

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



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The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.

Welcome: The Nashville chapter meets at 3:00 P.M. on the second Sunday of each month in the HCA building on Park Plaza just north of Centennial Park off of 25th Avenue, North. Inside, you will see our sign and someone will greet you. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend.

April 8 Meeting Journaling

“I wish I had written that down” is a sentiment expressed by many bereaved parents long after the sharp painful days of early grief have faded into the past. The Compassionate Friends encourage bereaved parents to capture, through journaling, some of those feelings before they are lost.

Join us on April 8 as Nashville TCF Chapter member, Donna Reagan, facilitates a session on journaling. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn about journaling. Bring brief examples of your own writings to share with the group if you wish. Donna will also facilitate a sharing table on journaling.

Mothers and Fathers

*A mother’s love for children is a very special thing,
 Filled with all the many days that motherhood can bring.
 Days when children misbehave and try your patience so,
 Days when they are sweet and kind and let their loving
 feelings show.*

*A father’s love for children is very strong and pure.
 There’s no problem that a child may have which a father
 cannot cure.*

*A parent’s love for children is a never-ending thing.
 It lasts from day to day and year to year, through
 summer, winter, fall, and spring.
 That special love continues still when someone’s child
 has died,
 for the feelings that a parent has are impossible to hide.*

*Jean Hotopp
 TCF, Fox Valley, IL*

Phone Friends

We have all experienced the pain of losing a child. We understand and would like to listen. If you can’t reach one of us, feel free to call another person on this list.

- Accidental Death**Mike and Paula Childers
646-1333
- AIDS**.....Joyce Soward
754-5210
- Illness**.....David and Peggy Gibson
356-1351
- Infant**.....Patti Drexler
834-8892
- SIDS**.....Kris Thompson
931 486-9088
- Murder/ Suicide**.....Joe Ladd
361-7996
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley
237-9972



I cleaned out the garage after he died—
 And I found our beach ball...
 I couldn’t let the air out of it.
 It’s his breath in there.

*Carol Burnett
 In the film *Laundromat**

There is a kind of release that comes directly to those who have undergone an ordeal and who know, having survived it, that they are equal to all of life’s occasions.

*Lewis Mumford
 TCF, Northern NY Chapter*

BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

Survivors of Suicide

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings and receiving their helpful newsletter, you may call the Crisis Center at 615 244-7444.

Sharing

Sharing is a community organization interested in helping parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a newborn infant. The parent support group meets the second Thursday evening of each month at 7 p.m. in the Administrative Board Room at The Women's Hospital at Centennial Medical Center located at 2221 Murphy Avenue (between 22nd and 23rd Ave).

Alive Hospice Support Group For Bereaved Parents

The first Thursday of each month, an ongoing support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 615 963-4674. For general grief (loss of parents, adult siblings, etc.) call 615 963-4732, leave a message and a counselor will return your call.

Times for TCF Videos

Do you have a question about what you're feeling? This informative thirty-minute program about grief and The Compassionate Friends can be seen on Channel 19 (Community Access Channel) in the Nashville area. Two videos are shown, with a break between them giving information about the Nashville chapter. The program may be seen on Mondays at 2:00 P.M., Tuesdays at 8:30 A.M., Wednesdays at 10:00 A.M., Thursdays at 7:30 A.M., Fridays at 11:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., and Saturdays at 10:30 A.M.

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Religion—A Continuing Theme

The Principles of The Compassionate Friends state that TCF reaches out to all bereaved parents across the artificial barriers of religion, race, economic class, or ethnic group. Further, TCF espouses no specific religious or philosophical ideology. Despite our nondenominational status, many writers indicate that they have found comfort in their faith, and some have shared their anger and loss of faith. The opinions and beliefs expressed in letters, articles and poetry are those of the contributors.

The Birthday Table

In the month of your child's birthday, a table will be provided at our meeting where you can share photographs, mementos, your child's favorite snack or a birthday cake, a bouquet of flowers—anything you'd like to bring. We want to know your child better, so please take advantage of this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful day of your child's birth and for us to become better acquainted.

