



January/February 2020

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS-CHAPTER 2358

CO-LEADERS: Susan Fletcher, Scott Higgins
& Lesa Hartranft
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WEBSITE: WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

Facebook Page: *Compassionate Friends of
Charlotte, NC*

MONTHLY MEETING

Meeting place: St. Matthew Catholic Church, 8015 Ballantyne
Commons Parkway, Charlotte, NC - Room 234-235

Meeting Time: 3rd Tuesday of Each Month at 7:00 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

*Card making session usually on the first Monday of each month
at Donna Goodrich's home. E-mails will be sent out.

*TCF Annual National Conference, July 24-26, 2020, in
Atlanta, GA

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REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Regional Coordinators for NC: Donna & Ralph Goodrich

Phone Number: 704-882-4503

E-mail: iluvu2lauren@gmail.com

NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends
(877-969-0010)

nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Website:

www.compassionatefriends.org

online private closed facebook pages:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/>

TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!!

We congratulate you on having the courage to walk through our door for the first time. Please give our meetings at least 3 tries before deciding if they are right for you. We hope, with the resources available through TCF, you will find the right person or the right words to help you. You Need Not Walk Alone, We Are The Compassionate Friends.

TO OUR SEASONED MEMBERS:

We need your encouragement and support. TCF continues because of YOU. You give hope to the newly bereaved - hope that they too can eventually find joy in life again. Please attend when you feel you are able to reach out to another bereaved parent, grandparent or sibling.

Did you know that TCF Charlotte has its own Facebook page? Just search in facebook groups for - Compassionate Friends of Charlotte, NC

LIKE our Facebook page and please post any article, quote or personal musings that you feel may help another member. All information for meetings and special events will be listed on our facebook page.

**PLEASE VISIT US ON OUR
WEBPAGE!!**

WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF TCF CHARLOTTE STEERING COMMITTEE?

We need your help. Volunteering to be on our Steering Committee is a wonderful way to give back to the organization that helped you when you were starting your grief journey, and what better way to keep your child, grandchild or sibling's memory alive? Contact any of the leaders at our meetings if you would like more information. We need YOUR help to ensure our Chapter is as successful as possible in helping others. This is YOUR Chapter - help us make it a welcoming and caring place for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings to come to for help.

Our Chapter survives by donations only. There are costs associated with the Chapter, i.e., supplies, books, refreshments, food and supplies for our annual events, and our fee for our website. PLEASE help support our Chapter!!! Please consider donating to your Chapter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling on their special days or during the holidays. What better thing to do in their memory than to pay it forward for the help you have received from TCF. Thank you to the following people who have made donations to our Chapter.

Marie and David Roberts in loving memory of their son Jason.

Carol Patton in loving memory of her family members who have died.

Thanks to all who participated and helped to make the Candle Lighting a meaningful event for all who attended.

Please Mail All Donations to Our TCF Charlotte Treasurer At The
Following Address:
Carolyn Patton
5902 Rimerton Drive
Charlotte, NC 28226-8227

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP OUT IN OUR CHAPTER? WE ARE CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR A NEW E-NEWSLETTER EDITOR. WE ONLY ISSUE AN E-NEWSLETTER EVERY TWO MONTHS AND I WOULD BE HAPPY TO HELP YOU UNTIL YOU ARE COMFORTABLE PREPARING IT YOURSELF. PLEASE EMAIL ME IF YOU ARE INTERESTED!!

Donna Goodrich - iluvu2lauren@gmail.com

TO OUR MEMBERS

If there are any errors in dates or names in our listing of our children's, grandchildren's, or siblings's, please let me know. We are trying to get our database as accurate as possible. Many of our loved ones names do not have a last name listed. In these cases, we assume it is the same as the parent, grandparent or sibling who is listed as a member in our database. If this is incorrect, please let me know. There are many names that do not have a birth date or a death date listed. We know this can be very difficult to list, especially in the early days of grief. If you feel like adding those dates, just email them to me at: iluvu2lauren@gmail.com. We are only human so we do make mistakes but I have tried to be as accurate as I possibly can. Thank you for your understanding.

