

Grief

I had my own notion of grief.

I thought it was a sad time that followed the death of someone you love and you had to push through it to get to the other side.

But I'm learning there is no other side.

There is no pushing through but rather there is absorption, adjustment, acceptance.

And grief is not something that you complete but rather you endure.

Grief is not a task to finish and move on but an element of yourself – an alteration of your being, a new way of seeing, a new definition of self.

Gwen Flowers

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Calendar of events

Wednesday 16th November – BTS Support Meeting.

7pm-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite)

Saturday 19th November (morning) – Living Beyond Suicide's (LBS) annual 'Walk through the Darkness and into the Light' Walk and Remembrance Service at Henley Beach.

BTS supports this most important event that has become a focal point in the annual calendar for those bereaved by suicide. The 19th November is also 'International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day'. Details page 4.

Saturday 19th November (afternoon) – MOSH are hosting a film 'Life's Journeys'

In support of 'International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day' at Thebarton Community Centre. Details page 4.

Wednesday 14th December - BTS Support Meeting and Christmas Remembrance Evening.

Bring a plate of supper and join us for a support meeting ending with a remembrance to those that we have lost to suicide. Details page 3. 7pm-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite)

Wednesday 18th January - BTS Support Meeting.

7pm-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite)

Sunday 5th February - BTS Coffee Morning

10am -12.30pm Botanic Gardens - Cafe Fibonacci – located on the Schomburgch Terraced Pavilion. This is an opportunity to catch up with others who have lost someone to suicide, in a less formal setting than our regular monthly meetings. Join us for breakfast or coffee and cake while chatting and listening to others and then take a stroll through the beautiful surroundings of the Botanic Gardens. BTS volunteers will be on hand.

Wednesday 15th February - BTS Support Meeting. Special Presentation. Details in our next newsletter.

7pm-9pm, Uniting Communities, Lvl 3 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking, Care Park, 15 Pitt St (directly opposite)

Thursday 24th - Saturday 26th March - 5th Australian Postvention Conference.

University of New South Wales. Details page 4.

A Welcome from the Chair

Where does the year go? As I grow older the years seem to go by faster. How have I changed? Hopefully I have become kinder and more considerate, and listen more. How has the role of BTS changed? Suicide prevention and postvention are receiving more attention but much more work needs to be done.

A new committee was elected at the August AGM with most returning and a new face joining the team. The committee has been in place for 3 months and has already tackled the issue of BTS into the future. Traditional ways of communicating with the suicide bereaved community have been overtaken by technology with the 'web' now providing a plethora of information without having to leave home. This means BTS must create better platforms by way of its website and newsletter. But what of direct interfaces with the community such as monthly support meetings? The introduction of special presentations on a quarterly basis at the support meetings has been extremely well received with the 3 presentations held earlier this year seeing healthy attendances and positive responses. These will continue through 2017.

Over the last few years BTS has strongly supported the 'Walk through Darkness and into the Light' walk and remembrance service organised by Living Beyond Suicide. This year the walk will be held on International Survivors of Suicide Day, 19th November. Later in the day MOSH will be screening the movie 'Life's Journey' with bereaved persons discussing the effects of losing someone to suicide. With the focus on this date BTS has decided to change the format of its Christmas Remembrance Service as it follows a few weeks after International Survivors of Suicide Day. BTS will be holding a December monthly support meeting on Wednesday 14th December. This meeting will be informal in nature and close with readings and poems rather than the structured format of previous years. We would ask those attending to bring a plate of supper.

Christmas is that time of year where we are expected to be happy and enjoy a good time. We may have Christmas with family, friends and work colleagues and put on our happy face or we might not even attend any events, rather stay at home and remember who we have lost. Each of us will have our own memories and handle it in our own way as each of us travels on our life's journey and as the poem on page 1 says 'an alteration of your being, a new way of seeing, a new definition of self'.

In this edition of the newsletter you will find articles on coping with Xmas, the complicated grief of the loss of a twin and a very moving eulogy to Graeme Blakey.

Graeme sent us a very moving letter on the loss of his son "I miss you Cameron" which we printed in our last edition. Little did we realise that Graeme was seriously ill and passed away not long after we received the letter. We have also re-printed Graeme's letter. On behalf of all of us at BTS go our sincere condolences to Graeme's wife 'Liff' and our heartfelt thanks for all the support, comfort and care they gave to bereaved persons during their time with BTS.

To all the hardworking BTS committee who give so generously of their time, the support workers who ensure our monthly meetings are held in a caring and compassionate environment and all those who have volunteered at BTS events during the year go my many thanks.