The “Let Us Remember Them” Listings

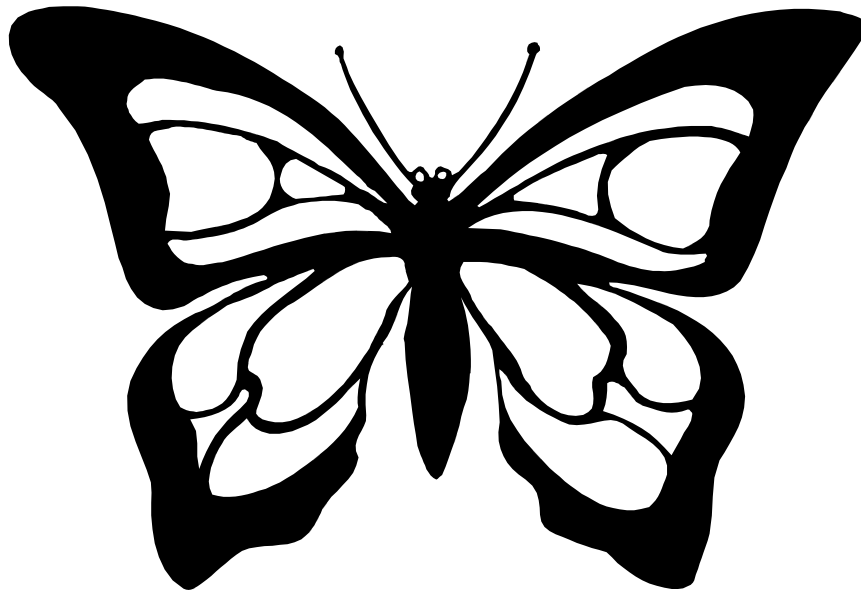
At your first TCF meeting you are asked to sign a registration card that gives us permission to add your child to the “Let Us Remember Them” list on page 3 in the monthly newsletter. If you have not been able to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed, please let us know, printing the exact way you'd like your child's name to appear, the child's birth and death dates, and the parents' names as they should be listed. You may drop us a note at TCF, P.O. Box 50833, Nashville, TN 37205, or email us at tcf@tcfnashville.org. We'll be glad to include your child's name. You need notify us only one time.

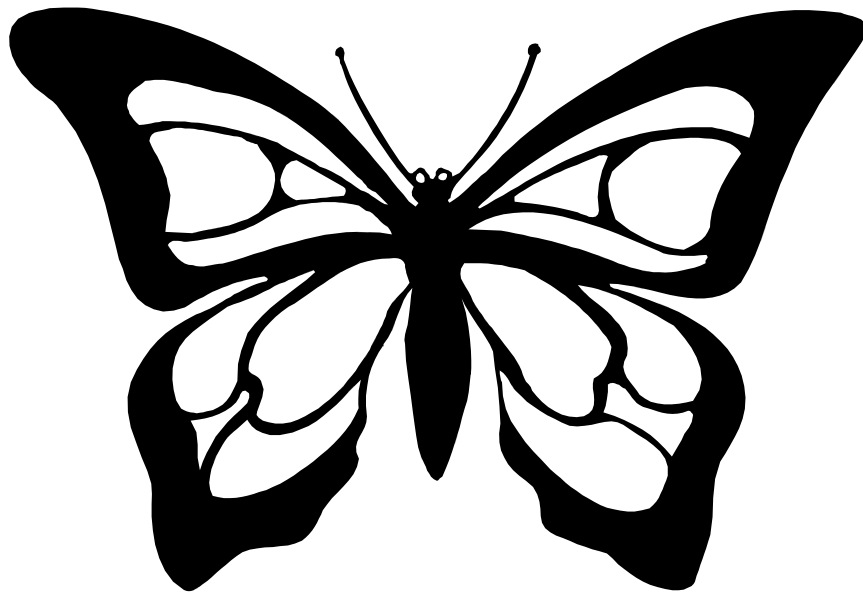
TCF Website

Go to the TCF Website at www.compassionatefriends.org to find a wealth of information about TCF and grief—poetry and articles, chat rooms, grief in the news, other chapter web sites, including Nashville, and numerous other resources. Check it out.

Let Us Remember Them

In the month of their births, the month of their deaths—and always, with love





Bryan Houstrup and Joe Philpott at Allegra Print & Imaging, 601 Grassmere Park, donate the printing, collating and stapling of this newsletter each month as a gift to the families of TCF. Deanna Brown and her family label, sort and mail the newsletter in loving memory of their son, Marcus Dean Brown. We are very grateful for these people and their generosity to all of us.

