Like this aching in my heart,
A scar that just won't heal,
Or the way a special song,
Can change the way I feel.

Brother, you must know that the music
bonds us and will keep us close; Because
secretly I know deep in my heart; It's
the music you miss the most.

So let the world keep on turning,
And time can take its toll.
For as long as the music keeps playing
You'll be alive and dancing in my soul.

Concerning Siblings

Adapted From: Helping Children Cope With Loss

*Buz Overbeck - Joanie Overbeck
TLC Group - Dallas, TX 1995*

It's been said that when a child's brother or sister dies, actually three people are lost: the sibling and both parents. The sibling also loses a friend, playmate, confidant, role model, and lifelong companion. For the parents, the loss of a child is often so traumatic that they have little left to give to the surviving children. Yet the surviving sibling has fears, needs, and anxieties that must be explored and addressed if the child is to avoid negative long term consequences. Listed here are normal feelings siblings might have concerning the loss along with some suggestions on what to do to encourage their expression.



Normal Thoughts

- * "Did I cause the death?"
- * "Will the rest of my family die?"
- * "Who will take care of me now?"
- * "I'm all alone now."
- * "Half of me died."
- * "I'm different from all the other kids."
- * "I'm not a child anymore."
- * "I feel left out."
- * "Things will never be the same again."
- * "No one cares about my grief, only about my parents' grief."
- * "I can't cry because it will make my parents more upset."
- * "I feel guilty to be happy or to laugh."
- * "Why wasn't it me?"
- * "Will I die young, too?"
- * "I made it happen by wishing him dead!"
- * "If I act like my sibling, maybe my parents will feel better."
- * "Maybe my parents would love me more if I died!"

Normal Feelings

- * Impatient and angry at the world.

- * Resentful over the attention the parents are getting.
- * Resentful over the attention they are not getting.
- * Resentful over having to do more around the home.
- * Fearful of having to replace the sibling.
- * Guilt for feeling relieved over the death after a long illness.
- * Guilt over all the "bad" thoughts, words, and fights with the deceased.

How To Help

- * The bereaved parents should constantly remind themselves to be sensitive to the feelings of the surviving children.
- * The parents should strive to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible for the survivors.
- * The parents should encourage grieving, openness and the expression of feelings in the children by grieving openly and expressively in front of them.
- * Reassure them that they are not going to die, too.
- * Reassure them that they are loved, wanted and okay.
- * Reassure them that they did not cause the death in anyway.
- * Give lots of physical reassurance in the way of touching and hugs.
- * Contact the teacher/teachers or school counselors.
- * Ask them what and how they would like the school to be told.
- * Prepare them for questions and remarks they can expect at school.
- * Encourage them to resume their normal activities at their own pace.
- * Remember the sibling's birthday and anniversary of the death.
- * Remember the sibling at special family gatherings and functions.
- * Don't be afraid to talk about the child that died.
- * Talk about all the qualities of the child that died positive and negative.
- * Talk about the differences between the siblings, good and bad.
- * Don't promise them a replacement sibling with talks of having another child.
- * Remember: surviving siblings cannot be-

come, or replace, the deceased brother or sister.

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Questions/Answers from Bereaved Siblings

TCF, Baltimore, MD

All of a sudden I burst into tears and cannot control crying.

You have the freedom to cry when you need to. Crying is a normal reaction. You may feel embarrassed, but most people will react with sympathy and wish for themselves that they could cry freely. Crying is a natural outlet to grieving.



Why am I so mad at my sister for dying? She left me alone. I know it wasn't her fault, but I feel so guilty for being angry.

At some time everyone is angry at the person who died. Anger does not mean you loved them less; it means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end.

I can't concentrate. I can't think and I can't remember anything. I think I am losing my mind.

You are not losing your mind, although it may feel that way. Your mind is probably overloaded. Not only do you have to continue to go through your daily routine, but your mind is flooded with thoughts and

feelings for your brother or sister. This is temporary; your memory and concentration will return over time.

I have terrible nightmares. Sometimes I dream I am dying. I can't tell anyone because they will think I am crazy. Am I?

Some grieving people experience intense dreams. Dreams serve as a healthy outlet for the intense feelings you have during the day. As time goes on and you deal with your feelings, your dreams will become less frightening.

I no longer want to be with people. Their conversations are so trivial and shallow. Can you believe my friend thought the end of the world had come when her boyfriend dumped her? The real disaster is that my brother is dead! Why am I so intolerant?

Many people believe the second year of grief is more difficult than the first year. You feel less numb and more vulnerable to feelings of sadness and helplessness. You have begun to confront painful feelings and memories you worked hard to avoid during the first year when you were coping with the reality of the loss.

I feel so guilty for the way I yelled at my brother. We would fight about the silliest things. I'll never be able to tell him how sorry I am.

Brothers and sisters in every family quarrel and don't apologize after every argument. Even though you fought, you still loved your brother and he loved you.

Suddenly my parents expect me to parent them. I just can't handle it.

This is truly one of the, most unfair positions your grief puts you in. Try to share these feelings with your parents. Hopefully you will be better able to understand one another.



The Sibling Collection

The following books were donated to our chapter by Anne Lynch in memory of her brother, Dan Lynch.

Self Help/Nonfiction:

Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies
T.J. Wray. 2003.

The Empty Room
Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn. 2004.

The Escape Artist
Matt Seaton. 2002.

Before I Say Goodbye: Recollections and Observations from One Woman’s Final Year
Ruth Picardie. 2000.

If the Spirit Moves You: Life and Love After Death
Justine Picardie. 2001.

Memoir:

Landscape without Gravity: a Memoir of Grief
Barbara Lazear Ascher. 1993.

Fiction:

When Will There Be Good News?
Kate Atkinson. 2008.

LOVE GIFTS

A love gift is a living memorial to our child. Usually given on anniversaries, holidays, etc. but any contributions would be welcome at any time. Since there is no charge for newsletters and meetings, we solely depend on donations to purchase books, brochures and keep the chapter running. They are tax deductible. A wonderful way to remember your child is to sponsor either the printing or mailing costs of a newsletter. If you are interested please contact Martha Berman (781)337-8649 or E-mail mmartha1@comcast.net

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This newsletter is sponsored by the Berman family in loving memory of Nicole Berman, Mark Shinney, and Eddie Berman.

We need not walk alone. We are the Compassionate Friends.