Thanks also to all the other organisations that are out there supporting the suicide bereaved community and/or working in the field of suicide prevention.

Finally to those bereaved by suicide go our heartfelt thoughts. Whilst the days can at times seem so dark I hope that like me you are able to find some light and are able to smile and laugh again whilst knowing that the loss you carry will always have a place in your heart.

May we all travel safely and take care of ourselves and those around us.

With the kindest of thoughts

Tim Porter

(on behalf of BTS volunteers and committee)



BTS Xmas get-together

The BTS committee and support workers welcome you to our BTS Xmas Get-together to be held on Wednesday 14th December from 7-9pm at Uniting Communities, 10 Pitt St, Adelaide. Parking (Care Park) is now available directly opposite in Pitt St.

This will be our last support evening for the year. Rather than hold a regular meeting we invite you to bring along your family, friends and people who have supported you throughout the year and join us in a relaxed, caring environment where you can chat with other bereaved persons. Prior to the end of the evening we will have a poem and letter reading followed by remembrance to those we have lost. You are welcome to bring along a photo of your loved one and place it on the remembrance table.

Please bring a plate of supper to share. Coffee, tea, water and soft drink will be available.

For many of us this evening is a very important part of Christmas as it allows us to remember those we have lost in a compassionate and supportive setting and share our thoughts and memories with others who have lost someone to suicide.

We hope you can join us.



Grief and Christmas go
together like fire and ice.
When everyone around you
wants to be happy and joyful,
you just want to be alone with
the pain, curl up and hide.


It's ok, it's your grief,
do it your way.

Grief changes us
The pain sculpts us
Into someone who
Understands more deeply
Hurts more often
Appreciates more quickly
Cries more easily
Hopes more desperately
Loves more openly

The only people who think
there's a time limit for grief,
have never lost a piece of
their heart.

Take all the time you need.


Important upcoming Events



ANGLICARESA

Walk Through The Darkness and into the light ...

Saturday 19th November 2016



Join us on 'International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day' in memory of a loved one, to support others bereaved by suicide, and for suicide prevention

West Beach 5am
Adelaide Shores Sailing Club, Barcoo Road

Tennyson 5 am
Oarsman Reserve, opposite 183 Military Road


Walk the entire way or join us from 6:30am at Henley Square for a Memorial Service hosted by Wesley Lifeforce

Complimentary breakfast, tea and coffee are provided

For more information call 1300 76 11 93

RSVP via lbs@anglicaresa.com.au

www.facebook.com/LivingBeyondSuicide



Reaching Out Can Change Your Life

You are not alone. Join with a community of suicide loss survivors to find comfort and gain understanding as we share stories of healing and hope.

The Program

12.45	Welcome and a cuppa
1.00	Screening of "Life Journeys"
2.00	Where to go for more support
2.15	Small group discussions that bring together people who have experienced a similar loss

Life Journeys


Each event will include a screening of *Life Journeys: Reclaiming Life after Loss*, a new AFSP-produced Survivor Day documentary that traces the grief and healing journey that follows a suicide loss over time. Drawing on stories and insights from long-term loss survivors, the film shows us that through resilience and support we can achieve hope and understanding in our lives while celebrating the lives of those we lost.

2016 International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day
Saturday November 19, 2016
12.45 – 3.00


Thebarton Community Centre
South Road/Ashwyn Pde
Torrensville

Please note – you can only access the car park when travelling north along South Rd. Turn in just past the bowling club)

Further information via: office@moshaustralia.org.au



#loveMOSH



Learn More and Register at afsp.org/SurvivorDay

The 5th Australian Postvention Conference - Surviving the Impact of Suicide



HOPE & HEALING

Surviving the Impact of Suicide

Thursday 23rd March – Saturday 25th March 2017

John Niland Scientia Building, University of New South Wales, Sydney <http://www.5thpostventionconference2017.com.au>

Coping with Grief at Christmas

Christmas is a time of mixed feelings for those who are missing someone they love. As we gather with family and friends, the absence of a loved one may be felt even more intensely. Whether it's a parent or partner who has left the family or a loved one who has died, you may be left feeling out of step with the jolliness of the tinsel and carols.

It is especially important at this time to take care of yourself and those around you who have also experienced significant loss or change. While some people keep busy to distract themselves, others prefer to withdraw to their memories and reflections; there is no right or wrong way to act or feel.

It's hard to predict how you'll be feeling, so put some safeguards into place.