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Birthdays - January 2020

Gabriel Jordan

1/24 - 6/6

Christina Arethas &
Susan & Ron Wilson

Michael Rodas

1/5 - 11/12

Debbie & Mike Cargill

Dennis Darrell

1/10 - 5/18

Diane Darrell

Cynthia Boza

1/24 - 1/14

Cheryl Good

Sergio Herta, Jr.

1/11 - 4/25

Sandra & Sergio Herta

Adyson Faith Mendicino

1/24 - 6/24

Melissa Mendicino & Carl Schonacher

Will Blottman

1/25 - 4/26

Tom & Catherine Blottman

Frank Chen

1/20 - 2/11

Cindy & Scott Chen

Stacey Glickman

1/19 - 6/15

Marilyn Glickman

Ryan Hartranft

1/12 - 1/15

Lesa & Alan Hartranft

Matthew Jackson

1/2 - 11/3

Sonny & Scotty Jackson

Jeanna Norton

1/28 - 11/3

David Norton & Jeanette Owens

Raymond Pierce

1/13 - 10/13

Wendy Pierce

Steven Vaughn Ray

1/27 - 8/21

Jimmy Ray

Ryan Scott

1/16 - 5/1

Janet Scott

Joseph Matranga

1/6 - 1/8

Kathy & Bill Vukela

Robert Wylie

1/29 - 1/17

Beth Wylie

Anthony John Pijerov

1/5 - 6/8

Nick Pijerov

Daniel Joseph Schrieber

1/10 - 5/18

Gary & Marilyn Schrieber

Corey Smith

1/16 - 5/28

Christy Smith

Aubrey Wiger

1/? - 9/?

May Wiger

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Anniversaries - January 2020

