



TCF CANADA - VOICES

2025 Winter Issue

Welcome to the Winter edition of the TCF-Canada National Newsletter, **VOICES**.

The holiday season may present unique challenges for families coping with the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

Regardless of whether this is the first year or the twentieth since your loved one passed away, this time of year can be particularly difficult.

Whether you observe Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's, or do not participate in any specific celebration, the absence of a loved one often feels more profound during these occasions when everyone else is merry and joyful.

Engaging in self-care practices and seeking support from others can provide meaningful assistance.

This issue features some strategies for navigating the holiday period.



Newsletter Committee

Connie Schram cschram@hotmail.ca
Tina Flamond tflamondtcf@gmail.com

We invite you to contribute ideas and suggestions for future editions by contacting us via email.

WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING

Please join The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting, on **Sunday December 14th at 7:00 pm local time**. The service held annually on the second Sunday in December unites families and friends globally to honour our sons, daughters, grandchildren and siblings who left us too soon.

Candles will be lit by thousands of people worldwide to commemorate these cherished children.



This event, believed to be the largest mass candle lighting worldwide, creates a 24-hour wave of light moving across time zones.

Since its inception in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance, the event has grown significantly. Now, numerous formal and informal gatherings occur globally, where families come together in quiet remembrance of those children who will never be forgotten.

Local TCF Chapters may host an in-person event as well as providing virtual links for those who cannot attend in person. Check chapter websites for further information. If you cannot join a group, in person or virtually consider participating in quiet remembrance alongside your family at home and you will join thousands of families in creating a wave of light to remember our beloved children.

Shine a light... We need not walk alone

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Barb and Gary Kachur have been steady, compassionate leaders with the **TCF Saskatoon Chapter** for more than two decades. Their dedication and teamwork have supported countless families navigating the pain of losing a child. This month, we are honoured to recognize Barb and Gary together, as they describe their work not as individuals, but as a true partnership built on empathy, service, and love.

Barb and Gary came to TCF after the death of their son, Ryan, who passed away in 1999 at just 16 from an undetected heart defect. In the months that followed this unimaginable loss, they sought comfort and connection at their first meeting in August and their first Candle Lighting that December. Those early moments of support became the foundation of the care they would later offer to other grieving families.

From their earliest days with TCF, Barb and Gary began strengthening the Saskatoon Chapter in ways that reflected their different strengths but shared purpose. Gary created and continues to maintain the Saskatoon TCF website now the oldest active TCF site in Canada giving families accessible support when few online resources existed. Alongside this, Barb offered steady leadership and compassionate outreach, connecting with newly bereaved parents and helping the chapter grow. Together, they built a foundation of stability and care that has supported families for more than two decades.

Their dedication extends beyond Saskatoon. Over the years, Barb and Gary have both contributed to TCF Canada at the national level through board service, newsletter and pamphlet work, and digital support. Barb served as National Board Secretary and later as a Director-at-Large, while Gary lent his technical skills to the national webpage, the 2017 National Gathering, and the TCF newsletter. Today, they continue to support TCF Canada, including ongoing work with the national Facebook page.

Together, Barb and Gary have offered comfort, stability, and hope to families facing the darkest moments of their lives. Whether through outreach, meetings, online resources, or the many quiet tasks that keep a chapter running. Their leadership has shaped a welcoming community where families can find understanding and connection year after year.



Thank you, Barb and Gary, for your years of dedication to The Compassionate Friends and for the care you continue to provide in honour of your beloved son Ryan.
Our community is stronger because of you.

WORDS THAT HELPED ME

THE FIVE-MINUTE RULE FOR GRIEVERS

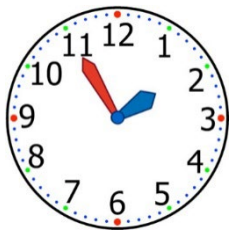
It's common for people dealing with grief to want to withdraw, even from those they care about most. This urge can come and go—sometimes it appears one day and disappears the next—and, like all aspects of grief, it doesn't follow a set timeline. These feelings might linger for years.

When you're invited out but hesitate to accept because you're unsure how you'll feel on that day, try using the Five-Minute Rule.

Let the person making the invite know that while you'd like to join, you can't predict how you'll be feeling when the time comes. Accept the invitation if they're comfortable with you, possibly applying the Five-Minute Rule.

"You can choose whether or not to attend up to five minutes before you're supposed to arrive."

This approach spares you from extra stress and means you won't need to explain why you're cancelling or feeling like you need to invent an excuse at the last moment.



By taking away this pressure, you might find yourself interested in participating in activities you otherwise would have declined, simply out of caution.

Remember you need to do what is best for yourself and that can change from day to day. Treat yourself with kindness and patience, this is a heavy load, we carry.