Kinship

*Met my fine friend Elmer at the ramp of the interstate,
To head down the road toward the country club gate.
A perfect weather day for this part of West Tennessee
As we planned to golf and a few fellow bankers see.*

*But I saw one I didn't want to see and told him so,
And he said he understood.
He said, I wanted to call you a million times or so,
And I said I understood.*

*David had lost his child of thirteen only nine years past,
As I had lost my child of fourteen only nine months last.
Then my name was called out to tee up next at the line.
Without a word we embraced in a frozen moment in time.*

*No thought of what other men saw in what we had to share,
Without a word, we said good-bye with only an empty stare.
Our joint loss of child goes beyond the ordinary friendship
And transforms itself into an unspoken, unwanted kinship.*

*Jere Williamson
TCF, Nashville, TN*

Journey

*I lived awhile like one who dwells
Always in that dark world apart
Where loneliness and pain rule all
And memories can pierce the heart.*

*It is an awesome place, and vast;
Anger and guilt are mountains there
I've climbed, and struggled on through seas
of tears, regrets, loss and despair.*

*Although I thought I came alone,
Love followed even there, I learned.
Time, too, became my friend until
Hope, faith, and at last—joy returned.*

*The world of grief had much to teach
In recompense for what I lost
I value all those lessons, but
You must not ask how high their cost.*

*Mary W. Helms
TCF, Morris, NJ*

Daydreams

*Once a day and sometimes more
You knock upon my daydream door
And I say warmly come right in
I'm glad you're here with me again.*

*Then we sit down and have a chat
Recalling this, discussing that
Until some task that I must do
Forces me away from you.*

*Reluctantly I say good-by
Smiling with a little sigh
For though my daydreams bring you near
I wish that you were really here.*

*But what reality cannot change
My dreams and wishes can arrange
And through my wishing you'll be brought
To me each day; A happy thought.*

*Stephen A. Wright
TCF, Champaign-Urbana, IL*

Sometimes

*Sometimes,
Memories are like rain showers
Sprinkling down upon you
Catching you unaware.
And then they are gone,
Leaving you warm and refreshed.*

*Sometimes,
Memories are like thunderstorms
Beating down upon you,
Relentless in their downpour
And then they will cease,
Leaving you tired and bruised.*

*Sometimes
Memories are like shadows
Sneaking up behind you,
Following you around.
Then they disappear,
Leaving you sad and confused.*

*Sometimes
Memories are like comforters
Surrounding you with warmth,
Luxuriously abundant
And sometimes they stay,
Wrapping you in contentment.*

*Marcia Updyke
TCF, St. Louis, MO*

Death Ended Your Child's Life, But Not His or Her Relationship to the Family

In 1983, I wrote a two-part article for the [National TCF] Newsletter called "Commitment to Survival" in which I described parent bereavement as a complex process that includes mothers and fathers maintaining a relationship with their dead child. Specifically, I wrote: "Death ended your child's life but not his or her relationship to the family" and "You give up the old person who was physically connected to a now deceased child and make different connections with your child who has died."

I received many letters describing how bereaved parents had been criticized and even ridiculed by others for expressing their continuing love and connection to their dead child. You told me you copied the articles and sent them to friends, relatives and people in the work place to let them know that it was "normal" to want to talk about your child. You also told me that in your opinion, maintaining a sacred bond to your dead child was vital to your well being.

From 1983 to the present, I have conducted a number of studies with both bereaved parents and siblings. Findings from these studies indicate the ongoing connection you have to your dead child is a catalyst and an enduring energy which sustains one through the most intense time of grief and gives survivors the courage to face loss that bereaved parents and their living children must endure. The deep pain of grief comes with a deep introspective searching for answers to agonizing questions about why your child's death had to be part of your life and about your shattered dreams.

Research shows that this period of grief is characterized by feelings of hopelessness, profound sadness, aching loneliness and a belief that you will not and cannot ever be happy again. Physical reaction may include fast heartbeats, shortness of breath, and a sense of fear or panic that more bad things will happen to other loved ones. Many bereaved parents expressed feeling angry, blaming themselves and others for their child's death. You spoke of being preoccupied with endless thoughts and feelings about the circumstances surrounding his or her death and the difficulty of coping and adapting to your new, permanently changed lives. You said that this was a time of "feeling confusion about who you were, not knowing yourself anymore and feeling detached from others" and how these thoughts and feelings demanded and used up the little bit of energy you had each morning.

Grief work is infinitely private, painful work. Part of you died with your child and now you must struggle with letting go of your old self as you endure the unknown of who you will become. One newly bereaved parent described this process by saying, "I liked who I was before my child died. I don't like who I am now. I barely know myself."

In the beginning of grief you were consumed with the myriad reminders of your child's life and death. As time passed, you found occasional peaceful respites from grief as the episodes of deep grieving gradually became less frequent and intense. Finally, you described knowing you were having more good days than bad. This marked the beginning of leaving behind some of the suffering and sorrow of intense grief and having the energy available for keeping and cherishing the love and connection you have to your dead child. Surviving the struggle with death and finding life again renews energy and is manifest in your becoming stronger and better able to cope with your loss. You gain a realization of having become more tolerant of yourself and others and becoming a part of life again.

