



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

When A Child Dies....

National Newsletter - June 2018

National Office

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National Executive:

Andy Bond (Ottawa, ON) - President
Donna Rodin (Medicine Hat, AB) -
Past President
Susan Doyle Lawrence (Victoria, BC) -
Vice-President and International Liaison
Cathy Sosnowsky (Vancouver, BC) - Secretary
Kathy Brooks (Victoria, BC) - Treasurer
Eileen Bond (Ottawa, ON) - Chapter
Development Committee
Directors-at-Large
Barbara Kachur (Saskatoon, SK)
Gary Kachur (Saskatoon, SK)
Judy Dowd (Campbell River, BC)

Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

- Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF

Passing the Baton

The slate of Directors that was proposed in earlier newsletters was elected at the Annual Business Meeting held on June 16, 2018, and Executive positions were assigned at the regular Board meeting that followed. People and their positions are listed in the side bar, but let us draw your attention to one important change. After two full terms as our National President, Donna Rodin is passing the baton to Andy Bond. In her Annual Report to the Board, Donna touched on the progress that has been made over the past four years, and she concluded with a statement that we all can take to heart: ***I learned that each person's experience of loss is unique and that the strength that comes from the experience can create a dynamic group of people who work together to improve and build an organization that offers hope.*** Hear! Hear! Donna, and thank you for your dedicated guidance of this organization, which does indeed strive to offer hope to bereaved families. And, of course, our National Gathering in Medicine Hat in 2017 could not have taken place without your spark and your drive. Thank you from all of us.



Andy Bond, who has been sharing the position of Chapter Development with Eileen Bond, will be our new National President. Andy and Eileen are co-founders and current leaders of the Ottawa Chapter of The Compassionate Friends of Canada. After their 20-year-old son Kevin died suddenly in 1994 from cardiac arrhythmia, the Bonds initially made contact with TCF in Winnipeg and found the phone calls and newsletters to be a lifeline during those terrible initial weeks and months. They founded the Ottawa Chapter after attending a TCF Conference in Kelowna, BC, in 1998. Andy retired in December 2015 following a career in program management and business development in the aerospace and defense sector and

14 years as a career and retirement lifestyle coach. He is still active with local business groups. In 2012, Andy and Eileen were honoured to receive Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medals in recognition of their work with TCF Ottawa, and at our National Gathering in 2017 they were presented with TCF Canada's Gwen Brown Award. Thank you, Andy, for offering to share your talents and your dedication with us all at the National level.

More thank-yous

This month we acknowledge, with gratitude, the following Chapters, who have made recent monetary contributions to our National organization: **Calgary, AB; Campbell River (Comox Valley), BC; Portage Plains, MB; Southeast New Brunswick; Winnipeg, MB.** Thank you!

Changes to Federal Program: Canadian Benefit for Parents of Young Victims of Crime

The following Canadian Press article (condensed here) appeared in the Times Colonist newspaper in Victoria, BC, on Saturday, May 26, 2018:

OTTAWA – *Changes to a federal program aimed at helping parents who have lost a child as a result of abduction or crime will provide easier access and more money. Social Development Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said the new Canadian Benefit for Parents of Young Victims of Crime will replace a similar grant introduced in 2013. The goal of the program is to provide financial support to parents who take time off work to grieve the loss of a child who went missing or was murdered. Duclos said the changes, which will go into effect in the fall, will make the program more accessible, generous and flexible. He said the government will raise the age limit for young victims of crime to 25 from 18, which he says will cover more families who need support. The benefit to parents will increase by \$100, so parents can take home \$450 a week for up to 35 weeks and will be able to work up to 20 hours a week while keeping full benefits. The former program spent less than one per cent of its annual \$10-million budget on grants, which Duclos blamed on strict eligibility criteria and a lack of public awareness.*

The article below was written in response to the needs of TCF Saskatoon members following the tragic bus accident involving the Humboldt Broncos on April 6, 2018. Dr. Phil Carverhill (Registered Doctoral Psychologist in Saskatoon) provided professional input. Phil is the immediate Past Chair of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement. We have been privileged to receive permission to include it in our TCF Canada National Newsletter. (Sources available upon request.)

When Grief Resurfaces

Many of us, no matter where we are on our grief journey, can be blindsided when we are exposed to traumatic triggers, such as the recent devastating Humboldt Broncos tragedy. This extremely overwhelming event has ignited anxiety, fear and grief in many, but potentially even more so among parents who have experienced the death of their own child, especially, but not limited to, those where the cause of death was a motor vehicle accident.

The course of grief is unpredictable and it is as individual as each person and relationship. In the blink of an eye, grief triggers (such as the recent bus crash) can cause a wave of despair to wash over you or even knock

you off your feet. You may find yourself detaching from daily life and reliving the pain of those early days after your own child died.

You might experience renewed grief symptoms, including feelings such as sadness, disbelief, anger, numbness and/or anxiety. On a cognitive level your thoughts could include: "Why am I feeling this way again?", "Am I always going to feel this way?" Or "I can't concentrate and I'm having trouble remembering." You may experience physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, fatigue, headaches or shortness of breath. Behavioral changes such as eating less/more, crying, disturbed sleep, loss of interest in activities and withdrawing from people may also occur.

Grief theorist and psychologist Dr. Therese Rando has coined the grief term STUG which stands for: Subsequent Temporary Upsurges of Grief. There are STUGs that we have come to expect, such as those associated with anniversary days, birthdays, family events or holiday seasons. These "anniversary" reactions may be brief or can last for days at a time. Tips for coping with this reawakened grief may include: being prepared, planning a distraction (such as visiting with supportive family and friends), reminiscing about your relationship with your deceased child (focusing on the happy memories rather than the loss), starting new traditions, connecting with others, walking, journaling/writing, and giving yourself permission to feel a wide range of emotions.

STUGs by their very nature can occur quite unexpectedly. The trigger might be a song that you hear on the radio, a glimpse of someone who looks like your child, or an event on the news. The overwhelming amount of media coverage of the Humboldt Broncos tragedy has continued. Sometimes, I have felt drawn to it like a moth to a flame. Other times, I could not bear to hear any more and needed to use avoidance as a coping strategy.

Those intense upsurges of grief take you totally by surprise and can cause a resurgence of grief emotions. They can bring up not only the grief and forever loss, but also the traumatic aspects that were present, and make it difficult to get ourselves "righted". They can happen at any time, and sometimes even years after your own loss. The triggers are not always obvious; sometimes we have no idea what caused the STUG to happen. But, they are very common, very normal, and are part of the grieving process. So, once again it is important not to judge yourself.

Some further suggestions for coping include: acknowledging your pain, realizing that grief can trigger a whole range of different emotions, understanding that your grieving process will be unique to you, seeking out face-to-face support from people who care about you, taking care of yourself physically, and recognizing the difference between grief and depression. This may require not only using strategies that have worked in the past, but also new ones. Don't hesitate to seek professional help, if needed, from a practitioner who is knowledgeable, experienced, and competent in the area of grief and bereavement.

- Mary Cunningham

Mary Cunningham has served as a facilitator with TCF Saskatoon for over eighteen years. She is a retired nurse from the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Mary experienced her own devastating loss of her five-year-old daughter, Heather, in 1996.