(We invite submissions regarding words or actions that may have offered encouragement or support. You may also share experiences about what you would have appreciated others doing in similar situations.)

"There is no "normal" way to grieve. Except for how we each do it."
– Melvina Young

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Chapter Chat (TCF Leadership)

The next chapter chat is scheduled for Saturday, January 17th, time to be announced. Info will be posted on the Leadership Facebook Page or contact the National Office by email nationaloffice@tcfcanda.net or call 1-866-823-0141

Group Facilitator Training – Will be held in February 2026, date to be determined.

Info can be found on the Leadership Facebook Page or contact the National Office by email nationaloffice@tcfcanda.net or call 1-866-823-0141

Worldwide TCF Candle Lighting – Sunday December 14th. Details available from individual chapters.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

TCF Canada chapters hold both in-person and virtual meetings. Individuals can participate in virtual meetings from any location. To attend a virtual meeting, contact the meeting organizer by email to request the access link.

When

Every Tues, 1:00pm Central Time	Winnipeg, MB	Contact Information mtanner@hsc.mb.ca
1st Tues, Monthly, 7:30pm Pacific Time	Vancouver, BC	northshore@tcfcanda.net
1st Thurs, Monthly, 7:00pm Eastern Time	Ottawa, ON	ottawa@tcfcanda.net
2nd Mon, Monthly, 7:00pm Eastern Time	Waterloo, ON	waterlooregion@tcfcanda.net
3rd Wed, Monthly, 6:30pm Central Time	Winnipeg, MB	mtanner@hsc.mb.ca
Last Wed, Monthly, 5:30pm Eastern Time	Burin Peninsula, NL	burinpeninsula@tcfcanda.net

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Have you considered donating to **TCF Canada**? Your support makes a powerful difference. Every contribution directly strengthens our mission to provide comfort, connection, and hope to bereaved parents across the country. With your help, TCF Canada can continue to offer vital programs, compassionate resources, and a supportive community for families grieving the death of a child—at any age, from any cause, at any time.

Donating is easy. You can give through the National Website or directly via CanadaHelps link below:

[Donate Now - THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA](#) *Tax receipts will be issued.*

Leave a Legacy of Compassion

You can also create a lasting legacy by including TCF Canada in your Will. A bequest—whether added through a new Will or a simple codicil—helps ensure that future generations of bereaved families will have access to the understanding and support they need. Your generosity today can make a meaningful difference for years to come.

Bequests can be made to:

The Compassionate Friends of Canada
Registration #893699462-RR-0001

FACEBOOK – TCF LEADERSHIP GROUP

Are you a Chapter Leader or Facilitator who uses Facebook?

We warmly invite you to join the **TCF–Canada Facebook Leadership Page**, an online space created specifically for those who guide and support our chapters. This private group brings together leaders from across the country, offering a unique opportunity to connect, collaborate, and grow within a caring national network.

It's a wonderful place to ask questions, exchange resources, and learn from others who truly understand.

[TCF Canada Leadership | Facebook](#)

CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

Powell River, British Columbia - Compassionate Friends Retreat “Nurturing Our Souls” by Zella Knutson, Retreat Director

It's never easy to put words on paper to inspire people to read but I'll try, because what we've built together deserves to be shared.

Our annual **Powell River Compassionate Friends** retreat was born from “love and loss”. I often say it began with “a gal with a dream,” but the truth is, it began with the enduring love of two parents and the unimaginable pain of losing their child.

Ariel and Paul Turcotte welcomed their little baby son Hayden into the world on June 12, 1997. From the stories I have heard, he grew into a carefree, and happy young man with many accomplishments. Tragically, in 2019 at the early age of just 22 years old, Hayden and his girlfriend Maddy lost their lives in a devastating car accident. In the wake of that loss, Ariel and Paul turned to the North Vancouver Chapter of Compassionate Friends for support, understanding, and hope. It was there, in the shared space of grieving hearts, that healing slowly began, and a spark was lit.

As Ariel's grief journey continued, she felt the call to give back. She now leads the Powell River Chapter, carrying forward the compassion and strength that once lifted her. A few years ago, she attended the annual Seabeck Retreat in Washington State. While the gathering itself was meaningful, the long and difficult journey to get there made her wonder: What if we had something like this closer to home? A place for Canadian families to gather, to grieve, to heal, and to grow together. That thought became a vision. That vision became our retreat, Nurturing Our Souls.

Now, we look ahead to our third retreat, in 2026, a gathering shaped by courage, connection, and community. It's a space where grief is met with compassion, where silence is held gently, and where love ever enduring is shared freely.

What began as a dream has become a sacred place for healing and connection for many and that is something truly beautiful!

Each year our planning team works diligently to create a restorative and uplifting experience over this four-day retreat located on Westwood Lake at the Bethlehem Retreat Centre in Nanaimo, BC.