Jeremiah Bellard

6/23 - 1/27

Mary Bellard

Trenton James Scott

11/15 - 1/31

Lisa Ann Christensen

Adam Dixon

7/22 - 1/30

Pam & Joe Dixon

Edward Stephens

9/14 - 1/6

Bunnie Brown

Tess & Sammie Crespi

10/16 - 1/20

Kim Crespi

Cynthia Boza

1/24 - 1/14

Cheryl Good

Lauren Marshall

3/22 - 1/30

Donna & Ralph Goodrich

Ryan Hartranft

1/12 - 1/15

Lesa & Alan Hartranft

Diana Phillipi

11/19 - 1/20

Becki Huff

Debra Kern

10/17 - 1/25

Sylvia Kern

Jacki Grinstead

6/30 - 1/11

Dan Luce

Scott Lee

6/9 - 1/9

Francesca Marie

Michael McKinley

12/23 - 1/9

Janet McKinley

Michael Ragone

5/31 - 1/17

Betsy & Mike Ragone

Philip Templeton

2/12 - 1/15

David Templeton

Matthew Wright

12/30 - 1/28

Kathleen Turner

Karson Whitesell

2/18 - 1/23

Debbie Harrison

Tommy Horton

12/23 - 1/21

Marilyn Horton

Isaiah Pinkney

12/31 - 1/13

Mia Jackson

Gevaughnti Lawson

4/25 - 1/5

Lisa Lawson

Mason Crist Heller

10/7 - 1/15

Sandra Mackinnon

Paul McGrath

9/26 - 1/22

Jim & Linda McGrath

Bobby O'Shea

9/6 - 1/7

Bob & Pauline O'Shea

Amanda Lee Stanley

10/18 - 1/22

Daris Stanley

Christopher John Thorne

7/26 - 1/25

Jackie Thorne

Joseph Matranga

1/6 - 1/8

Kathy & Bill Vukela

Denis Anthony Giacobbe

12/31 - 1/18

Christine Webb

Robert Wylie

1/29 - 1/17

Beth Wylie

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Birthdays - February 2020

Laura Barrowman

2/26 - 2/28

Marianne Barrowman

Stephen Bennish

2/3 - 11/28

Candy Bennish

Chet DeMilio

2/10 - 8/25

Kathy Cahill

Jessica Cudd

2/22 - 5/10

Dennis & Joy Cudd

Ben Huff

2/21 - 5/7

Martha Currie & Lisa Rainey

Karson Whitesell

2/18 - 1/23

Debbie Harrison

Jordi Bone

2/8 - 4/26

Jodi Bone Hudson

Jacob Preston Penrow

2/24 - 8/2

Beth Jordan

Jeremiah Karriker

2/17 - 8/4

Jamie Karriker

Rickey Buchanan

2/25 - 5/18

Cayren Lloyd

Natalie Rose Ruiz

2/1 - 2/1

Karina Lopez (Aiel Ruiz)

Jonah L. Gray

2/18 - 4/21

Melissa McNeal

Austin McRee

2/16 - 5/20

Tammy McRee

Chaylan Tucker

2/7 - 3/27

Crystal Moorman

Jaqueline Nicholson

2/23 - 3/4

Elizabeth Nicholson

David Patton

2/25 - 2/25

Carol Patton

Jameel Pearse

2/28 - 11/14

Yvette Pearse

Kirsten Ashley Whicker

2/21 - 2/7

Sandra Ratliff

Philip Templeton

2/12 - 1/15

David Templeton

Laura McDermott

2/10 - 9/23

Meredith Warren

Brian Courtemanche

02/03 - 11/09

Stephanie Courtemanche

Adam Powalski

2/4 - 4/12

Rose Powalski

Chris Taylor

2/23 - 12/10

?

Zachary Michael Tobey

2/4 - 7/2

Connie & John Tobey

Jeramiah Karriker

2/17 - 8/4

Angie Wolf

Remembering these Children and Their Families on Their Anniversaries - February 2020

Sam Wallace

10/19 - 2/22

Lisa Wallace & Jackie Anderson

Brad Aylward

4/6 - 2/9

Lisa & Frank Aylward

Frank Chen

1/20 - 2/11

Cindy & Scott Chen

Brendan Cullen

7/29 - 2/24

Sue Cullen

Mike Goepp

8/24 - 2/11

Kate Goepp

Jack Hicks

3/26 - 2/24

Daniel Ashbury

Laura Barrowman

2/26 - 2/28

Marianne Barrowman

Kevin Goodnight

6/26 - 2/17

Mary & Tim Cochran

Bobby Dowling

9/20 - 2/28

Dulcie & Jeff Dowling

Christopher Cullen

10/19 - 2/8

Marsha Gray

Brady Hopkins

4/27 - 2/1

Kim Hopkins

Russell Kershaw

4/30 - 2/28

Jim & Marguerite Kershaw

Missy Miner

3/8 - 2/26

Barbara Litschert

Jason Lubeznik

3/14 - 2/16

Maricely Lubeznik

Cory S. Flynt

11/29 - 2/2

Debra McDonald-Flynt

Aiden Miller

3/24 - 2/25

Matthew & Kelly Miller

Jimmy O'Keefe

11/6 - 2/19

Doris O'Keefe

Adam Mashburn

12/22 - 2/24

Becky & Scott Petersen

Christina Rupp

3/19 - 2/12

Jennifer Rupp

Danny Gary Scott

6/17 - 2/24

Gary & Emily Scott

Sean McCormick

4/8 - 2/17

Gail Jones

Jeannie Liebertz

6/8 - 2/12

Linda Liebertz

Natalie Rose Ruiz

2/1 - 2/1

Karina Lopez (Aiel Ruiz)