- Don't make any big decisions over Christmas time. You will probably be feeling enough stress and distraction, and there is no need to add to it. If possible, wait until the New Year.
- Make plans to be around people who you trust and who understand that you might not be feeling very "jolly". Let them know that you may actually prefer to be alone sometimes, and they should not be offended if this is the case.
- Give yourself some time to think about the person you are missing. Listen to music, look at pictures, cry if you feel you want or need to. This may mean you are less likely to be overwhelmed or caught off guard by Christmas 'triggers'.
- If a family has been split through divorce or separation, Christmas day may become a logistic struggle for children who now have two places to be. Make this easier for them by including them in plans ahead of time and making the transition as smooth as possible, and do your best to avoid competition over time spent with children or size and expense of gifts.

Here are some things that might help you manage your grief feelings over Christmas.

- Do something to remember the person you are missing...
 - Play their favourite music
 - Go to a place they loved or do something you used to do together
 - Write them a Christmas card
 - Share memories and stories with others who loved them too
 - If children are missing the person too, involve them and find out how they would like to remember their loved one.
- Give yourself permission to do less. People will understand if you do not get the Christmas letter out, if you do not bake cookies for everyone or if you miss a few parties. The most important thing is taking care of yourself and those close to you.
- Accept help. If you feel as though you are not coping well, reach out to people you trust and say yes to offers of support or company.
- Let yourself have fun. If you are feeling happy, go with it – it does not mean that you are forgetting or forsaking the person who is not there.

New Year

With Christmas comes New Year, a milestone which prompts reflection upon the past and plans for the future. Memories may bring both pain and happiness, while thoughts of the future may bring reminders of lost dreams as well as hope. Be gentle with yourself at this time, too.

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Graeme Blakey – bereaved father, loving BTS support worker and living example of survival after losing a son to suicide.

Not long ago I happened to meet a bereaved father who was reminiscing about losing his son to suicide about 20 years ago. This father's most important memory was of the personal support Graeme had given him through BTS that had been so pivotal to this father getting through those early months and years of bereavement. He talked of the phone calls Graeme made to check that he was alright, his encouragement, his caring, of never giving up on him however down he was, and of Graeme's relentless sense of humour that shone through the really tough times.

Graeme and his wife, affectionately known as Liff, attended BTS after the devastating event of their 17 year-old son's suicide in 1987. In those days suicide was still stigmatised and taboo. There was virtually no help apart from the newly formed BTS support group – the first in Australia. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding his own grief, Graeme was an advocate for change.

He and Liff courageously spoke out about their own grief on the BTS video Suicide: The ultimate rejection (1991) and a later one, Suicide: Some Years Down the Track. This normalised for many others the traumatic nature of the suicide bereavement trajectory. People identified with Graeme's grief and found hope in his example of survival. Similarly he contributed much valuable material and advice to make the book After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved (published 1995) so relevant to the newly bereaved.

Graeme was outspoken about the need for support for people bereaved through suicide, which resulted in him becoming an active support worker and Committee member with BTS for many years. Graeme provided in-house support at BTS meetings, extending his care of people to follow-up after the meetings, and to buddying fellow bereaved fathers as in the story above. He participated in the BTS phone roster, and in those days the BTS phone ran hot with distress calls at all times of the day and night. On one of those occasions Graeme took a call from a bereaved father who was threatening suicide himself on the other end of the line. Graeme managed to have the call traced and to keep the man talking until professional help arrived for the distraught father.

It was through a strong sense of social justice, courage, determination and compassion for others that he provided a living example that it is possible to survive such a traumatic loss and to put together a purposeful and meaningful life. Graeme's legacy of caring still lives on in people's memories, and by the example he has handed down, and which is still active in BTS principles today.

As if losing a son to suicide was not enough, Graeme and Liff were burned out in the bushfires at Greenhill in 1983 and again in their new home at Kinglake in 2009. Moving to Melbourne, sadly Graeme developed pulmonary fibrosis five years ago and died recently in Melbourne.

Graeme's last contribution to BTS was in the very last BTS newsletter with his honest and heartfelt piece about his son Cameron, 29 years on, I Miss You Cameron.

All along the way Graeme has been supported by his loving wife Liff. Together they have endured and struggled through their various griefs. Our hearts go out to Liff and their surviving sons, Duncan and Tony. Thank you Graeme for your loving example and thank you Liff for yours.

- Sheila Clark

I miss you Cameron...

Hi,

My name is Graeme and I miss my youngest son, Cameron, - still - after 29 years.

Way back in 1987 our lovable, bright, companionable, good looking youngest child had hit a brick wall which only he could see.

We will never know what built that wall or why Cam couldn't see the holes and cracks that could help him climb over it. Hindsight allows us to surmise, to pretend we know, to think we should have seen the problems! Hindsight can be a very cruel mistress.

