



## WRITING THE HEARTACHE

THE FIRST YEAR AFTER THE DEATH OF A CHILD IS LIKE HAVING THE WORST NOISE possible running through your head each day and night. There is no way to turn the horrendous sounds off because there is no off button.

Grammar didn't matter; penmanship went out the window. These aren't a concern when you are writing to survive.

I wrote through that noise. I wrote from the heavy bag of emotions bereaved parents and siblings must carry — anger, guilt, sorrow, and confusion, all the “what ifs” and “how comes” and “whys.” I wrote of longing for a blond-haired boy with blue eyes whose laughter brightened hospital rooms. A quiet spot under weeping willows at a local park is where I carried my pen, journal, and pain. As I wrote over the course of many months, I was although I didn't realize it at the time, providing therapy for myself.

Some days when the weather did not permit a trip to the park and my body and mind harbored excruciating pain, I shut myself in a room, away from my other children and husband. I'd grab my journal and let the experiences of the day and my feelings freely emerge onto each white page. Grammar didn't matter; penmanship went out the window. These aren't a concern when you are writing to survive.

Writing the heartache, complete and honest, is a way of healing. Our cry is, “Help me with this pain!” We find ourselves lamenting as King David did in Psalm 13:2, “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” David wrote many of his psalms starting with anger and agony and, gradually, ending with hope. Writing can do that for us. We enter into our devastation, get a good grip on what our struggles are, and something about seeing them on paper causes us to realize the pain is not only within us anymore. It is shared, even if only on a sheet of notebook paper. It is documented, and the more we write, the better we are able to understand and deal with our intense sorrow.

Some people think only the creative types write, when in reality, writing through the pain is available to anyone who has suffered the loss of someone close. “I don't have the time,” many say. “What will I write?” others wonder. The blank page scares some because they think they have to fill it with something profound. But just writing a memory of your child or a few lines about how you felt after he died is a notable start. If we think of writing as a private endeavor and an effective tool, not a paper to be graded by a high school English teacher, we will conquer many of the doubts about our ability. In time, we will see that writing helps us become better in tune with our feelings and thoughts. It clarifies our lives and gives us understanding.

*Other reasons to take the time to write are:*

- \* To experience personal growth.
- \* To leave a legacy or a keepsake so that there will be recordings of what and who our child was.
- \* To demonstrate a way of cherishing our child.
- \* To feel a connection to our child as we remember the things we shared here on earth.

We also are honoring our grief, our pain, and what has happened to us. We are validating its existence. As studies have shown, writing is healthy for our minds and bodies.

## MEETING SITE

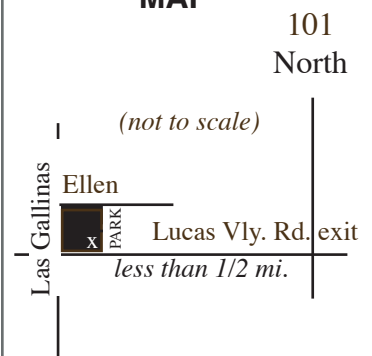
Lucas Valley Community Church Conference Room  
2000 Las Gallinas at Lucas Valley Rd. in San Rafael  
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of the month at 7:30 P.M.

\*First Time Members meet at:  
7:00 P.M.

**Directions** Exit 101 at **Lucas Valley Rd.** and go west. Turn right onto **Las Gallinas** and make an immediate right onto **Ellen**, then a right turn into the parking lot at the signage. The Conference Room is located in the first building next to the parking lot. For more info, call our TCF Hotline 415/457-3123.

Please call prior to your first meeting, so that you might meet with the facilitator before the meeting begins.

## MAP



### Alternate site in San Francisco:

**Parents:** Community Meeting Room/Taraval Police Station at 2345-24<sup>th</sup> Ave. (near Taraval) in S.F. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm. For more information, call Audre at 650/359-7928 or alhallum@comcast.net.

Professor James Pennebaker claims that writing actually helps the physical body when the writer is able to open up, by sharing deep feelings on paper over a period of time. In his study, half of a group of students at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, wrote their heartfelt thoughts and feelings about a stressful event from their lives; the other half wrote about superficial topics. Each group wrote for 20 minutes a day, for four consecutive days. Before and immediately after writing, blood pressure and heart rates were tested and a galvanic skin response was done. Six weeks later, the students had their blood tested again. The group that had written about trivial topics showed no sign of changes. But the group that had poured their pain onto paper, claimed writing had actually calmed them. Their skin was drier after writing and both heart rate and blood pressure had decreased. Their blood work even showed an increase in lymphocytes, the white blood cells that work to keep the immune system healthy. Writing through the heartache of losing a child is some of the best therapy I have found on this journey. I didn't know how helpful it was, I just knew I needed to organize my thoughts and get them on paper. Now, four years since my 4-year-old son Daniel's death, I see that when all the evidence is presented, there is no reason not to write. It causes dim skies to light up when not only the pain, but also the love and cherished memories, are recorded.