Sean McCormick

4/8 - 2/17

Gail McCormick

Richard McPeck

5/4 - 2/8

Rick & Sarah McPeck

Stephanie Midkiff

8/17 - 2/3

Teresa Moore

David Patton

2/25 - 2/25

Carol Patton

Kirsten Ashley Whicker

2/21 - 2/7

Sandra Ratliff

Robert Paul Alexy

?/? - 2/25

Carole Rush

Allie Brown

5/17 - 2/21

Marianne Steele

Jason Smart

4/24 - 2/17

Connie & Bill Smart

Keeghan Drake McCormack

9/27 - 2/22

Melissa Steele

Elliot Grayson Thomas


10/2 - 2/13

Kay Thomas & Tim Harasek

“

Clearly, we grieve the person we lost.
What many don't understand
is that is only part of it.
We grieve what we had and all we shared.
We grieve all the important
things they have missed
and will miss.
We grieve the future we were
supposed to have together.
This list goes on. Grief is complicated.

JONI GRIEFTOLIFE.COM



We begin to remember not just
that you died, but that you lived --
-- And that your life gave us
memories too beautiful to forget.

all-greatquotes.com



Be with supportive,
comforting people.

Identify those friends and relatives
who understand that the holiday season
can increase your sense of loss
and who will allow you
to talk openly about your feelings.

Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself
and accept your feelings—both happy and sad.

~ Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. www.centerforloss.com



**The
Compassionate
Friends**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Sibling Corner

Why The Death Of A Sibling Is Like Losing A Part Of Yourself

If you're anything like me, you grew up in a fairytale 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.

Don't 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's 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.

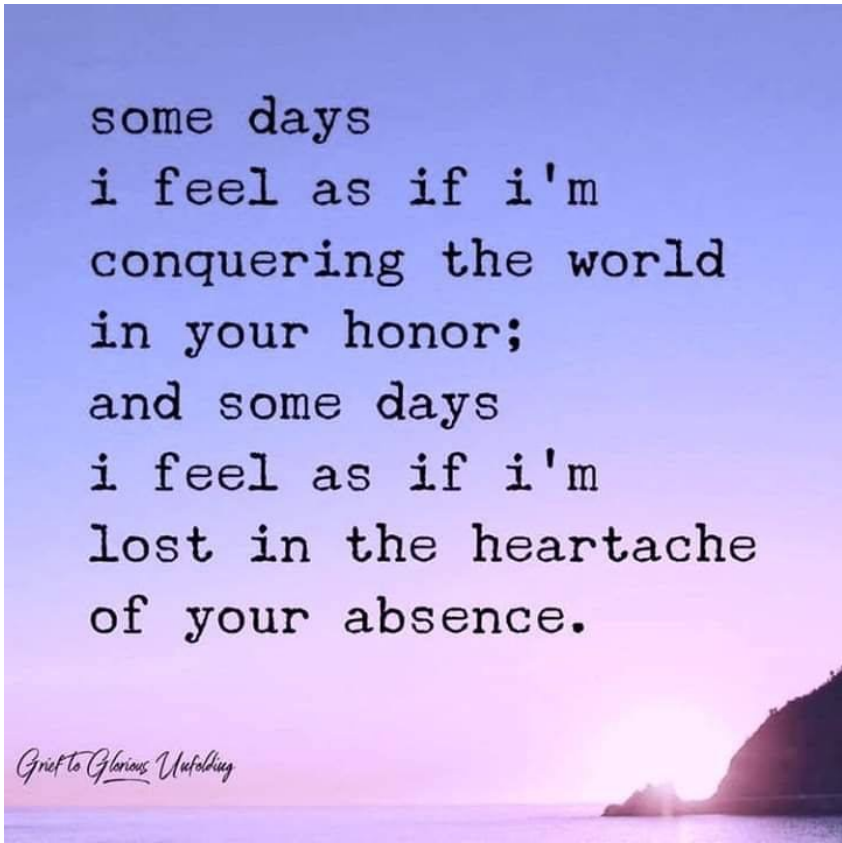
There is no statute of limitations on grief. There is no time limit to waking up crying, or having to leave the grocery store because you see your sibling's old friends. There is no special cure for those dull aches in your heart that don't seem to ever go away.

