

## *Learning to Laugh Again*

Our only & oldest son, Nathan died of viral pneumonia on May22/91, after a 30 day illness in the hospital. We had no prior knowledge of his condition, at the time, and could not comprehend that just weeks ago, we were a happy, healthy, normal family, making it's way in the world.

Aline & I owned an Insurance & Real Estate Agency, and were used to being Independent. I was used to making my own way when there was no clear way in front of you. I was used to going into the market, without a guarantee of profit. And I was used to always knowing what the next step was to be.

But having a son die, was unfamiliar territory. I do not recall knowing another Bereaved Parent. I had no vision of the future, I did not know if I could live through this darkest event in my life. But I DID know what the next step was - to attend a TCF meeting, as all good business people to , I would check it out.

And I did know the PAIN of Grief. That overwhelming feeling of being at the bottom of a black hole of grief, where I could not think of anything but my son, his death, his suffering, his funeral, and HOW I was to carry on with our life from this point on. Emotional, I cried and ached all the time. These thoughts were in my mind from the moment I woke up in the morning, and were the last I had before falling asleep, exhausted at night. My entire life was wrapped in this grief. My days were filled with this overwhelming grief, and somehow, somehow, I had a few routine, rational, & normal thoughts that interspersed this grief process, and helped me function in a somewhat normal manner.

Grief is an unseen illness. If I was walking down the street, a stranger would not know what I was going through. I did not have a physical sign, like a broken arm, that everyone could see was a problem. To the world, I LOOKED all right. I looked fine, & people who knew me, knew that I would pull thru it alright, in a few weeks, or months. How little does society know about the time frame of grief. And so we try to carry on in a normal manner.

So here I was, attending my 1<sup>st</sup> TCF meeting that I certainly had not planned on, was not sure how I would benefit, & for the first time in my life, I was OUT of control of my own emotions, crying from the moment I walked in the room.

We were well received & made to feel very welcome. How grateful I was, as I was hardly able to utter a Thank You, due to the tears that started to flow.

At this darkest point of my life, in a room full of Bereaved Parents, who seemed to be in far better emotional shape than me. I kept asking myself , how long will I feel like this!

Across the room were a couple of men talking.

During their conversation, they LAUGHED ! and again they LAUGHED !! Not just talking, they were LAUGHING !!!

I was struck by this everyday emotion, mainly because I had not laughed since Nathan died, & I could not even conceive of doing so. I viewed their Laughing as something impossible for me to do again.

My emotions told me this was impossible to do, but my intellect told me it was possible. I knew these men were Bereaved Parents, I knew that they, more than anyone else, understood my grief. I reasoned that if I was laughing, I would not be crying, and if I was not crying, then I would be feeling better, even if only for those few seconds that I would enjoy - a LAUGH !

So from my position at the bottom of the black hole of grief, looking up at these men , I now had a goal, - to LAUGH. I used to Love to laugh, and would love to do it again, but how ?

How to you make a Bereaved Parent Laugh ?

Do you have to take a course on it ? Is there a special formula ? Are you really normal if you do this ? I did not know how long it would take me to do, but I knew, if they could do it - so could I.

I knew nothing else about them, or how they had come to be able to laugh again. But they were able to do something I was not, to LAUGH.

And I wanted to laugh again. I too wanted my life to be normal again.

I made their acquaintance that night, Ken & Maurice, the current and past Chapter Leaders.

They were compassionate to me, & they let me tell my story, as they shared bits of their story of grief.

I broke a social taboo that night, & did something I had never done. It was really quite innocent, and I knew I was being true to myself. I cried in front of men !! I learned quickly that they were not uncomfortable with my tears, & that they would not shun me because I was crying in public.

I was drawn to continue to go to TCF meetings to see them and others & appreciate the various stages of grief that members were in. After a few months, I did not cry when I walked in the room, but continued to cry throughout the sharing circle. New people came to our meeting, & I felt a bit like an "old-timer", not to the point of LAUGHING, but at least with my tears more under control. I would see much the same thing as when I first came, that I too was normal when crying under the stress of grief.

Soon I was able to approach other new members, introduce myself, and make them feel welcome.

As time went on, Ken & Maurice became good friends, & I truly enjoyed their company both in and out of TCF meetings. Spending time with these people was very therapeutic for me, and I could feel that I was slowly becoming better.

I don't remember the day or the event or circumstances when I first LAUGHED again, but I know I learned it with them. And I don't think there could have been better teachers, who know the depth of pain that I was coming from.

The feeling was fabulous. To laugh again, to enjoy the feeling of laughing. It felt good, healthy & wholesome. The world was much brighter at that moment of laughter. The weight of my grief had been broken, like the sun peeking through the clouds, and I could appreciate for just a moment, the beauty of the world, and the joy of other people. It felt like it used to - at least for a minute or so. So I knew that the Sunshine was still there, only behind my clouds of grief.

This was progress !! It was starting to happen.

I still cried a lot, & did a lot of grief work, but I was now able to have a few minutes to laugh, every now & again. I did not feel guilty, to my son, or to anybody for doing so, as I accepted the feeling that I deserved to be happy again.

The black hole was not so deep anymore. It was shallower, and more light was coming in. In fact I could almost reach the top of it on some days. And in the months to come, I did feel like I finally did climb out of that black hole, to resume my life the best I could. I was still wounded, but had now experienced the fact that a Bereaved Parent can live with a sense of normalcy, experiencing life's range of human experiences amid the devastating loss of a child.

Six and a half years later my goal to Laugh, has been accomplished, & I do it often. And with the confidence of that accomplishment, I was able to make other goals in my grief journey and in my life journey come true.

The black hole of grief will always be a part of my life. In fact, I even return to it every now & then, just to remind myself of what it was like.

I often feel it through other TCF members tears at our meetings. Like toys & bicycles that we have outgrown in our youth, the black hole of grief is one more thing we do grow out of.

I recently returned the favor, I had lunch with a newly Bereaved Father. He did the crying, told his story. I did the listening, & smiling, and I hope I inspired him to have a goal beyond the deep black hole of grief.

And I thought of the first time I saw Ken & Maurice laugh, it gave me a goal when none other could be found, and started my slow journey back to health & wellness.

And I still cry when I think about re-learning to laugh.

*By Richard Lepinsky - TCF Victoria*

*To Special TCF Winnipeg Friends -  
Ken Pinch & Maurice Belot*

