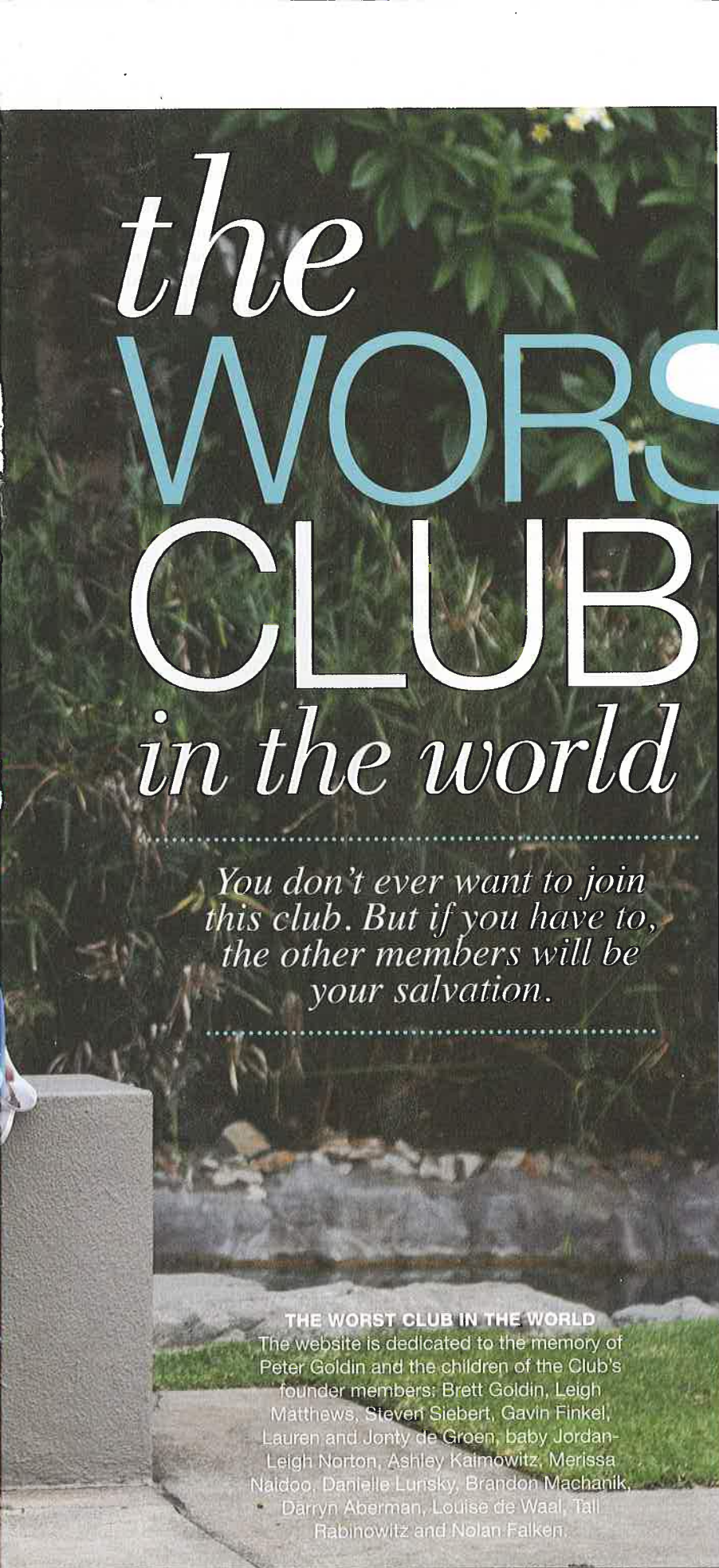


A FEW OF THE FOUNDER MEMBERS,
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GLENDA
LUNSKY, DENISE GOLDIN, GABI DE GROEN,
SHIREEN DE WAAL, DESIRÉ FINKEL.





the WORST CLUB *in the world*

You don't ever want to join this club. But if you have to, the other members will be your salvation.

THE WORST CLUB IN THE WORLD

The website is dedicated to the memory of Peter Goldin and the children of the Club's founder members: Brett Goldin, Leigh Matthews, Steven Siebert, Gavin Finkel, Lauren and Jonty de Groen, baby Jordan-Leigh Norton, Ashley Kaimowitz, Merissa Naidoo, Danielle Lunsky, Brandon Machanik, Darryn Aberman, Louise de Waal, Tall Rabinowitz and Nolan Falken.

*T*hey don't have a headquarters, a flag or a manifesto. There's no one calling the shots, not even a president or vice-president. There are no membership fees, and why

should there be, for a group that doesn't conduct meetings. Months can go by before some members see each other, while others are in constant, sometimes daily, contact.

The members of the Worst Club in the World, as this group of parents have dubbed themselves, all have one thing in common – the death of a child.

Each situation is different. But whether the loss was due to accident, illness, suicide, substance abuse, violent murder, miscarriage or stillbirth, the grief is enormous, overwhelming, and affects the entire family.