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's 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](#).



some days
i feel as if i'm
conquering the world
in your honor;
and some days
i feel as if i'm
lost in the heartache
of your absence.

Grief to Glorious Unfolding

43RD TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE
JULY 24, 2020 - JULY 26, 2020



43rd TCF National Conference
July 24-26, 2020 • Atlanta, GA

The Compassionate Friends National Conference is a weekend spent surrounded by other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. It is a place where hope grows and friendships are made with others who truly understand. With inspirational keynote speakers, abundant workshops for everyone's wants and needs, and a remembrance candle lighting program culminating with the annual Walk to Remember, this time of healing and hope is the gift we give ourselves. Join us as together we remember and share the everlasting love we have for our precious children, siblings and grandchildren.

The 43rd TCF National Conference will be held in Atlanta, GA on July 24-26, 2020. "Sharing Sweet Memories of Love" is the theme of next year's event, which promises more of this year's great National Conference experience. We'll keep you updated with details here, on the national website as well as on our [TCF/USA Facebook Page](#) and elsewhere as they become available. Plan to come and be a part of this heartwarming experience.

- Choose to attend from nearly hundred different workshops and sharing sessions, given by professionals and also individuals just like you.
- Take advantage of "Healing Haven" to receive free personal services such as a massage.
- Craft items to commemorate the love for your family member in the "Crafty Corner".
- Step away for a quiet moment of pause in the "Reflection Room".

IF you haven't attended a National Conference, please try to attend this one. It is close, Atlanta, GA. Just 4 hours down the road. It won't be this close for many years. You will find nothing but compassion, love, understanding and most importantly - HOPE. Please join us!!



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

BARBARA BUSH

“StepParent Grief”

Lauren Marshall, although not my biological daughter, was as special to me as my own daughter. Lauren died tragically January 30, 2000 as the result of an automobile accident at the age of 17, two months short of her 18th birthday and five months short of graduating from high school. This tragedy would most likely have been prevented if Lauren had worn her seat belt while traveling in her boyfriend’s car. They encountered black ice conditions on a wintry road in Northern Virginia and hit an SUV head-on. Lauren hit the windshield while her boyfriend escaped with only a few scratches. This tragedy changed the lives of her Mother, Donna, and myself, forever. I knew Lauren for 15 years and was her Stepfather for nearly 6 years. As I said, I loved her as I did my own daughter and her death was probably the most tragic event that I had ever had occur in my life.

Upon Lauren’s passing, Donna was put on the most horrific roller coaster ride. She was forced into the roller coaster’s first car that had no brakes on tracks that had the steepest, fastest, sharpest, nerve racking and cruelest ups and downs and turns that seemed to never end. I have learned that fathers (and stepfathers) may be unable to join their grieving wife in that first car to give them comfort, compassion, and support they need. Regardless of the car that step-parents sit in, they are still going to experience the grief journey/ride with their spouse. Their feelings and expressions of grief may be completely different, like the differences in the expressions of grief between a man and a woman, but they will both experience the same horrific ride.

My role as a stepfather changed dramatically when Lauren died, but I was bent on dealing with issues as the provider, the fix-it upper, and the doer in the family. I could handle “getting things done” but I was not equipped to handle the emotional issues that accompany the death of a child. I learned about these the hard way. But I also

learned that we each have to deal with our own grief in our own individual way.

A stepparent may feel almost invisible to the spouse, other stepchildren, other family members, and friends. Assumptions seem to be that the stepparent, unlike the biological parent, can't possibly understand or feel the depths of the loss. This is so untrue. The fact remains that Step parents do grieve for their step child - make no mistake about that.

