



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

When A Child Dies....

National Newsletter - July 2017 Special Edition, Gathering 2017

Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

—Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF

National Office

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The purpose of this Special Edition, is, quite frankly, to persuade others to join us for our Canadian National Gathering. Why would we want you to come and participate? Because, from our own experience, we believe that you will be glad that you did.

Cathy Sosnowsky, of the North Shore (Vancouver) Chapter writes:

SHARING HOPE AT THE TCF CANADA NATIONAL GATHERING

Why travel 785 miles to spend a hot summer weekend with fellow grieving parents? Well, the Medicine Hat Lodge Hotel will no doubt be air conditioned, as, I hope, your car is, and what better impetus for a road trip through the Badlands? One could even stop at Banff on the way, take a few photos of deer eating geraniums. Husband Woldy and I will be stopping at Salmon Arm the weekend before for the Roots & Blues Festival (google it—it's wonderful!) With us will be Ruthmarijke Smeding, a grief educator from Switzerland whom we met in Frankfurt last summer at the 6th International Gathering of the Compassionate Friends. Yes, children die all over the world—TCF has chapters in over twenty-two countries. Grief knows no boundaries.

For me, the Medicine Hat gathering will be the seventh national or international TCF conference I have attended. At these gatherings—in Salt Lake City, Sydney (AU), Brandon, Costa Mesa, Vancouver, Frankfurt, I have made lasting friends and had my belief in the healing power of sharing confirmed. Wearing photo badges of their children, the parents who attend are confessing their love and their vulnerability. A general warmth pervades the meeting rooms, the banquets, the elevators even. When my husband attended the Salt Lake City conference with me, I couldn't find him in the meeting room he said he was going to. Instead, there he was, waist high in the swimming pool, with a taxi driver from New York, exchanging stories of their sons.

Those who join us will have an opportunity to learn more about the grieving process in workshops such as:

- grief related to suicide
- the language of grief, spoken and unspoken
- how writing can help healing
- men in grief
- crisis of faith after the death of a child
- supporting grieving siblings
- weaving life after the death of a child
- making memory quilt squares
- journaling from heartbreak to healing
- music and other proven grief relievers
- gender stereotypes and grief
- facilitating a sharing circle

After the Friday catered luncheon Ruthmarijke Smeding's talk on The Labyrinth of Grief will introduce us to the concept of "grief accompaniment"; at the Saturday evening banquet and candle-lighting Dr. Doug and BJ Jensen will inspire us with their presentation "Leaving a Legacy of Love, Joy, and Laughter". The Love In Motion Signing Choir will perform at intervals, and we'll have yoga on Saturday morning, sharing circles on Friday and Saturday evenings, and a Walk to Remember on Sunday morning. For more information and to register go to **www.tcfcanada.net**.



Sharing Hope

The Compassionate
Friends
of Canada
National Gathering
August 25-27, 2017
Medicine Hat, AB

Please join us in Medicine Hat, AB
for our National Gathering
August 25 - 27, 2017
Medicine Hat Lodge - 1051 Ross Glen Dr SE

Registration now open
www.tcfcanada.net

Facts about Medicine Hat:

Medicine Hat is a city of approximately 63,000 people
Located on the Trans-Canada highway
169 km east of Lethbridge
295 km southeast of Calgary
435 km to Banff
300 km to Waterton National Park, Alberta
Average August temperature: High 26, Low 11 Celsius
Tourism Medicine Hat: **www.tourismmedicinehat.com**

Shuttle service to and from Calgary airport:

<https://prairiesprinterinc.ca/>
<http://www.jandlshuttle.com/>

Medicine Hat Lodge: 1-800-661-8095
www.medhatlodge.com

Why the push to get registered?

- The Lodge can fill up on week-ends, especially in the summer. Make sure you ask for the TCF conference rate.
- After August 11 we won't be able to provide a t-shirt for the Walk to Remember.
- Organizers must confirm the numbers for the Saturday night banquet by August 11.



Packing for a TCF conference: what to leave at home

Whenever I pack to travel to a conference or a retreat, I set aside any personal objectives or expectations. I always leave my mind and my heart open to whatever may unfold. I am sometimes surprised, but I am never disappointed. Let me tell you about two of the gifts that I've received while attending TCF events.

The first one must have been at least 15 years ago. I was attending a weekend TCF retreat at Seabeck, WA, organized by the Seattle Chapter. I make a point of sitting with different people for each meal, so at lunch one day I found myself seated beside a woman named Eileen. As we introduced ourselves to each other, we quickly learned that we were the only two people there that weekend whose children had been lost through disappearance. The ages of our boys, and the circumstances of their loss, were different, but we had both experienced crawling into a warm bed at night, knowing that our child was out there, somewhere, in the elements. Where? Alive? Dead? Long story short, we became friends, we've attended later Seabeck retreats together, and...in 2010 Eileen invited three of us TCF friends to join her on a trip to India. Three months later I found myself standing in the holy Ganges River as our friend Harb released ashes of her daughter and her father. Later, as we stood on a bridge over the Ganges, I could see the foothills of the Himalayas. I would never, ever, have dreamed that I, someone from Victoria, BC, might experience this in my lifetime. But I had. And this October Eileen and I will return to India, and we will be trekking in those Himalayas. It's a life-long dream come true. Unbelievable. I have to shake my head. Yup, it's true.

Another gift came to me when I attended the TCF USA conference in Oklahoma City in 2007. On the Thursday at the start of the conference, I attended an evening presentation by Tim Tingle, an internationally acclaimed Choctaw storyteller. He began with "I remember Mother" and then took us with him, in the character of a young boy, on the Trail of Tears from Mississippi to the Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). By the end of the story, we were all in tears. I felt a resonance with the story, and its teller, and sought Tim out in the bookstore the following day. There happened to be a lull just then, so he and I were able to settle into a meaningful conversation. It turned out that Tim is descended from the older brother of the boy in the story, and Tim said that he knew as he walked the Trail the night before, every one of us was with him. In short, we were strangers who were never strangers. We shared stories back and forth, and when it came time to part, Tim gave me a precious gift. He gave me my Choctaw name: Homma Loosa Pokoni. Loosely translated, it means "the grandmother who lives in the shadow of the mountain", or "the wise elder who lives close to the spirits". What an honour.

So, whatever you do decide to bring with you to Medicine Hat this August, leave plenty of room in your heart for the unexpected gifts that you just might receive if you leave expectations behind and just leave yourself open to all possibilities. ***But please, please, do come.***

—Susan Doyle Lawrence, TCF Victoria, BC

Packing for a TCF conference: what to bring along

Have you checked out the website for our venue, The Medicine Hat Lodge? If yes, you have learned that it is a "Resort Casino, Convention Centre, Health Spa and Indoor Waterslide Park", so you know to pack your bathing suit for the pool and your saved roll of quarters for the slot machines. You also know that there are three different restaurants on site and that registered guests receive a complimentary hot breakfast buffet, so there is no need to pack a hamper. What would be good to put into your suitcases would be photographs of the children, so that we can share the pictures along with the stories. We will have a photo button machine on site, so bring an appropriately sized photo if you like.

And, of course, come with an open heart and an open mind. You might be the one waist-high in the pool, sharing stories with a new friend, or the one heading home with new insights or even a new name.