The Club is very informal, explains Denise Goldin, whose actor son, Brett (along with his friend, Richard Bloom) was kidnapped, hijacked and shot execution-style in the back of the head in Cape Town on 16 April 2006. 'It's a name that we attached to a few of us who are close enough to be able to share whatever we're feeling 24/7.'

Not a day goes by that Denise doesn't think of Brett. There are photos of him all over her Sandton house – daily reminders of her loss, but also of how far she's come since that horrific April day when he didn't arrive at their prearranged brunch.



THE LATE PETER GOLDIN, SAMANTHA GOLDIN-BEHRMANN, DENISE AND BRETT IN HAPPIER TIMES.

Brett's murder, just before he was due to head to the UK to act in a production of *Hamlet*, made international headlines. What wasn't reported was the fact that 2006 was a triple whammy for Denise: just three months after his death she was diagnosed with breast cancer – triggered, says her surgeon, by her intense grief. A few months later her husband Peter suffered a fatal heart attack at the gym, so Denise's whole world was turned upside down in the space of less than a year. You have to wonder how it didn't cripple her.

Denise's turning point was the day Sharon Matthews, whose daughter Leigh had been kidnapped and murdered in July 2004, came to visit her.

'She held her arms open to me and no words needed to pass between us,' says Denise. 'I knew she understood.'

Four months after Brett died, Denise found herself in a stranger's home for the first time, offering support. 'I wanted to give back some of the goodness that had been given to me,' Denise explains. Paying it forward has now become a way of life, and though she's quick to point out that she's not a trained counsellor, she knows first-hand the benefits of talking through your grief with someone who can identify, exactly, with what you're experiencing.

Over the years since Brett's death, Denise has visited over 40 families, giving a shoulder to cry on, even fielding middle-of-the-night phone calls.

If there were a leader of the Club, it would be Denise. She is also the driving force behind the club's next

Managing grief

It's perfectly okay to weep and feel so angry that you could scream, throw something at the wall or punch your pillow. Even staying in bed or at home for the whole day is part of a person's grieving process. But endless moping and shutting yourself away won't help resolve this painful situation. Here's some advice from Worst Club in the World members on how to cope with losing a loved one:

- If you feel you are slipping into a dark hole, don't be alone. You need to talk to someone and know that you are not alone in your grief and pain. Get on the phone; call a family member, friend or even a helpline; go out and visit someone, and spend some time on www.theworstclubintheworld.org.
- Try not to come home to an empty house. If you have to, then make sure there's some background noise. A radio talk show is ideal 'mental popcorn'.
- Read a magazine or an inspirational self-help book.
- Meditation and visualisation work wonders, as does exercise – even the simple act of taking the dog for a walk.
- Do something to honour and commemorate your loved one's memory: plant a tree in a public place, donate a bench with their name on it to a park, school or a place they liked visiting. You could also donate a trophy for prizegiving at the school they attended.
- Don't be afraid to seek professional help. This is a much safer option than just taking prescription medication to numb the pain.

evolution: its online initiative. She is funding the non-profit website theworstclubintheworld.org, a virtual meeting place where families all over the world can support one another after their devastating, inconceivable loss.

We all grieve differently, and part of what the website does is guide the whole family through that process – not just the mother. Often, Denise says, the father's grief gets internalised while he tries to support the mom, but the cracks eventually start to emerge – he might spend more time at the office, in bars, or away from home, which could lead to his wife thinking he doesn't care.

It's also a dual blow for the grandparents, who have to cope with losing a beloved grandchild as well as seeing their own child suffer enormously. But it's the siblings who often get the worst of it, Denise feels – they might have survivor guilt, and they often end up parenting their parents to the point that their own sorrow and their problems take a backseat.

The website provides an outlet for all members of the family, and contains discussion groups, forums, blogs for writing memories and posting photographs, and survival tips for other families reeling in grief. 'Online' means there's no geographical gap between mourners. No matter where they are, their circumstances are the same – they are real people with a shared debilitating experience who are comforting each other. And, where professional counselling is needed, members are able to interact with psychologist Dr Jeanie Cavé.

'It's as user-friendly as Facebook, and there's a strong feeling of community,' Denise says. 'It's an excellent forum for people to exchange stories, feelings, suggestions and advice, and to establish new friendships. It's also ideal for people who are isolated, or not ready to let their feelings be known: for those who carry this burden of grief around with them without any support or release. If you want to get fully involved, that's encouraged too.'

Behind her genuinely warm smile and huge heart, Denise is a woman whose selflessness knows no bounds; the many harrowing tales she hears don't destroy her faith in people, they just make her want to make it all better. Denise is proud of The Worst Club in the World's new 'baby', their website, but she also feels a sense of relief: the club provides a haven in cyberspace, and it also means many more people can now be reached. ❖

Register free to become part of The Worst Club in the World community at www.theworstclubintheworld.org. If you wish to help or support in any way, please email Denise: dgoldin@telkomsa.net.