Donna and I joined the Leesburg Chapter of TCF eight months following Lauren's passing. But the monthly TCF meetings, as well as grief counseling and marriage counseling for me, were not enough. It was not until our first national conference in Washington, D.C. in 2001 that we realized the extent to which 1,700 bereaved parents, stepparents, siblings, and grandparents can be so compassionate to strangers that shared a common bond. We have learned so much about the grief journey through the experiences of others that gave us hope and let us know we were on the path of establishing a new normal for our drastically changed lives. The bonding that took place at that first conference remains with us today. We look forward to meeting our new found friends from each conference and we have not missed an annual conference since 2001.

In the 19 years that I have attended the Annual TCF National Conference the organization has increasingly responded to the needs of Stepparents. At last years conference there were various workshops offered for stepparents. I attended one of those workshops that provided me a new button to wear that introduced the concept of a "Bonus Dad" for stepparents. I like the concept of "Bonus Dad and Bonus Child" much better than Step parent and step child.

I strongly recommend any stepparent join the Closed Face Book Group entitled "Loss of a Stepchild". The moderator for this group is

Babe Muro. This group provides support and advice for all step parents after the death of a child.

The bottom line is the more we can learn from others the better it will help our own bereavement which in turn will enable us to help the newly bereaved parents that will follow us. (The Reverend Simon Steven's approach and TCF Credo in action.)

Ralph Goodrich, Lauren Marshall's "Bonus" Dad,
Former Co-Leader of Charlotte, NC TCF Chapter, and currently
North and South Carolina Co-Regional Coordinator

WHY ARE THE "LANDMARK YEARS" SO HARD?

This January 30th marks the 20th year my daughter, Lauren, has been gone from this earth. I remember in those early months (and yes, years) how I didn't think I could make it another day, week, month, without her - but I did. When the 5th anniversary came around, we had moved from our home in Northern Virginia to Charlotte so I assumed that year would be easier - after all - I was away from all the "familiar" landmarks that cut to the core of my being whenever I had to go near them: her high school, the road she was killed on, the mall that we shopped together all the time, the hospital where she died, her bedroom where she spent her last night on this earth. They were all behind me so things should be easier - right? WRONG! That 5th year hit me so very hard. After weathering another anniversary and soon after, birthday - it suddenly dawned on my - it was a "landmark year". I had heard that they are much more difficult to handle but just didn't believe they could actually be any worse than a regular year. But it was. By the time the 10th year came around, I had actually for-

gotten - again - about the landmark years. Then it hit me again. How could year 10 be worse than year 9? Was this just physiological BS? I really thought so. When year 15 came around, I was ready and yes, it was harder than year 14. Then I hit the beginning of this year - 20 years coming up in January, 20 years without my sweet Lauren - it really doesn't seem possible. It seemed as though everything I did reminded me that she was not here with me. So many thoughts!! Yes, we do think about our children every single day, but after years without them, those thoughts are not as painful as those first hard years. This year those thoughts have been very very painful. I can't believe I've managed to live - and live a meaningful life - without my Lauren. She taught me so very much in her short time here on earth. She taught me compassion, that anyone could change for the good, that to give someone a second chance often changed their - and our lives - for the good, that forgiveness is good (yes, i know Lauren - I'm still working on this one!). Lauren continues to teach me even after she is gone - to direct me to other bereaved parents, to help me understand what others need, to remind me of the days when I thought I could not breath another breathe so I could remember how the newly bereaved parents that I meet are feeling. I feel Lauren is behind everything I do, "trying" to direct her mom in a direction that is helpful to others. So for all you newly bereaved parents out there - if you feel like you are going crazy when one of these "landmark" years hits you - you aren't going crazy - you are just a bereaved parent going through one of the many difficult time periods after the death of your child.

What I Wanted to Say

Today I wrote a note to the mom of a 22 year old girl who died. I wanted to say don't believe those other cards. The ones that say "time heals" and "God only takes the best" and "may your sorrows be lessened." You'll only be disappointed. I wanted to say this is the most heart-wrenching, chest crushing, breath stealing tragedy on earth. I wanted to tell her there will be days she wants to die, and friends who will not understand some of the things she does or says.

