



The Compassionate Friends of Canada When A Child Dies...

National Newsletter – Fall 2024

REGISTERED OFFICE

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Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF.

Welcome to the Fall edition of the national newsletter! Our objective continues to be to provide news, information, and items of interest to connect members from coast to coast, and to provide guidance to leaders in organizing events and activities. If you have any material that you would like to contribute, or suggestions for topics that you would like to see included, please e-mail the National Office.

A Time to Gather

Borrowing a phrase from Pete Seeger's *Turn, Turn, Turn*, this issue includes reports from two TCF gatherings and a chapter outreach. We hope that these events will confirm that our common grief for the loss of our child extends beyond geographic borders and perhaps inspire you to consider organising or attending a similar event in your region.

TCF US National Conference

TCF Canada Board members Barb Noseworthy and Karen Destun attended the 47th National Conference of The Compassionate Friends in New Orleans, Louisiana, this July. Here is Karen's report.

Barb and I were fortunate to attend this year and were overwhelmed by the number of bereaved parents, and the levels of compassion and learning that we encountered.

We set out to

connect with as many Canadian attendees as we could. Thanks to Tina Flamond and her family from Calgary, AB, Canadians had a designated table where we gathered during the opening 'Meet and Greet', met each other, shared our stories and posted our children's photos on a photo board.

Barb and I also met some members of The Compassionate Friends USA Board of Directors, and the CEO, Shari O'Loughlin.

The conference, held over 2 days following the registration and meet and greet, was filled with workshops and sharing circles. There were so many opportunities to hone in on very personal aspects of your grief journey through these workshops. Topics included *Death of the Difficult or Troubled Child*, *A Panel of Men for Women Only: Understanding Our Struggle*, *We Remember - Grandparent Grief* and *On the long Road - After the First Years*; to name a few. There were



also workshops that focused on strategies for healing that included Yoga, Exercise Class, Crafty Corner, Aroma Touch Hand Technique and Art based activities.

Siblings were offered specific workshops that ran during the same time as the parent and grandparent workshops. Some topics that were explored included, *Suddenly Alone, How a Family Changes After Loss, and Am I Still a Sibling?* Sharing Sessions were held each evening, often with many specific options provided such as *Loss of an Adopted Child, Loss to Suicide, Signs and General Grief.*

Keynote speakers provided engaging stories of living with loss and the opportunity for all attendees to gather in the main ballroom. These keynotes were often accompanied by a meal, and lovely melodious interludes by musicians who channel personal loss through music.

A highlight of the conference for many was the Saturday Evening Dinner, Keynote and Candle Lighting. We were able to gather many Canadian attendees to dine together in the ballroom. The Candle Lighting was an incredibly beautiful,

emotional and cathartic experience for all.

The final day brought everything to a conclusion with the Walk to Remember, a Keynote message emphasizing *What Next - Taking the Conference Home* and the Closing Program by TCF USA CEO Shari O'Loughlin.



I heard the conference described as: *“A foreign place where you belong. Euphoric and wonderful.”*

“Nurturing Our Souls” A Restorative Retreat

A special gathering that is expected to become an annual event took place recently on Vancouver Island. Co-planner and attendee Cathy Sosnowsky provided this report.

Ariel Turcotte, chapter leader of TCF Powell River (BC), came back unsatisfied from her first-ever TCF conference in the spring of 2023. That journey to Seabeck, Washington, was too long, the weekend too short! After gathering a team around her, she began planning a new kind of retreat, closer to home in Nanaimo, BC, and lasting longer - from Thursday night to Sunday morning (September 5th to 8th).

As a member of the planning team, and a presenter in three workshops, I have just returned from that experience, and my head is still spinning, remembering highlight after highlight. To begin with, the setting, Bethlehem Retreat Centre, once a nunnery, is stunning: surrounded by huge trees, set next to a lake, the centre’s buildings are lined with cedar with large windows facing forest and lake. The facility includes a labyrinth and a pond with a gurgling waterfall. The whole atmosphere invites peace and healing.



On the program, there was a stretching, breathing session every morning, and a relaxation yoga-type session every evening. These were led by Vickie MacArthur, a yoga teacher and spiritual guide. Two other members of the team led craft workshops to make dreamcatchers, grief flags and hand mandalas. The craft tables were available throughout the weekend. Choices among the scheduled workshops included *Men in Grief, Writing to Heal* and *After Death Communication*. There were traditional sharing circles on Friday night, and entire group activities like *The Red Thread Circle*, and *A Gathering of Stones*.

Thirty-eight bereaved parents attended this year, including the planning team: Ariel Turcotte (Powell River), Zella Knutson (Texada Island), Heather MacLeod (Courtenay), Marion Prochnau (Sechelt), Cathy Sosnowsky (North Vancouver), and Linda Woods (Kelowna).

We are awaiting news on a grant to help fund future retreats and Ariel has already booked Bethlehem Centre for 2025. The next one may perhaps be larger; the team felt that for this first time around we should limit the numbers. We already have a waiting list.

For further information, or to register for next year, please contact Cathy (NorthVancouver@TCFCanada.net) or Ariel (PowellRiver@TCFCanada.net).



Chapter Outreach

A TCF Chapter Founder and group facilitator Emily MacKenzie recently sat in on the CHCH local Morning Show to share our unique support group with others. Emily spoke about the loss of her daughter Jody and how it brought her to begin a TCF Chapter in Hamilton, Ontario. The group has provided support for her following her loss, and she feels a sense of purpose in leading the group with co-founders, to provide support for other bereaved parents. The TV broadcast ran the day before their August meeting, which was timely. On the night of the meeting, four bereaved parents arrived for the first time, their losses spanning from mere months to 48 years.

World-wide Candle Lighting

First started by TCF US in 1997, this is an annual event in which candles are lit from 7pm to 8pm in each time zone, creating a band of light around the world in memory of all children who have died. The 2024 celebration will take place on **Sunday, December 8th**, with literally thousands of people expected to participate in small and large groups, in-person and on-line. Many TCF chapters conduct their own ceremony which can involve simple readings or a more extensive program with music. While December may seem a long way off, now is the time to begin planning and promoting your chapter's event.

If your chapter is planning an on-line program, please consider posting the contact information on the *TCF Leadership* and / or *Parents* Facebook pages. Many individuals unaware of the event, or unable to attend in person, will appreciate being able to join with others in commemorating their child(ren).

First time chapters can find a suggested program on the TCF Canada website under *Resources -> Articles*.

Alternatively, TCF US offers on-line celebrations in different time zones that can be viewed either individually or in a group. Visit www.compassionatefriends.org for details.

Donations: This issue, we give a big "Thank You" for a donation from TCF Perth (ON).

Facilitator Training: There are still spaces available for the next training session scheduled for **Saturday, September 14th**. Please contact the National Office to register.

Pins and Books: Copies of the TCF Canada book of poems *Reflections from the Heart* and a supply of TCF Canada pins are still available. To receive either or both, please contact the National Office with your mailing address.

Closing Thought

This issue of the newsletter includes several examples of bereaved parents coming together to share their stories and support each other on their grief journeys. This is the essence of The Compassionate Friends, and we hope that you will have the opportunity to reach out to either find or give support as you travel your own journey.

"We Need Not Walk Alone"