*Alice J. Wisler*

*In Memory of my son, Daniel*

**Alice J. Wisler** is a former newsletter editor for the Wake County, NC chapter of TCF. She lives in Durham, N.C., with her husband and three children. Their four-year-old son, Daniel, died in 1997 after eight months of treatments for a malignant tumor, neuroblastoma. She is the author of *Slices of Sunlight: A Cookbook Of Memories*, founder of Daniel's House Publications, and editor of LARGO and the new e-zine, Tributes.

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*"And can it be that in a world so full and busy  
the loss of one creature makes a void so wide and deep -  
that nothing but the width and depth of eternity can fill it up!"*

- Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

## 2010 "Our Children Remembered" DVD

### Ordering Information:

Price per copy: \$20.00 includes postage, handling, sales tax, and a \$5.00 contribution to the Marin TCF Chapter for each copy purchased.

Make checks payable to:  
Digital Video Dimensions

Send Your Payment to:  
Digital Video Dimensions  
Attn: 2008 TCF DVD  
273 Crest Road  
Novato, CA 94945

Please be sure to include your mailing address for the DVD along with your payment. Shipping: DVDs will be shipped via First Class Mail within 5 days of receipt of payment.

Questions: Alan Kolsky  
(415) 893-9070

### DVD Photos

If you would like to include a photo of your child in the DVD for this year's Candle Lighting ceremony, please send your photo or digital photo (along with the name of your child) to Alan Kolsky by November 20th. For photo returns, please include a self-addressed envelope. NOTE: It is not necessary to send another photo if your child has already been in a previous DVD unless you want to change the picture.

Video Dimensions  
ATTN: 2010 TCF DVD  
273 Crest Road.  
Novato, CA 94945  
Or:  
alan@digitalvideodimensions.com

Questions: Alan Kolsky  
(415) 893-9070

## "STUFF"

I TRAVEL A LOT AND SPEND A GREAT DEAL OF TIME IN AIRPORTS. I spend so much time in airports that I no longer want to collect frequent-flyer miles, but rather, the hours I've spent waiting for airplanes that are late, lost, or nonexistent. I am always prepared to spend those hours constructively by traveling with my laptop computer, a small carry-on that can support my needs for several days if necessary, and a good book.

I spend most of my airport time working or reading, but sometimes it's fun to watch the never-ending stream of humanity making its way down the walkways, heading blindly toward someplace. I also love to watch that endless human tide board aircraft, carrying all manner of "stuff" that they then try to place in the overhead compartments, despite the repeated pleas of flight personnel to "utilize the space beneath the seat in front of you." I have learned a lot from these observations. Traveling is a lot like grieving. We are headed somewhere with high hopes, little preparation, and too much baggage for any single human to carry.

We have become a society that defines itself by its "stuff." We measure our "stuff." We sort it, count it, store it, move it, treasure it, and discard it, only to retrieve it again. Our stuff is simply who we are and without it, we risk becoming lost, disoriented, and disconnected. This stuff simply has to come with us at all times!

Grief is part of our stuff, too. Our experiences get boiled down to a few essential memories, phrases, and images that seem to become necessary to hold on to. It would be easier if we would pick and choose which memories to keep and which to toss. We could, perhaps, get away with a smaller version of who we are if we only knew we did not have to fear forgetting anything that has happened to us and felt more comfortable carrying fewer reminders of the hurt and more symbols of the joys.

Trying to pack for a trip means assembling the vast amount of "necessary stuff" and deciding what can be taken and what can't. We all have seen people who obviously cannot live without everything they own crammed into one carry-on, while others figure a small reminder or two will be enough.