The hardest work of becoming a survivor is learning to live without the physical presence of your dead child while simultaneously learning to live with his or her emotional and spiritual presence. You find that meaning in your life is derived from your relationship to those you love, including your dead child. The legacy your child has left is a love that transcends time and space.

Nancy S. Hogan, RN, PhD
Dr. Hogan is an Associate Professor at the University of Miami
(Reprinted from the TCF National Newsletter)

A Family Copes With Tragedy

Most people think that after a reasonable period of mourning, families pick up the pieces of their lives and go on. I remember a friend asking me, three months after my son's death, if everything was back to normal. Those who haven't been through this experience cannot comprehend that life as we know it will never exist again. There won't be "normal" years for parents whose world has been devastated. Their dreams of raising children have vanished forever. Our surviving children have lost a part of themselves—the part they shared with their sibling. One daughter said to me, "I don't want him to stop living. I don't want to go on with my life without him being part of it and growing along with me. I don't want to leave him behind. I need his caring and sharing."

How would we live? How would we manage? Nothing could ever replace what we have lost. Since my son's death, I don't make long-range plans anymore or take anything for granted. I live each day as it unfolds, for I have learned that everything I know or have known can be shattered in an instant. We did seek help in different ways, through counseling, writing and group therapy. As a result of our tragedy, our family is closer than we have ever been. Any anger or frustration we harbored about one another has disappeared because of its comparative triviality. We've shared feelings never before expressed and emphasized our love for each other, over and over again. This we will do forever more.

Nancy Doss
TCF, Houston, TX

Daffodil Time

Sometimes in our grief we become workaholics. We rush, rush, and rush, never stopping to "smell the roses." We are afraid that if we stop, or even slow down just a little, all those memories and thoughts of our dead child will come flying back, and we'll drop down to that black hole of grief again—so we don't stop or even slow down a little.

When I was in the fifth grade we had to memorize some poetry. I still remember lines from the poem "Daffodils": "*When oft upon my couch I lie, in vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye, Which is the bliss of solitude.*" For a couple of years after my daughter's death I could not, I would not allow myself to get into a vacant or pensive mood, because it wasn't daffodils that flashed upon my inward eye, it was always my daughter who was there—and there was no bliss.

Things change. Time helped to heal the raw open wound. Now, after four years, I can allow myself to have those vacant or pensive moods, and I can see the daffodils along with my daughter. My bliss is bittersweet, sometimes more bitter than sweet, usually more sweet than bitter, but it is bliss as those memories flash upon my inward eye. I have accepted that which cannot be changed. I do NOT like it; I have accepted that she is dead. As I lie there, in vacant or in pensive mood, I am careful that those memories that I allow to flash upon my inward eye are the happy ones, not the sad or unhappy ones. They are more like roses than daffodils, though. They do have thorns that hide just below the beauty. But I can do it now. I can take time to "smell the roses." And so can you. Try it. In small doses at first, then larger ones. You owe it to yourself—and to your family—and to your child.

Tom Crouthamel
TCF, Sarasota, FL

Life's Bargain

Life made us a bargain when we first came into this world: That as surely as we live, someday we will die; as surely as we laugh, someday we will cry. All of the assets that life and health and joy bring are balanced on earth by hate, disease, and sorrow. Our sorrow is the price we pay for all the love and joy we took so freely. We wouldn't weep such bitter tears if our laughter had not been so sweet for years. If the price I pay for loving David is the pain and sorrow I now have, I still think I got a bargain to have had him for thirteen years. If the only way to avoid the pain is to also avoid the pleasure of loving someone, then love with all your heart and soul, and mourn their loss the same, and count your life a bargain for having loved.

Dale Trevathan
TCF, Tulsa OK

The Stream

I went to the river to meditate. The river was wide, clean, and flowing rapidly. I picked up a tree limb and broke it into four pieces of approximately equal size, one to represent each member of my family, including my son, who had recently died. As I tossed each piece into midstream, I silently named it as it began to drift.

My 19-year-old daughter's piece drifted off first, but quickly was channeled by a crosswind, and promptly returned to the shore.

My wife's piece started, then drifted past some rocks and eddies, and after traveling fifty yards, also returned to shore.

Mine started slowly, made it past some rocks, whirlpools, and an entanglement of logs, and after traveling 250 yards, it also returned to shore.

But the piece that represented my son drifted directly to the swift mainstream, accelerated, and floated off on pure, clean water to points unknown in the glistening and gleaming light.

Ed Kuzela
TCF, Atlanta, GA