Our retreat aims to explore our grief journey together, to find light in the heavy darkness. Our greatest success has been creating a safe and compassionate space where bereaved parents can connect with others walking a similar path. The retreat is a dedicated place where we feel emotionally supported as we share our stories and honor our children.



Many parents arrive in a fog of grief, with no expectations, they only hope for some sense of release.

Witnessing their transformation from profound sorrow to a renewed sense of being is profoundly moving and deeply rewarding. One second-year attendee shared over breakfast, “Last year felt heavy. This year you have managed to bring joy.” That moment captured everything we strive for. Mission accomplished!

Powell River TCF Retreat, continued

This year's retreat featured expert presenters offering tools to support both the emotional and physical effects of grief. Pamela Downey, Counsellor, MEd, RCC, led a powerful session titled "Death by Drug Poisoning: Death with a Stigma." We also were gifted with a presentation by Dr. Cameron Morhaliek, psychiatrist, who also spoke on how grief manifests in the body. His insights into the effects of opioids on the brain helped parents understand their child's death was not their fault and often couldn't have been prevented. These sessions brought meaningful relief and opened a path toward healing.



We offer creative outlets to express our thoughts and emotions through journaling, coloring, creating activities like crafting lanterns of love, dream catchers, hand Mandala's to mention a few. We have explored the thought of "continued connections" through an intuitive teacher. We have included a book exchange to share meaningful helpful information. But mostly we share love and support. We honor diversity in Beliefs, Religions, Backgrounds, Age and Grief Stages. On a side note - we are very clear about opting-in and or opting-out of activities. We also provide free time to reflect and/or connect. We call it "Fiesta or Siesta time."

At the heart of our retreat is one simple truth: connection matters. As bereaved parents, we often feel isolated in our grief, surrounded by a world that can't fully understand the depth of our loss or the silence that follows. Explaining the death of a child can feel not only overwhelming, but deeply personal and often, well-meaning responses leave us feeling even more alone. Over time, many of us retreat inward, carrying our pain quietly.

But here, at our retreat, something shifts. We find one another. We sit with others who understand without needing explanation. We listen, not to fix, but to truly hear. And in that space, healing begins.

This year, something beautiful happened. At our closing ceremony, participants asked for a contact list so they could stay connected beyond the event. That simple request speaks volumes: we didn't just gather, we created a circle of care that continues long after the retreat ends.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, just before sitting down to write this, I came across a quote that read, "True love is something given, not taken." Our children are that true love. They are the greatest gift we were ever given. And although they are no longer physically with us, their love remains fierce, enduring, and present in everything we do.

Our retreat is an extension of that love. It is a space to honor them, to remember together, and to keep walking forward, side by side. I continue in this love journey for my daughter, Lilly.

We hope you'll join us one day! We will announce the date and open registration for our 2026 retreat early in the New Year. We have built something truly special, a community of support grounded in compassion, connection, and shared experience.

The Powell River Compassionate Friends Society
"May Love, Light and Strength find you always"

(For information on 2026 Retreat, email Zella Knutson nurturingoursoulsretreat@gmail.com)

Winter and the Quiet of Grief

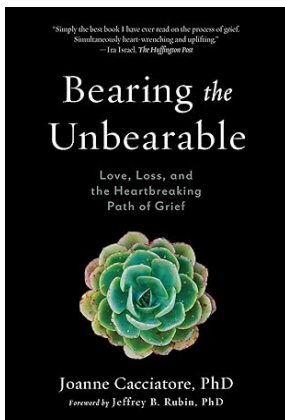
Winter's stillness can mirror the quiet places within our hearts after the loss of a child. This season often brings a sharper awareness of grief, inviting us to pause and gently acknowledge what we feel, without pressure to move forward before we're ready.

Though winter can feel isolating, it also reminds us that rest and reflection are important parts of healing. Just as trees appear bare while gathering strength for spring, we can use this quiet time to honour our emotions and care for ourselves with compassion.

Even in the coldest months, small moments of warmth can sustain us—a cherished memory, a meaningful conversation, or a moment of peace. Winter may be long, but it can also offer space to soften our hearts and breathe a little more gently.



RESOURCE PICK



Bearing the Unbearable is one of the most compassionate and insightful books on grieving a loved one—especially the loss of a child. Drawing from her own devastating loss and years of work with bereaved individuals, author **Dr. Joanne Cacciatore** offers brief, meditative chapters that speak directly to the heart of sorrow.

Instead of trying to “fix” grief, the book honours it as a natural, love-rooted response. With honesty and tenderness, Cacciatore blends personal stories, mindfulness practices, and gentle guidance that help readers feel less alone.

The short chapters make it easy to return to, especially when concentration is fragile, and many readers find new meaning as their grief evolves.