Grievers are like that, too. Some seem to be able to release much of the pain and horror far sooner, while others stash it away, buried deep within themselves, only to emerge at the least convenient moment. Some try to cram a steamer trunk into the overhead compartment, having wrestled everyone else's stuff to the floor or simply moved it to another bin. Some try to compartmentalize their hurts with the idea that hurt and grief can be dealt with in an orderly and logical fashion. But you can't pack away grief in the same way you can toss stuff into a suitcase and then stash it on a shelf until you are ready to deal with it. Grief simply is a part of our fabric, woven into each fiber of our being, always with us, but not always recognized or even acknowledged. It nudges us, calls us, teases us, hurts us at the least touch. Grief demands *to* be heard, and when we turn a deaf ear, it grows louder and more persistent until we grow weary trying to ignore it. We can sort it out, roll it up tightly, pack it carefully, lock it away, or even carry it around with us, but we cannot ignore it forever. It returns again and again until we learn to embrace it, wrestle with it, and adapt to its flow. If we are lucky, we learn to carry the load we have without too much guilt or anger and have found ways to release the emotions that accompany our grief.

Like our "stuff," grief defines a part of who we are, but not all of who we are. The trick is to figure out which parts are grief-born and which parts are joy-based. If you are lucky, you'll discover, some day, that it is all the same and that grief truly is the price we pay for loving someone. I am glad I bought the ticket, paid the price, shared the journey, and have a memento or two from the ride. It is often lonely, sometimes hard, but never boring. Trying to carry it all with you isn't possible, but neither is ignoring it all and hoping it will go away. So, pack what you truly need, give the rest away, and get going on your travels. Each breath takes you closer to your destination, even if you don't know where that is. Learn to let some things go so you can pack lighter next time. You could let go of some of the guilt or fear or anger or hurt. How about weeding through the awful parts so you can get to the loving parts? Don't discard it without embracing it first, but once you have examined the whole picture, let go of the "stuff" you no longer need to carry in order to define yourself. Let go of the labels and the worries.

Will it happen again? It could. Will I be able to handle it better next time? Maybe. Will I ever find love like that again? Not unless you look for it. Will I forget? Not likely. Maybe that

("STUFF" CONTINUED)

is why we believe we need so much stuff around us all the time. Maybe we are really afraid of losing it all, not just the bad parts, but the good times as well. Do we carry too much, save too much, pack too much because we are afraid?

Just as you have never forgotten the name of the very first person you fell in love with, you will not forget your child. If we let go of that fear, we all can travel a bit lighter. Fear is a heavy burden to carry. You cannot forget love that has been given and received. You cannot forget the exchange of heart and soul. You don't need the stuff in order to remember the love.

Love is the size of a sigh, as light as a kiss, as gentle as a whisper, and as small as a moment in time. It comes in all sizes and shapes and cannot be saved until later. Love simply IS, and you have been loved. So lighten up. Carry less, live more, and love a lot. Love is a good thing to carry and really the ONLY ESSENTIAL thing we need!

-Darcie D. Sims

**Darcie D. Sims, PhD, CHT, CT, GMS**, is a bereaved parent, a grief management specialist, a nationally certified thanatologist, a certified pastoral bereavement specialist, and a licensed psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. She is the author of several books. Darcie is also an internationally recognized speaker and has served on several boards, including the National Board of Directors for The Compassionate Friends. Darcie received The Compassionate Friends Professional Award in 1999. She is president and co-founder of GRIEF, Inc., a grief consulting business.

*"I loathe a friend whose gratitude grows old, a friend who takes his friend's prosperity but will not voyage with him in his grief"*

- Euripides

### **Grief Support After the Death of a Child**

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

The Compassionate Friends is a national nonprofit, self-help support organization that offers friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved parents, grandparents & siblings. There is no religious affiliation & there are no membership dues or fees.

The secret of TCF's success is simple: As seasoned griever reach out to the newly bereaved, energy that has been directed inward begins to flow outward and both are helped to heal. The vision of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us and everyone who finds us will be helped.

### **Adult Siblings Loss Group**

Although this group is not presently active, Elise Noland and Caitlin Fager, past co-facilitators, are still available

for questions or concerns. Elise: or [eliseln@yahoo.com](mailto:eliseln@yahoo.com) or Caitlin : [cfager@gmail.com](mailto:cfager@gmail.com).



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

**Marin County, California Chapter**

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San Rafael, CA 94915

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**Dated Material  Please Deliver Promptly**

As Long As I Can

As long as I can, I will look at the world for both of us.

As long as I can, I will laugh with the bird, I will sing

with flowers, I will play to the stars, for both of us.

As long as I can, I will remember how many things on

this earth were your joy. And I will live as well as you

would want me to live, as long as I can.

— by Sascha Wagner (Sascha's son Nino drowned at age 3;  
years later, her daughter Eve died by suicide at age 21.)