

BFO -TORONTO NEWS

The Tree of Light ceremony has become an ongoing annual event for many of our members, and on November 30th of this year, once more hundreds of doves, carrying the names of our loved ones, adorned the tree. Again I'd like to thank all the volunteers and staff for caringly assembling the tree, with the doves, and for creating a space of remembrance. This year we had three speakers, Cameron Britt and Shevaun McGrath, who spoke with such intimacy of the death of their son Patrick who was born still: and Marilyn Ortega, who not only shared her grief and spoke of how BFO had helped her, but also spoke of the social stigma she faced after her son, Ruddin, was killed as a result of violence. Another BFO member, Louisa Corbett whose brother died 10 years ago, sang The Prayer with her singing partner Alan Reid. These testimonies, each presented in their own unique way, spoke loudly of why the work we do at BFO-Toronto is so important.

With the financial support of Service Canada, we are hiring two Community Development Workers, who will each work within an underserved community in Toronto - one in the east and one in the west - to inform people and organizations about the services and programs BFO has to offer. They will also provide bereavement support to individuals and families within these communities. We hope this will help to make our programs more accessible to more people, especially those who live in the geographic margins of the city.

We have just heard that we are one of nineteen agencies that will receive funding from the Provincial Government's Youth Challenge Fund, headed by Pinball Clements. Our aim is to engage bereaved youth in a podcasting project, whereby they will learn the art of filming via podcasts. The podcasts will illustrate how youth are affected by grief and will be downloadable from our soul2soul website. We feel very privileged to receive this money and, hand in hand with youth, we will work hard, to make this program a success.

In 2007 our Volunteer Training will be expanding. Because the demand to participate is so high, we have decided to hold two annual training sessions – one starting in February and one in September /October.

On a more sombre note, BFO-Toronto needs your help. We need your financial support to continue the programs that have helped each and every one of us live a new day. Please consider giving a donation, making a pledge to raise money or donating to BFO-Toronto, through United Way in your workplace. No gift is too small.

Finally I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciations to our volunteers, to the members of our Board and to the staff for their hard work, time and commitment that they have dedicated to BFO-Toronto and all the bereaved people who access our services.

I wish you all, and the world, peace in this new year.

Take care everyone,

Janet Wilson,

Executive Director

This newsletter is produced for our members and supporters and is available by mail and on our website. We welcome submissions, please forward to info@bfotoronto.ca. We reserve the right to edit items submitted for publication.

The opinions and ideas expressed by our members and other authors in this newsletter, represent their own unique experiences of grief and do not necessarily reflect the views of BFO-Toronto

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Please Note our Email address & Website:
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March 5, 2007

JOURNEYS

A MEMBER SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

Bereaved Families of Ontario
Toronto
Founded in 1978



Loving in the Face of Loss

I'm learning to love spiders. Not in the way that I love chocolate, a walk on a crisp, sunny day, or the dimpled smile of my beautiful nephew. I'm learning to love spiders in the same way that I'm learning to love the line-ups at Loblaws, the delays on the TTC and my "descendant-of-Irish-potato-farmers" body. Maybe some day, I'll be able to love George Bush, but I'm still a work in progress.

Spiders have decided that my beautiful apartment is just a lovely place to hang out. (The myth that spiders will only live in a really clean home is no comfort to me). At first, I tried to deny their existence. But each night as I came home and turned on the lights, I was confronted by their unmistakable presence. Next came the awful phase of trying to rid my space of them altogether, the karma for which I will be paying for many lifetimes. Every once in awhile, I tried to capture one and take it outside, but the persistent little buggers seemed to find their way home. One night, as I was down on my hands and knees wiping up a spill, my hand brushed against what can only be described as the king of spiders. He sat there staring at me as the cycle of emotions (fear, anger, frustration, indecision) worked their way through me and finally came to land on acceptance.

Just like my impatience on the stranded TTC train, my simmering anger in that line-up at the grocery store or the many moments of unpleasantness experienced in any given day, I figure that I've got a choice as to how I will respond to my unwanted houseguests: I can choose to churn up a gutful of anger, resentment and rage, to give in to my irrational fears and to let that cycle me into a state of emotional distress. Or, I can choose to accept that these spiders are, like me, just trying to make it through another day on this planet that we share. And given that they were probably here first, I at least owe them the courtesy of trying to live in harmony. Sigh.