We did what we did at the time knowing what we knew, at the time. We whipped ourselves, we blamed ourselves mainly for his suicide. And then we were introduced to the fledgling BTSSG and the lifeline it can provide.

The group made us realise several things. There were unquestioning shoulders to cry on. There was a safe place to let go of those tightly held emotions, with others who totally understood why you howled and then laughed as something bright went through your mind. Who understood that it's OK to not want to talk sometimes and why you can't shut up other times.

The first few years are tough as the memories are so fresh you can smell them. Then slowly came the understanding that Cameron would certainly not want us to remember him with sadness and gloom but rather to revel in the wonderful times we did have together, all 17 years of his life.

We still wonder what he would be doing at 46.

And it still hurts but it's bearable now.

Graeme Blakey

Reprinted from last issue of the BTS Newsletter

The grieving of a twin is difficult, and perhaps more so for an identical twin

31 years ago, someone I was in a fairly rocky relationship with and had loved and lived with for just over six years took his own life. It changed my life forever, and eventually forced me to look deeply within, and to make changes to how I lived my life.

Ultimately, it was for the better, and after about 10 years I saw David's death as a gift, perhaps the greatest he had ever given me as his mental illness was truly difficult to live with, and I would never have left him. I also started to see it as if it was voluntary euthanasia, as if this had been legal, this is what we would have called it. The two mental illnesses he was living with, and hid from most others, was like a cancer in his heart and soul, something he could not find a cure for, and so in this way, could have been seen as a terminal illness. Of course, this might just have been my own rationale for dealing with the grief.

Reconnecting with his twin brother a few years ago after not having had contact for over 23 years was like walking into what would (should) have been my 'past', a real sense of de ja vu. Seeing a man approximately 27 years older than when David died, but who looked and acted just like him was unnerving and re-opened the door to sadness and loss in a way I had not expected. To see the same beard twiddle, listen to the same quirky sense of humour, and see a person who for the most part is identical to David but older, was to walk into what my life might have been. It was also like a dead man coming back to life, and unnerving and of course, very sad too, in an odd sort of way, to 'see David again'.

This grief now seems very complicated.

David's foster parents refused to have a relationship with his twin brother John (or me) after the funeral, something I never understood at all until meeting up with him again all this years later. To see the person who has died, in 'the flesh of another body', highlights the reality of the loss in the starkest of ways. Whenever I receive a hand written letter from John, it is like receiving a letter from a dead man; the writing is identical too. The same goes for phone calls, as it took me over three years to tell the difference between their voices when they were both alive. It is virtually impossible to tell the difference now, and always startles me to 'hear David's voice' again.

I started writing about this a few years ago as a friend and colleague of mine who I still volunteer with for The Bereaved Through Suicide Support Group Inc. was thinking of updating the book *After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved*, a book that I was also a major contributor to in the 90s and which has a strong 'consumer content', not just pure research. The twin grief is not in the first edition, and when I realised it was missing, I decided to not only write about it from my perspective, but I have also tried to find a surviving twin to contribute.

Those I have talked to so far do not wish to re-open the door to their grief for this book, and in fact have told me they are still hurting, almost as if the loss was yesterday. Some have said they felt as if "half of them died with their identical twin", and they still feel this way. David's brother felt that deeply for many years, and says, perhaps he still does on some days.

This seems desperately sad, and I understand them not wanting to open up their grief wounds. Sometimes shutting an emotional door is an 'easier' way to get on with living, especially grief, although I do believe this probably has a detrimental affect to another part of our life or health. We cannot get them back, and so, in effect, have to 'get over it'. Even if we don't 'get over it', life goes on regardless, and, in spite of our pain.

The other thing about any grief or loss is many of us feel the need to share our pain with others who have experienced the same type of grief, the reason why grief support groups work so well. Perhaps twin grief needs its own support group, as it seems there are a few rather unique features to this type of grief, of which I have unearthed in my own grief, many years after losing David, who was an identical twin.

One of the more difficult memories is of his funeral, not so much the funeral itself as that is still a blur, but relating to the additional and unexpected challenges of the loss of someone who was an identical twin. David came from NSW, and did not like his friends and colleagues in Adelaide to know he was a twin, so when the more than 800 people turned up to his funeral (only my immediate family and a couple of friends knew he had a twin brother) you can only imagine the shock everyone got, when it seemed as if the person they were attending the funeral of, appeared 'to be walking in from of his own coffin'. It was something I regret to this day, not having said in the funeral notice, 'The funeral of David Mitchell, identical twin brother of...'

