

treetops



stories, poems, drawings and letters from children who have lost someone they loved

TREETOPS is the Child Bereavement Group of the Corrymeela Community



On our front cover this time is a drawing by Fredric, 9 years old, Zimbabwe. "My mother will know that I am happy and feeling ok if I wear "a big banana smile"."



From THE Editor

Hello everyone,

It seems a long time since I wrote my last letter to you. Hello to all our Treetops friends. Time is so strange. Sometimes it flies by and sometimes it really drags. One day we feel that a memory is very real, the next day we struggle to remember.

In Treetops groups we have shared our memories by writing special poems, letters or art work. We have made our memory jars or worry boxes choosing our colours, shapes and materials with care. Thank you all for your special efforts and allowing us to publish them. This will mean that Treetops groups go on reaching other children who have not attended a group. Many have the same sort of feelings because they too love someone who has died.

We love to hear from you, so keep up the good work and send us your stories, poems, problems and drawings so that the magazine continues to be written by you.

A big thank you to all of you,

Carol

(The Editor)



P.S. Thanks to all those who made generous donations towards the publication of this issue: Victoria Homes Trust, St. Matthew's (Shankhill), St. Patrick's Church (Jordanstown). If readers would like to make a donation for the next issue, please send cheques (payable to Treetops / Corrymeela) to the Editor at the address below.



You can have YOUR own story, poem, drawing or letter published in Treetops! Tell us about the very special person in your life who died... and help other children understand how you feel... Just send it to The Editor...

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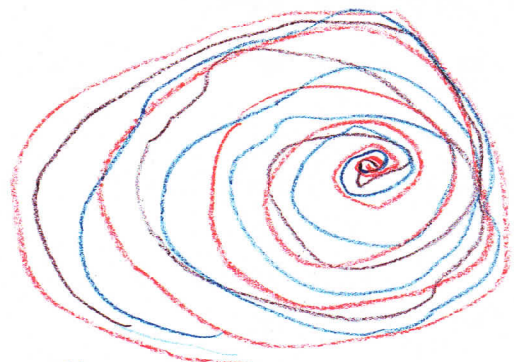
The Unpredictable Bunch

We are all like a bunch of twisters.
None of us truly knows that path we take,
none of us knows the purpose of our existence.
At times we dwell upon a specific thing causing
more damage than good and at times our passing
is greatly celebrated.
But no matter where we go or what is said about us
we leave our mark and our lives make an impact
on yours and what you do in preparation of our
arrival has a great effect on yours.

WE ARE UNPREDICTABLE

Nyasha Hungwe, 16 years old, Zimbabwe
Nyasha's mother died of cancer

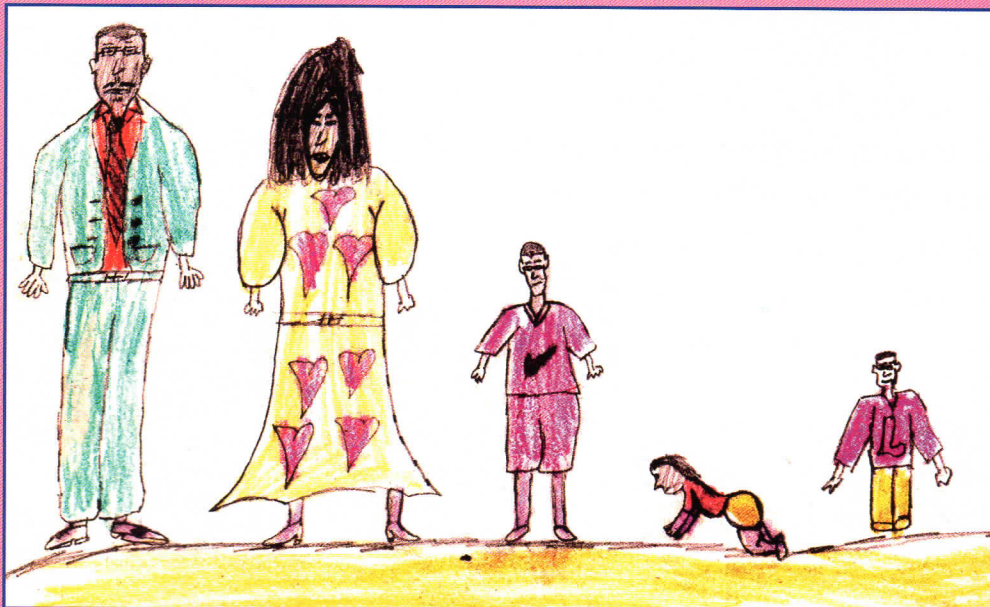
Jamie's Twister



To illustrate Nyasha's poem

Separation is a gap no one can fill
Departure is a wound no one can heal
Memory is a treasure no one can steal

Abdi Billow, Ghana



This is the Chikumira family.