It's hard to love the things in life that give us such distress. And it's even harder to love the broken and unfinished pieces of ourselves that we long to be different. Gandhi said, "You must be the thing you want to see in the world". I take that to mean that if I want to live a peaceful and contented world, then I need to take responsibility for creating that peace and contentment, as best I can, in each and every moment, starting inside of myself.

Continued on pg. 2

If I can love my own wounded heart, instead of staying stuck in my pain, shame and fear, then I think I have a better chance of truly learning to live with my grief.

But how do we heal those gaping holes in our hearts? How do we learn to live with our grief? One of the gifts of our community at Bereaved Families is our model of mutual support. I hear time and again from newly bereaved (and not so newly bereaved) people the comfort and relief that is felt when one has an opportunity to connect with someone who has experienced a similar loss. “Finally, someone who understands.” “It’s so good to talk with someone who really “gets it”. “I thought I was the only one who felt this way.” “If they can survive, maybe I can too.”

Sharing our stories – of pain and loss and struggle, but also of surrender, coping and hard-won wisdom – is one of the best ways I know how to begin to heal our wounded hearts and find a way to learn to live with grief.

I know that I’m never going to stop missing my mom or any of my beloved friends and chosen family members that I lost to AIDS. Because of my experiences with multiple loss and grief, I also know that every “hello” that I experience in my life automatically comes with a “goodbye” attached. And I have two choices in how to respond to that reality. I can close up my fragile, broken heart to the world and never choose to love again. Or I can step boldly and confidently (and some days, tentatively and cautiously) into each new day determined to find moments of joy, beauty, peace and even love, trusting that my heart is strong enough to receive whatever comes into my path.

With Valentine’s approaching – yet another day focused on love and family that can trigger us into a painful grief spiral - I invite you to take a few minutes to think about the parts of yourself that maybe require a little more patience, nurturing and acceptance. Opening our tender, bereaved hearts to the love of the universe is a scary thing – but I believe it’s also the only thing that can truly heal us. Send yourself a Valentine of loving-kindness today. Forgive yourself for the mistakes you’ve made, be gentle with yourself when you struggle with your sorrow and know that you are, like the rest of us, a beautiful work in progress.

As for me and my spiders? Each night as I crawl in to bed, knowing full well that my “housemates” are surely active in their nocturnal routines, I take a deep breath and say a prayer as I turn out the light. I thank the universe for a safe place to lay my head, I asked for the patience and grace to accept whatever comes into my life and then I just hope for the best.

ON GRIEF AND GRACE

Death touches all of life in some way. In its wake, there is grief. If you choose to engage, it requires the experience of sorrow, heartache, suffering. The only way through grief is to grieve. And in this dance, one can also hope to meet grace – a gentle hand that extends itself, perhaps the lifeline that makes it possible for you to keep dancing.

Stories, written and visual, will be presented to engage participants in reflection and discussion about this delicate and poignant relationship of grief and grace.

Date: Saturday, March 31, 2007

Time: 10am - 3pm (incl. 1hr lunch break)

Cost: \$100.00 (incl. lunch)

Location: University of St. Michael’s College (U. of Toronto)

Course #: SPC17S

Instructor: Karen Haffey, B.F.A. Registered Polarity Practitioner, Cranial Sacral Therapist, Comfort Care Coordinator, Writer

For more information and to register, please see www.utoronto.ca/stmikes or call St. Mike’s Continuing Education at 416 926 7254.

Recapturing the Joy, A Journal for Bereaved Parents

Recapturing the Joy for a bereaved parent is a painfully difficult and lengthy journey. Once completed, it is a declaration of who you are. You will have, as some may say, “achieved the impossible”!

In 1984 Deborah Anthony’s six-year-old daughter Erin was struck, run over and killed by her school bus in Beaver Bank, Nova Scotia. Deborah has always know she would write a book about the experiences she and her family endured and survived, although she never realized it would be over 20 years in the making.

Excerpt from Recapturing the Joy:

“Upon hearing what happened to my daughter, my life, my husband’s life, and her younger sister’s life, along with lives of extended family and friends, all changed in a heartbeat. We were thrust into unfamiliar terrain, and our joy of life as we knew it was lost.

I have devoted much of my life to healing, learning and recognizing the gifts that I have received from this event and – more importantly – from the aftermath, which often felt more devastating than the loss itself. I decided to create this journal for bereaved parents who wish to work to recapture the joy of life. When a child dies, we lose that joy. If I could have known then what I have since learned and experienced, I know it would have eased my struggle and the isolation I sometimes felt. Recapturing the joy was my longest and most arduous struggle; however, my life is richer for having won the battle.