While especially meaningful for parents mourning a child, the book is valuable for anyone carrying deep loss or supporting someone who is grieving. It offers no clichés—only presence, understanding, and permission to grieve in one’s own way.

At its core, ***Bearing the Unbearable*** is a wise and compassionate companion for anyone learning to live with heartbreak.

TCF FOUNDING MEMBER IRIS LAWLEY

TCF founding member **Iris Lawley** passed away in October of this year, just one day after her 94th birthday. She was the last surviving member of the two couples who, together with Rev. Simon Stephens, founded **The Compassionate Friends**.

In May 1968, Iris and her husband Joe, along with Bill and Joan Henderson, each experienced the devastating loss of their sons at Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital in the UK, within days of one another. At the time, Rev. Simon Stephens was serving as the hospital chaplain and supported both families during this unbearable time. Recognizing the unique understanding they could offer each other, he encouraged the Lawleys and Hendersons to meet and share their grief. Their connection proved profoundly healing, as they discovered comfort in a space where their pain was understood without explanation.

A few months later, in January 1969, Iris, Joe, Bill, Joan, and Rev. Stephens held the first meeting of *The Society of The Compassionate Friends*—a name later shortened to **The Compassionate Friends**.

In 1977, the first Canadian TCF chapter in Winnipeg held their inaugural meeting. Today, TCF has a presence in many countries around the world, with both local chapters and virtual support available globally.

We are deeply grateful to Iris, Joe, Bill, Joan, and Rev. Stephens for creating a safe, compassionate space where those navigating life after the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild can find understanding companionship and support from others who truly understand their journey.



*In 1994, Iris was awarded an **MBE** by Queen Elizabeth II for her remarkable work with The Compassionate Friends. Through her own personal bereavement, she transformed unimaginable sorrow into decades of service, compassion, and hope for others—showing just how extraordinary she was.*

Thank you, Iris, for your unwavering dedication to **TCF** and for the legacy of comfort and connection you leave behind.

AS THE YEAR CHANGES, GRIEF REMAINS



New Year's is often presented as a joyful turning point—a moment to celebrate, to plan, to begin again. But for parents grieving a child, it can be one of the most tender times of the year. The transition into January can amplify the ache of absence, as we mark another year without the ones we love.

In our **Compassionate Friends** community, we understand that these feelings are real and deeply human. Grief doesn't reset on January 1st. It travels with us, shaped by love, memory, and the longing for what might have been.

If this season feels heavy, please know that you are held in the hearts of those who walk this path alongside you. You don't have to navigate these days alone—reach out, share your child's name, and let your community support you through the turning of the year.

CONTACT US

The Compassionate Friends of Canada
c/o 31 Maplehill Way
Ottawa ON, Canada
K2C 3H1

E-mail: nationaloffice@tcfcanada.net

Website: www.tcfcanada.net

Toll-free line: 1-866-823-0141

Newsletter Suggestions
cschram@hotmail.ca
tflamondtcf@gmail.com

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

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Karen Destun (Waterloo, ON) – Vice-President
Donna Rodin (Medicine Hat, AB) – Past
President / Facebook Host
Diana Cadigan (St. John's, NL) – Treasurer
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Development

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Tina Flamond (Calgary, AB)



HOLIDAY GRIEF

The holiday season can be an especially tender and difficult time for those grieving the loss of a child. Traditions, memories, and expectations often heighten the ache of absence. As you move through this season, we hope the following suggestions offer comfort, understanding, and a reminder that you are not alone.

Begin by giving yourself permission to set boundaries that protect your heart. Choose activities—and people—who feel supportive and safe. It is more than acceptable to decline gatherings or traditions that feel too heavy this year. (*Remember the **Five-Minute Rule**: it is okay to step away whenever you need to.*)

Seek support from those who truly understand the depth of your grief. Connecting with others through support groups or online communities can offer a sense of companionship, understanding, and shared strength during a time when many bereaved parents feel isolated.

Finding gentle ways to honour your child's memory can bring moments of closeness amid the season. You may choose to light a candle, include a favourite food, display a cherished photo, or weave a small remembrance into your family's holiday traditions.

Planning simple, comforting activities ahead of time can help ease some of the emotional strain. Whether it's watching a familiar movie, taking a quiet walk, or engaging in a soothing hobby, intentional acts of care can create small pockets of peace.

When it feels right, spend time with friends or family who offer compassion, steadiness, and a listening ear. The presence of caring individuals can be a source of comfort as you navigate the holidays.

Above all, please remember that it is entirely natural to grieve during this season. Prioritizing your well-being is not only acceptable—it is essential. By combining self-compassion, supportive connections, and thoughtful remembrance, you may find moments of light and gentleness even within the sorrow.