"Gone are the days when we used to laugh to each others jokes with my beloved father. Oh Lord I wish we could be doing that again".

What is left of my family that live with me:



by Tabitha, 8 years old

My name is Em and I have 3 sisters and a wee brother. My Dad is still alive and my Mum died when I was 10 years old. This is my poem for her.

Memories

Grieve not for me with sorrowing tears
Think not of death with harmful fears
Though you think me dead
Every tear you shed touches and tortures me
Yet when you sing, delight, my soul is lifted
to the light

Em, Age 13, Belfast

Amy's Story: Losing a loved one

Do you know someone who has lost a loved one? Or have you yourself lost someone close to you? Often people don't know what to say, don't say anything or comments designed to comfort don't really do so at all. People who have been bereaved experience many feelings and emotions and their everyday life can also be affected. I have been bereaved; someone close to me died. I am writing this to explain to people who don't really understand about bereavement what it's actually like. To people who have been in a similar situation, who have experienced the death of a loved one, what I can say is, you are not alone.

How do people react to being told about a death? For the rest of my life I will have to tell new people I meet about the death of my father. It is hard and through my experience of telling people, their reactions have been different! Some feel awkward and embarrassed and the most commonly used expressions in these situations are, "I'm sorry!" "I don't know what to say!" and "I feel so sorry for you!" I've probably heard them all, but the worst one has to be "You should be lucky you had him at all!" When I heard this I immediately began to feel guilty, but then I was very hurt that someone could say this to me. They didn't really understand what I was going through.

My father died on my tenth birthday. This means that his death will mark that date for the rest of my life. At first I felt that I wouldn't be able to celebrate my birthday as I would feel guilty. But then I soon realised that my Dad would not want me to feel like that, he would want me to be happy and to enjoy my day. Now when my birthday arrives I think about all the good times I had with him, rather than mourn his death.

I think the best way to make the person with whom you are talking about the death feel more comfortable, is to actually tell them what to do to help you. If you want them just to listen, tell them, or maybe you just want them to be sympathetic. Explaining how you want to be treated is very awkward, but as I have had to tell a lot of people, I have become more comfortable when telling them. So in my experience it does get easier! I know that when I've got upset and my friends have been around that they have felt awkward and some of them don't know what to say. But sometimes they say things that make me feel so much better, for example, "he is always here with you!" and "he is so proud of you!". I like the way they say "he is" instead of "he would be so proud of you!".

When I learned of my father's death, I went through a range of emotions which were all completely natural. First of all I was so shocked that I suffered from denial. I couldn't believe he was dead. Then I started to cry all the time. This was good as it got it all out of my system. Communication is vital when trying to cope with news this devastating. I am a naturally open person, so I find it easy to express my feelings. I was always able to talk to other members of my family and friends, which I found very comforting. Others, who may not find it easy to talk about it as openly as I could, could maybe write all their feelings down on a piece of paper. Then they could either show it to someone or just keep it themselves as it still helps.

Even though my family and friends helped me a lot, I decided to take part in a bereavement group for children and their parents

or guardians called Treetops. This is a special children's group where they work through grief issues in ways that involve playing games, engaging in therapeutic activities and examining quite real and emotional issues. Although there were many tears, by the end of the six weeks that I was there, I felt a lot better. So the expression "it's good to talk" in my opinion is really quite true!

What effects does death have on people? The main thing that happens is that people lose their energy; this affects the person physically, emotionally and psychologically. Lots of people go through personality changes and express their feelings of death in different ways. They may become quiet, or the opposite, overly outgoing. Also they may become depressed all the time therefore resulting in not seeing anyone and being very unsociable. Some may become bitter and angry and push others away when they are only trying to help. These are all natural and they can be overcome, it just takes time. That's why I am overly emphasising the word communication, as talking about feelings helps to sort out things that may be worrying you.

Schoolwork can also be affected. Grief can ruin your motivation and concentration. I know this for a fact as I was very distracted by the fact that I had lost a parent. Another effect that my father's death had on me was that I suffered from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. I always felt that people were talking and staring at me. I was so paranoid. I didn't want to feel different but I did.

Should there not be counsellors in schools for pupils to talk to? I strongly believe that this would be a good idea. In school, in some subjects we have to talk about death, eg: religious education and home economics. These brought all the feelings that I had suffered previously back to me. It is in times like these that a counsellor would be much appreciated. Teachers are sometimes helpful in situations like this but with no disrespect to them, unless they have had a major bereavement in their family, they don't really understand.

When a person you love dies, you feel as if part of you has gone with them. It makes you vulnerable, but in a way changes you for the better. In my opinion, over the years I have become a stronger person. When I hear of other people who have suffered from the death of a loved one, I like to be able to help them, either by talking to them about it, or by writing them a letter.