It is my wish that when you participate in Recapturing the Joy, you will experience support in your grief process to assist in moving you along with the comfort of understanding and the voice of experience at your side to shed light on your own path.”

A copy of the Journal is on display at the BFO-Toronto offices.

Copies of the Journal (\$24.95) can be ordered through Win-Win Publishing.

win-winpublishing@ns.sympatico.ca or P.O. Box 23 Lower Sackville N.S. B4C 2S8

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A PART-TIME FUNDRAISING POSITION AT BFO-TORONTO?

We are looking for someone who:

Is detail minded

Can think ‘out of the box’

Is very organized

Loves working with people

Has some experience with special events, obtaining sponsors and ticket sales

Is passionate about the work that BFO does

Has excellent communication skills

This is a one year 15 hours per week, contract position. Responsibilities include: assisting with the planning, coordination, promotion, logistics and follow up with special events; and providing administrative support to fundraising committees. If you are interested please send a resume attention Janet Wilson at jwilson@bfotoronto.ca before January 15, 2007.

NEEDED...

A strong, deep person
 wise enough to allow me to
 grieve in the depth of who I am
 And strong enough to hear my pain
 without turning away.
 Not too close,
 because then you couldn't help
 me to see.
 Not too objective,
 because then you might not care.
 Not too aloof,
 because then you could not hug me.
 Not too caring,
 because I'd be tempted to let you
 live my life for me.

I need someone who believes that the sun will rise again,
 but who does not fear my darkness..
 Or my walk through the night.
 Someone who can point out the rocks in my way
 without making me a child by carrying me.
 Someone who can stand in thunder
 and watch the lightening
 and believe in a rainbow.

Author Unknown

Bereaved parents, young adults and adults who have participated in a BFO mutual support group and feel far enough along on their journey to train to be peer supporters to other bereaved people are invited to consider applying to become a volunteer. To find our more information visit the website at www.bfotoronto.ca or call Betty Ann at 416 440 0290. Core Skills Training begins in February 2006.

Thank You

Thank you
 for teaching me
 about my heart
 showing me
 the places
 i will go
 because i'm afraid
 of pain
 and that it's okay
 to be sad,
 to mourn,
 to cry
 and to wish

things were different
 without
 desperately trying
 to make it so
 when it's not

 i have glimpsed
 the lengths
 i will go
 to avoid pain
 and the fullness
 of being with it
 i am learning to grieve

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IN MEMORIAM

Memorial Donations

Ron Malter Alcasio

Marcus Nazir

Robyn Alexandra Nettleton

Sandy Smart

I Carry Your Heart with Me

I carry your heart with me (I carry it in
 My heart) I am never without it (anywhere
 I go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
 By only me is your doing, my darling)

I fear
 No fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) I want
 No world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
 And it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
 And whatever a sun will always sing is you

Here is the deepest secret nobody knows
 (Here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
 And the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
 Higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
 And this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)

E.E. Cummings

Submitted by trudy, in loving memory of her daughter kristin alissa who died september 16th, 2002. "I felt this poem was perfect for me in grieving my beloved daughter's death. I found with this poem, that no one can take 'this' away from me. I felt stronger, knowing 'yes' i will always carry her heart in my heart."

Friends Forever

Join me in remembering
 those who have been lost to us.
 We can find them pleasantly
 dwelling in our hearts.
 Our spirits are formed by pieces of each nice
 memory of those we miss.
 We can fulfill each sad
 loss that we must encounter
 by smiling and chuckling,
 rather than locking ourselves
 up in a tearful trap of heartache.
 Grow each heart within us
 as we think of those we love.
 Our hearts blossom
 thanks to happy memories
 we can cherish, rather than
 unhappily ignore.

Jocelyn, May 2004

This poem was submitted by bereaved mother Joette Kruger. Joette's daughter Jocelyn Marie Schryver wrote this after the death of her best friend Scott Reade who died from Cystic Fibrosis and complications from a double lung transplant. Jocelyn died 3 months later, at the age of 24, waiting for her own lung transplant.