I wanted to tell her she will still feel her daughter's presence at times, sometimes so strongly that it is as if she is dancing just at the edge of whatever activity is going on. And other times she might not feel her presence at all.

I wanted to tell her that her life will not go back, that she will never be the same, because a piece of her left with her daughter.

And that even though the pain does not go away, somehow her soul will eventually make enough room so she can hold it all— the grief, the pain, the joy and the love.

I wanted to tell her... but I didn't.

Instead, I wrote— I'm sending love, for words are pointless right now.

And that is the truth.

Susi Costello is the mother of four smart, funny sons in their 20s and a beautiful daughter who died a few hours after she was born 44 years ago. She is a psychiatric nurse and yoga teacher who works with people who have experienced severe trauma.

From The Far Side of the Rainbow

The best way I can describe grieving over a child as the years go by is to say it's similar to carrying a stone in your pocket.

When you walk, the stone brushes against your skin. You feel it. You always feel it. But depending on the way you stand or the way your body moves, the smooth edges might barely graze your body.

Sometimes you lean the wrong way or you turn too quickly and a sharp edge pokes you. Your eyes water and you rub your wound but you have to keep going because not everyone knows about your stone or if they do, they don't realize it can still bring this much pain.

There are days you are simply happy now, smiling comes easy and you laugh without thinking. You slap your leg during that laughter and you feel your stone and aren't sure whether you should be laughing still. The stone still hurts.

Once in a while you can't take your hand off that stone. You run it over your fingers and roll it in your palm and are so preoccupied by its weight, you forget things like your car keys and home address. You try to leave it alone but you just can't. You want to take a nap but it's been so many years since you've called in "sad" you're not sure anyone would understand anymore or if they ever did.

But most days you can take your hand in and out of your pocket, feel your stone and even smile at its unwavering presence. You've accepted this stone as your own, crossing your hands over it, saying "mine" as children do.

You rest more peacefully than you once did, you've learned to move forward the best you can. Some days you want to show the world what a beautiful memory you're holding. But most days you twirl it through your fingers, smile and look to the sky. You squeeze your hands together and hope you are living in a way that honors the missing piece you carry, until your arms are full again.

- Jessica Watson - <https://fourplusanangel.com/>
(with special thanks to Valerie Jones)

Feeling Vulnerable Is Common When We Are Grieving

By: Abi May

Losing a loved one can be utterly life-shattering. Nothing seems the same anymore because most things are *not* the same. One of the changes that can hit really hard, particularly if you're usually a person who is on top of things, is how your self-confidence can take a big tumble. It is as though the foundations of your world have been shaken, and with that shaking, you're no longer standing on solid ground. Your beliefs might be shaken; your sense that "things will work out all right" might be destroyed – because things *haven't* worked out, have they?

You might find that you are less resilient when things go wrong. A blocked toilet can lead to a flood of tears. The pain of a pre-existing illness or the onset of something new can be hard to cope with. People's reactions can leave you stunned. What you used to be able to ignore or respond to with a quip leaves you speechless.

This change in ourselves can be one of the most unnerving parts of grief, I think.

We are often at our most vulnerable when we are in this phase of our grieving.

No wonder there are well-worn clichés about ambulance chasers and some unscrupulous funeral directors who take advantage of grieving relatives.

I remember that utter bewilderment when Catherine had first died, and sitting in my living room, and being completely at a loss how to arrange her funeral. How do you arrange a funeral? Where? How? I was fortunate as the very kind leader of our small church came over. She'd made all the enquiries that were needed, and with her help, we were able to put all of the arrangements into place. If I hadn't had her help, I don't know how I would have managed it.

When you're in that state of shock in the earliest period of your grief it seems your defences are completely down. Inconsiderate comments or behaviours of friends and family hurt unbearably, scarring our relationships, whereas the extra kindnesses are just so powerful, so important.

