

Sharing Precious Memories.

It's a pleasure to share one's memories. Everything remembered is dear, endearing, touching, precious. At least the past is safe --though we didn't know it at the time. We know it now. Because it's in the past; because we have survived.

Susan Sontag (1933-2004)

Out of the many books I read when our much loved only child, Will, died in January 2006 was Barbara Rosof's, **The Worst Loss**. Rosof is not a bereaved parent but interviewed many who were and her book is remarkably insightful and observant. As always when I find a book which helps me, I highlight comments especially helpful and one of these, with the heading **Silence**, reads as follows,

Throughout this book, parents speak about the healing value for them of being listened to and of listening. If you do not talk to the other people who knew and loved your child, you invite chronic depression, isolation, and a slow death of your spirit.

Since becoming a member of TCF, we have met with many bereaved parents and I have been struck by the realisation that parents who have the opportunity to share memories of their child with, as Rosof says, "those who knew and loved them" often appear to cope better with their loss as time passes. Memories are a gift and sharing them can help to keep our child alive in our memory. Whether we laugh or cry does not matter. What matters is sharing.

My sister's son and daughter both have children of their own who were very young when Will died. They adored their big cousin, Will, and he them. As I sat by Will's bedside in the intensive care unit in the Leicester hospital Will had been transferred to for specialist lung treatment, I said to my niece how thankful I was that we had her and her brother's children in our lives – if the unthinkable happened and Will should not recover we would never have grandchildren of our own. I could never have imagined for one moment that I would only see the children on two more occasions - it will be seven years next March since I last saw any of them. They are no longer little children; they are now at Grammar Schools. I had imagined being the great aunt they loved to visit, the great nieces and nephews with whom I could share memories of Will; give them the toys and books he had enjoyed as a child and hopefully keep their memories of him fresh in their minds. Instead I am filled with sadness because their lives have moved on without us and Will has been forgotten. Ironically the Christmas before Will died; my sister and her family had spent Christmas with us. It was a wonderful time, the children loved every minute and as they were travelling home told their parents it had been the best Christmas day ever.

I have a brother too, whom I have not seen or spoken with since the day of Will's funeral. He has two sons who came with their parents to the service – I barely recognised the tall young men I had not seen since they were children. But even my brother and his wife must have memories of Will they could share with us.

I am relating this because I know there are other parents who, for various reasons, have been cut off from their families or perhaps do not have extended families. Edwin and I long to learn more about Will, things he said or did we did not know about, times others spent with him when we were not there. Thankfully we have our dear friends within TCF with whom we can each share our memories. But, valuable as this is, it is not the same as talking with those who knew and loved our children, as the parents in Barbara Rosof's book observed.

Many parents in TCF talk of their child's friends, of how supportive they have been and many maintain close contact with them. But it is not always this way. Will's closest friends were those with whom he shared a house whilst at Birmingham University but they did not really get to know us. They will be lifelong friends and I know they will never forget Will. But we rarely hear from them or from Will's other friends who had known him for longer. This is an added sadness to us, although I know some parents prefer not to keep in touch with their child's friends. Seeing them moving on with their lives can add to the pain and reinforce the fact our children are not sharing that future with them.

I have recently begun to have PTSD counselling and in the letter I received from the counsellor following my assessment, she described me as being "stuck" and my grief as "complicated". Not only do I resent such descriptions but I think this displays a deep lack of understanding of the grief of bereaved parents and how essential it is that we are given the opportunity to talk about our children and what happened to them.

Now Christmas is fast approaching as the shops and television adverts are keen to remind us. A difficult time for bereaved parents whether or not they have families to share Christmas with. The empty seat at the table, the missing gifts under the tree, the poignant memories of past Christmas's when the family was complete and blissfully unaware of what was to come.

Some parents try to avoid Christmas completely by shutting themselves away at home as we have done sometimes or perhaps spending Christmas in a quiet hotel or going to another country.

This Christmas will be the eighth spent without our beloved son. We have mostly spent the time alone but with three exceptions. One Christmas – the third without Will – we stayed with another couple and a single mother, all of whom like us had lost their only child. It was very special. We put photos of our children around the room, lit candles and shared precious memories. We ate a lot, laughed a lot and cried a lot. For reasons I cannot go into, we cannot share Christmas with these particular parents again but it was amazing at the time. And on two occasions since we have spent Christmas day along with some other bereaved parents at the home of a wonderful TCF mother. Spending such occasions with those who truly

understand is a huge comfort and can turn what might otherwise be a lonely sad time into something very special.

Whatever plans those of you reading this have for Christmas I hope and pray you will find the opportunity to talk about your child, to share those treasured childhood memories.

I recently talked with a wonderfully wise elderly nun. When I began to talk about Will, she corrected me when I said "Will was" saying, "No. He IS." She believes our children are still here with us, surrounding us with their love and giving us strength. I found her words very comforting.

The first Christmas without Will I had a wonderful sense of his presence and described it in this poem.

Cabaret

The first day of Christmas...

Christmas Eve...

Limp from weeping,
I gaze out of the window,
see, through my tears: a glint of gold.
I throw a chicken leg onto the lawn,
call your father, who arrives just in time
to see the red kite swoop.
Magnificent.

The stunning spectacle lifts my mood,
but the cabaret is not finished...
a posse of red-legged partridge arrive.
I count them ...one, two, three...
twelve RLP's! (we christened them thus,
thinking how much they resembled OAPs.,
always in pairs, clucking away).

The finishing touch...
a green woodpecker on the neighbour's grass.

Will, how kind of God to allow you
to arrange all this,
a Christmas present for your mum,
to make me smile.

From **My True Son**. For further information concerning this and my second book , **Aspects of Loss**, please visit Amazon via TCF; the publisher [www.moorleys .co.uk](http://www.moorleys.co.uk) or contact me direct.