In Memory Wristbands

You've probably been seeing them everywhere... the yellow Livestrong wristbands, the pink ones in support of finding a cure for breast cancer, and many more. Now BFO-Toronto is pleased to offer these lovely wristbands in memory of your loved one who died. The wristbands are white with the words "In memory" engraved on them. They can be purchased at our office for a small donation.

If you would like to order a number of wristbands and have them mailed right to your door please contact our Communications and Special Events Coordinator at 416 440 0290 x17 or via email at klopes@bfotoronto.ca to place an order.

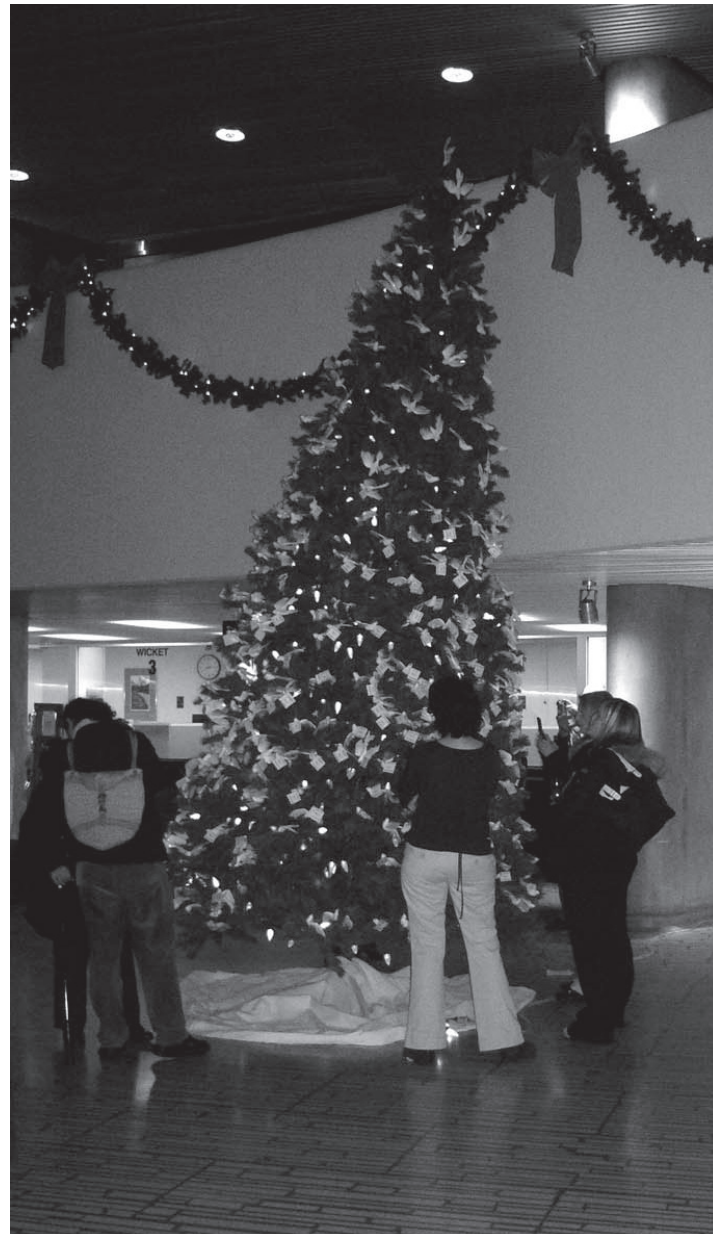
TREE OF LIGHT 2006

It was the warmest day for this time of year, more like spring they are saying. The annual Tree of Light, our signature event, was held this year on November 30 at Toronto City Hall. As usual, the new sixteen-foot tree looked magnificent with all of the doves perched on its branches. The new LED lights gave the tree a very warm bluish hue that contributed to a peaceful environment. A crew of extremely dedicated volunteers skilfully hanged the nearly five hundred nametags with care. Over six hundred people were held in the calm ambience while finding the names of their loved ones. Coffee, tea and punch were provided by the City of Toronto Catering Services and the Open Window Bakery once again generously donated the delicious cookies. Soothing background music by harpist Eithne Heffernan completed the serene scene.