The vulnerabilities of grief carry on long past those early days. It somehow took me months before I could get on a bus. I just felt completely lacking confidence. I remember trembling as I paid the driver and sat down; my daughter was dead and I was on a bus. It sounds ridiculous, but it was my reality.

I heard from a couple of friends, bereaved mothers, in different parts of the country, who received hospital treatment recently. Both – completely unconnected – told how emotional they were to be in hospital, and sadly both had accounts of being treated insensitively on occasion. The emotions of grief can make any experience more difficult. I remember sinking in that feeling of helplessness when I had my knee and kidney surgeries in 2015, and I also recall the kindness of the assistant in the pre-op room who held my hand and listened.

Kindness is powerful. It is not that someone can take away our grief. It is not that they can magically make us feel stronger in ourselves. But **kindness gives us a safe space**. A safe space is what we need when we are so vulnerable.

When you're feeling vulnerable in your grief, there are a few things that seem to help.

Being open and honest about what we're experiencing:

People often don't know what has happened in our lives or realise how it's still affecting us. As hard as it can be, it is important that we tell the people around us when we're struggling.

When Catherine died, I had a writing and editing contract with an overseas publisher. All our interaction was via email. I was supposed to get a certain amount of work done every month. I took a month off – it was impossible to work – then gradually started to do what was required, which was a financial necessity for me. A couple of months later, I mentioned in an email to my manager that I was struggling to keep up with my work because of the death of my daughter. She wrote back in surprise, something on the lines of, "I hadn't realised you were still grieving."

Duh! You might think. My daughter had died. Barely 3 months had passed. What did she expect? But being young and inexperienced with the deeper things of life, she just didn't get it. It was up to me to tell it like it was.

Accepting help when it's offered:

If we're someone who people usually go to when they need a listening ear or a strong shoulder and/or if we're someone who usually manages their own problems in private, it can feel like a defeat to accept help. *What's happened to me*, we might wonder. *I've always been so on top of things and now I'm like a ball of jelly.*

It won't always be like this. We do gain strength as we walk the grief journey, but when we're at our most vulnerable, we should accept at least consider accepting help that is offered. The help could be company, someone to listen to us; it could be practical; it could be accepting an easier slot at work, or the offer of time off. It could be somebody who gives our home a once-over with the Hoover, or picks up our children from school, or takes the dog for a walk.

Watching out that we don't get "pushed around":

The trouble with being vulnerable is that it means what it says. We are vulnerable to salespeople, to pushy friends who think they know what's best for us, to relatives who want us to make decisions before we're ready.

Some decisions when we're bereaved do have to be made soon – things like funeral arrangements. But many others can be taken slowly and in our own time. If we can slow it down, let's do so. Generally it's best to avoid making major decisions while we're in a particularly low or emotional state. Many people advise waiting a year or two after a major loss before making major moves, like changing job or house, but it's not always possible to delay that long. But where we can, I'd suggest we take the time we need and not let other people's opinions or sales talks sway us too much.

Entering the safe spaces:

Finding safe spaces – times and places where we can be ourselves and relax – is vital.

Safe spaces can be with people who care and will not take advantage of us. You know the type of friend with whom you can sit in companionable silence? They're not expecting anything. We can just be. Sometimes the safe space is by ourselves. Not lonely, but in solitude, taking care of own well-being. It could be listening to music. Having a walk. Watching the birds. Star-gazing. Painting or doing some craft activity. Curling up in a blanket on the sofa and watching TV.

As we walk on the journey of grief, our emotional muscles get stronger, and eventually we come to a place where we're not so vulnerable. Even so, other events may set us back at times – an illness, subsequent bereavements in the family, loss of job, problems with our benefits, even something mundane like the washing machine backing up.

But gradually, step-by-step, we find our feet again. Instead of vulnerability there is resilience.