Another thing that has helped me, although it may sound silly, was to name a star after my Dad.

One night I looked out of my window and saw a really bright star and thought "my Dad was a star". So ever since, when there is a clear sky at night and I see that star, I really feel as if my Dad is looking down on me and that brings a smile to my face!

So please, if you ever lose a loved one, share your feelings, because I promise you, you will feel much better for it, although it may take some time!

Amy Adair.
Newtownabbey
written when she was 15



Mary's Dad died suddenly. Here she responds to some questions 6 months after her father's death.

WHAT IS THE WORST THING ABOUT YOUR DAD'S DYING ?

The worst bit about it is: I loved him and I am lonely no matter what I go to do. There is always a gap of my Daddy not being there in person. But a reassurance is a warmness I feel when I think of him.

WHAT HURTS MOST NOW ?

What hurts most is that my Mummy misses him a great deal.

WHAT HELPS NOW?

Things I'm happy about remind me of Daddy and myself: my birth mark and of course the thing that distinguishes me from the rest of my family, the bent nose. Just like his.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE ?

Facing the future without Daddy is hard and scary, like having one shoe without the other. My parents were so suited for each other and the family too. The future will be hard for me and Mummy.

Mary Loughran, Dungannon
Written when she was 13

Does your Grandpa make you laugh?

Did you ever meet my Grandpa? He was 6' 2" tall with a straight back, long neck and a thin face. He wore old clothes and his favourite sweater had holes in the elbows. In winter he wore a duncher on his head and said he had a dim memory of the colour it once was in 1950! His house was very messy but he knew where everything was. He cooked for himself and the snack he liked best was baked beans and bananas.

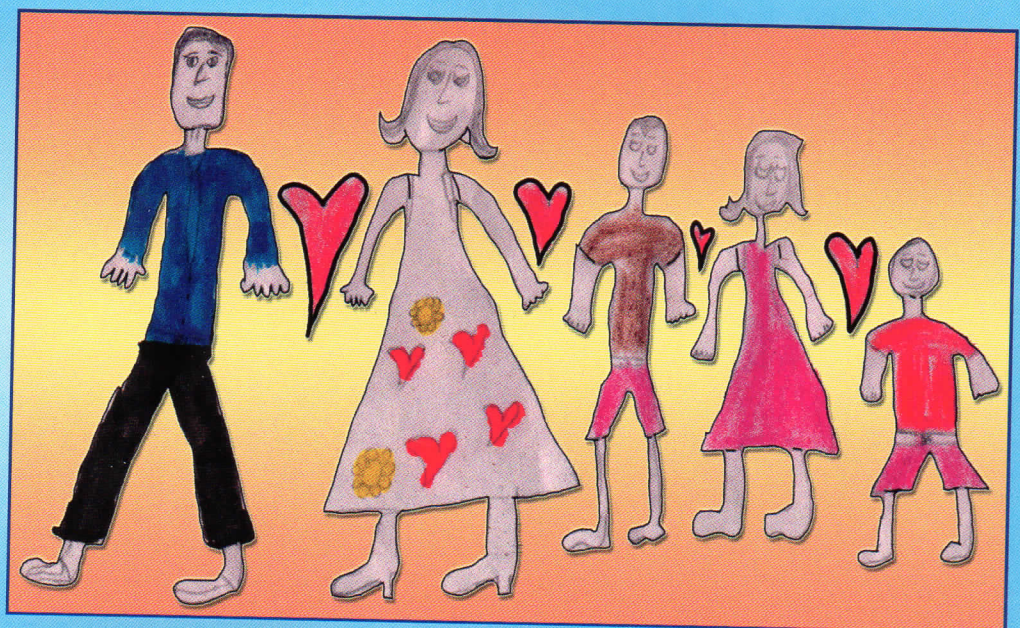
My Grandpa was my best friend. He loved me and I loved him. We just loved each other. He taught me to make funny faces and told me hundreds of jokes. I can remember 87 of them because I wrote them in a wee JOKEY NOTEBOOK he gave me on my 9th birthday. He did things to make me laugh and laugh like the time we walked through the park on a hot summer day and he walked straight into the children's paddling pool and splashed himself all over. Just to think about that makes me laugh, and maybe always will.

So you see, even though my Grandpa died I still have him in my heart now and forever.

Harriet Hampton,
Age 11, Coleraine

This is the Mbulo family.

"My parents used to give me very good advice before they died, but when they died I didn't know what to do. I was heart broken".