Executive Director, Janet Wilson, opened the more formal part of the evening with her heart-wrenching story of the loss of her son, Simon, in the prime of his life. Not a sound could be heard in the cavernous rotunda as everyone held their breath while Cameron Britt and Shevaun McGrath also recounted the memories of the loss of their infant son, Patrick. The harmonious and heavenly voices of Louisa Burgess Corbett and Alan Reid when they sang “The Prayer” by Josh Groban helped everyone to connect with their feelings of grief and to remember their loved ones. Not a dry eye was to be found. Marilyn Ortega, Rhonda Greaves, Jillisa Ortega and Danille George-Shap spoke with passion while telling their compelling story of grief about the loss of their son, brother and uncle, Ruddin. The formal part of the evening was drawn to a close by the symbolic lighting of the Tree by chair of the board of directors, Maureen Ford.

Special thanks must be acknowledged to McGill Productions/MacLaren McCann Advertising for their splendid work in creating the scroll of names which was displayed on its own stand next to the Tree. Also tremendous appreciation must be expressed to Teresa Bailie and the wonderful Toronto City Hall staff who looked after every detail to make the event flawless. And finally, to Sylvie, of SAS Party Decorations Inc., who not only set up the Tree for us but stored the Tree, lights and doves safely and efficiently.

It goes without saying that the evening’s success is owed to you - the people who continue to support us in the important and necessary work that we do. This year’s event generated over \$10,000 in donations. It is through your generosity of spirit that we have been able to continue this event for the past 13 years and our work for the past 25 years. We look forward to continuing to serve those who follow. Thank you so much.



Cam & Shevaun’s Remarks for Tree of Light 2006

Cam: When we were asked to do this speech we began to try and figure out what the Tree of Light means to us as it symbolizes many different things. To some it is a celebration of lives lived, to others it is a beacon of hope during this very trying festive season and to others it is a coming together of people like themselves who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

We are here today with a lot of help from our friends, family and BFO. Three years ago my wife and I had a stillborn son, named Patrick James. When I think of what the Tree of Light means to me, I think back to the first time Shevaun and I attended after losing Patrick. I remember the feeling of pride when I saw his name on the Tree and how much fun he would have had during this festive season. I also remember greeting and hugging the members of our BFO support group. Although we had only known each other for a few months, we had shared so much it felt as though I was greeting life long friends. Patrick’s name is on the Tree tonight and to me this tree is a symbol of both remembrance and pride.

Shevaun: One of the things we have learned in this journey is that people grieve differently. We saw that with our own grief as a couple and it is reflected in our ideas for this speech. I want to share with you some of the lyrics of a song called “Without You” from the musical *RENT*, which sums up what for me, has been very difficult: watching life go on without Patrick being here:

Without You	Without You
The Ground Thaws	The Breeze Warms
The Rain Falls	The Girls Smile
The Grass Grows	The Cloud Moves
	Without you

Without You	The Crowd Roars
The Seeds Root	The Days Soar
The Flowers Bloom	The Babies Cry
The Children Play	Without You

The Stars Gleam
The Eagles Fly
Without You

The theme of the musical *RENT* is to live for today and not for tomorrow or yesterday, because if you live for tomorrow or yesterday, then life is yours to miss. Although I have always thought that those were good words to live by, I did not see

how I could possibly live for today without it being a sign that I have forgotten the past, and therefore forgotten Patrick. After what seems like a lifetime, I now understand that although Patrick’s death is indeed in the past, he is very much a part of our present. He may not be here to open gifts, visit Santa or bake cookies this Christmas but he is very much a part of our present day life. Whether it be in the sound of the wind chime outside of my window, our volunteering with BFO, seeing his beautiful face in the face of his two sisters, coming to the Tree of Light or simply carrying him in our hearts every day. Our life is not what we had envisioned three years ago but it is a life, and although I never thought I would say it, it is a good life.

While we stand in front of this Tree of Light we would like you to take a moment and remember all the good things that this tree means and all the good people whose names are upon it. Let this Tree be whatever you want it to be, a symbol of peace, a beacon of hope or a vigil of remembrance.

We wish you peace during this holiday season and wish that you are able to share it with your loved ones, both those here and beyond.

Encourage your Heart

Look not upon me because of the colour of my skin

Look upon me because I am your equal

Judge me not because you perceived that I might be guilty

Judge me as thou you are judged

Let your inner self be encouraged by the beauty of
Togetherness, Unity, Peace & Love

Today I give you my peace & love because he first gave us
his peace and loved us.

Submitted by bereaved mother Julia Farquharson: “I would like you put this in the newsletter for me under Encouragement, because at this time we all need encouragement to up lift the heart and to remember we are all from the same tree just different branches.”