This insight has certainly helped me understand why David's foster parents appeared to 'desert' their other twin son. It must be truly horrific to lose a brother or sister, and then look in the mirror and 'see' them, and I suspect the same must be said for a parent losing an identical twin child. To bury someone, and then continue to 'see' them must be incredibly painful and confronting.

It is a very difficult topic to think about, and to write about, but as always doing so has helped me deal with my own feelings which were reopened a few years ago. It can be helpful to explore and clarify one's own reactions and emotions, and to read and research about it. Thankfully, there is so much more to be found on the topic of suicide grief and much more support now than there was 31 years ago. The following sites and articles about this topic in particular also supplement and support what I had felt and thought after reconnecting with David's twin.

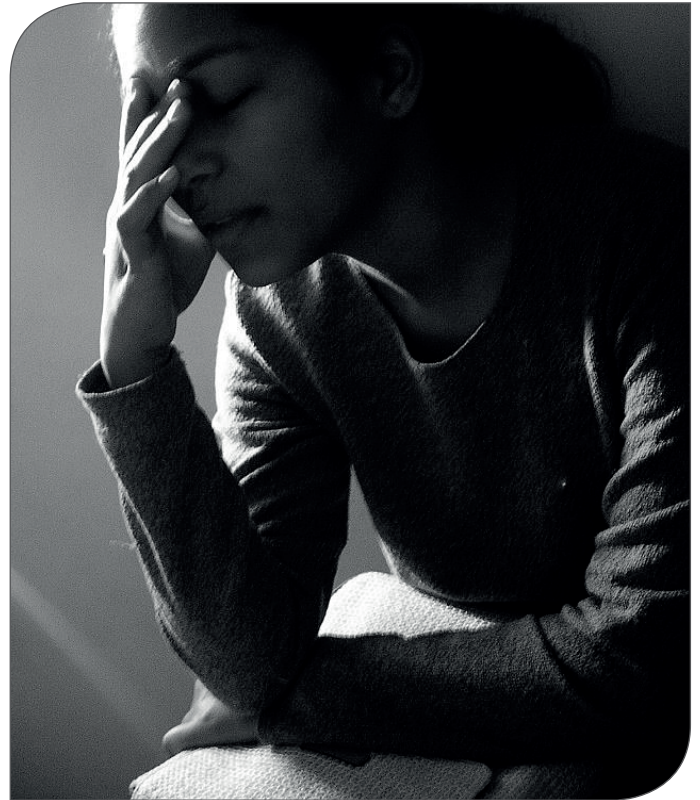
The grieving of a twin... cont.

Psychology Today Research says:

"Two key findings have emerged from the extant research on twin loss. The first is that identical twins experience the loss somewhat more intensely than fraternal twins, although there is considerable overlap—the loss experience may be just as devastating for some fraternal twins. There is also evidence of less grief reduction over time for identical than fraternal twins, on average. The second finding is that the loss of a twin is associated with greater grief than the loss of any other relative, with the exception of a spouse. This makes sense in evolutionary terms—in the absence of a partner, one cannot transmit genes to future generations. At the proximal level, spouses are the people chosen to be lifelong companions. Interestingly, grief associated with spouse loss did not differ from grief associated with twin loss. Comparing the effects of twin loss versus spouse loss between surviving MZ and DZ twins would be revealing; however, my own sample of nearly 700 bereaved twins does not include sufficient numbers to support such an analysis. In addition, very few twins (fortunately!) have lost children, also precluding twin group analyses of such data."

- Kate Swaffer © 2016

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/twofold/200907/loss-twin>



Donations

Without donations, BTS would not be able to continue supporting the Bereaved Through Suicide community. 100% of all donations received are used to continue supporting people bereaved through suicide.

Should you wish to make a tax deductible donation to BTS you can directly EFT to: **BTS Support Group BSB: 633-000 A/C: 148312366** or donations can be sent to: PO Box 15, Hindmarsh SA 5007. Tax deductible receipts will be issued.



A big thank you to Graphic Print Group for their ongoing print support.

Additional Support Services

[Living Beyond Suicide \(LBS\)](#) between 10am–10pm any day.

[Minimisation Of Suicide Harm \(MOSH\)](#)

[Kids Helpline](#)

[Lifeline](#)

[Beyondblue](#)

[Mensline](#)

[Suicide Call Back Service](#)

Phone 1300 76 11 93

Phone: (08) 8443 8369

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Phone: 13 11 14

Phone: 1300 22 4636

Phone: 1300 789 978

Phone: 1300 659 467

The Suicide Call Back Service is a professional, national, 24/7 counselling service for anyone affected by suicide.