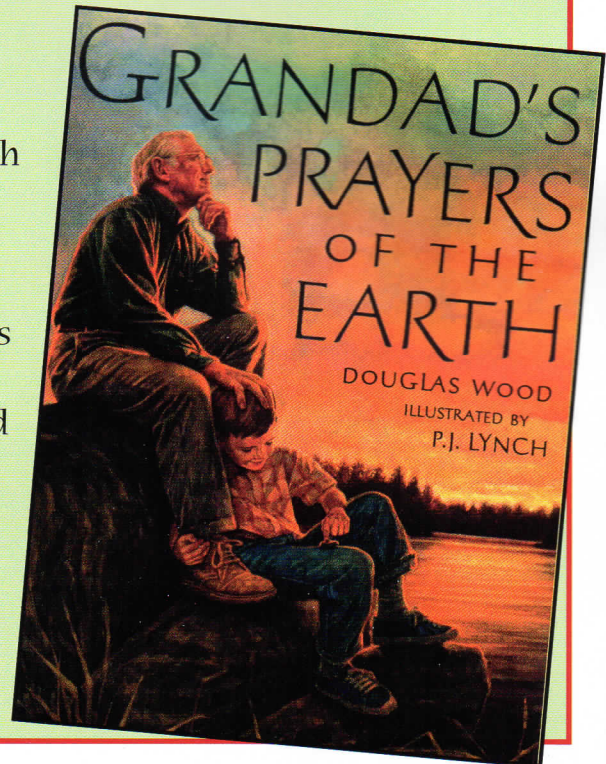


Book Review

Grandad's Prayers of the Earth

by Douglas Wood, illustrated by P. J. Lynch. Published by Walker Books

This is a beautiful book which would be enjoyed by both young people and children alike. The book is based on the relationship between a boy and his Grandfather, and all that it means to the boy. Together they explore nature and the fact that everything in the world has its own prayer. One day Grandad is gone and the boy struggles to find himself in the places they once shared together. This is a special book which helps to focus on the feelings and issues that arise when we lose someone we love. The pictures are particularly beautiful - almost like looking at photographs, the detail is so precise. "The illustrations are quietly spectacular..... read it and weep". The Irish Times



Problem Page



You have shared a few of your worries and questions that maybe all of you would like an answer to. Don't be afraid to ask- we may just be of some help. Here are a few of the worries you've told us about.

Q. My Grannie died last year. My Mum died three weeks ago. She was cross with me the day before she died and I was cross back. Was it my fault she died?

Susan, Age 11

A. Dear Susan, I am so sorry to hear that both your mum and grannie died. You must miss them both very much. There is no way that your mother's death could be your fault. We cannot cause anyone's death by being cross with them. People die because parts of their bodies wear out, or become too sick or injured to be repaired.

Being cross with each other at times is something that happens in all families; but most of the times between parents and children are happy and loving. Very soon, the lovely times you can remember with Mum will start coming back into your memory. Perhaps when they do, you could start to write some of them down, and maybe draw some pictures to help you remember her, and how much she loved you.

Kate Canavan

ACTIVITY PAGE

I think one of the most difficult things when you lose someone you love is managing to cope on special days such as birthdays, anniversaries or Christmas.

Some ideas which might help you to deal with these difficult times are outlined below.

Plan to do something with your family or friends on that day. Think of the things you would normally have done when that person was alive and then think of some of the things you would like to do - REMEMBER- it's alright to enjoy yourself and have fun as well as be sad and upset.

Make a calendar of special days / events for your house so that everyone knows that these days are important to you. REMEMBER - not everyone will have the same days as being important to them so it is good to let everyone know that these days are special to you.

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6 7 8 9 10 11 12	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	5 6 7 8 9 10 11	2 3 4 5 6 7 8
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27 28 29 30 31	24 25 26 27 28	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30	26 27 28 29 30 31	23 24 25 26 27 28 29

JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
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7 8 9 10 11 12 13	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	6 7 8 9 10 11 12	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
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21 22 23 24 25 26 27	18 19 20 21 22 23 24	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	20 21 22 23 24 25 26	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	22 23 24 25 26 27 28
28 29 30 31	25 26 27 28 29 30 31	29 30	27 28 29 30 31	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	29 30 31

write in the space above or draw some of the dates / occasions that are important to you and what you might want to do on these days:

The

BACKPAGE

'Treetops' is a support programme for small groups of children who have experienced a sudden death in the family. It provides the opportunity to meet and share with other children who have had a similar experience. We use art, drama, puppets, games, songs and stories during our time together.

'Treetops' groups are for children between 8 and 12 years old. Parents are asked to come too and meet separately. Groups meet for six consecutive weeks.

If you think you would like to attend one of our groups or just find out more, please send for our leaflet and application form to 'Treetops', Corrymeela House, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT

"I'm afraid to cry in case I can't stop"

"Mum used to do the housework. Now Dad leaves a note"

"Is it my fault?"

"I'm all alone"

"Who goes to hell?"

"My heart is heavy as lead"

The subscription is £3.00 for 3 issues