

# THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



P. O. Box 50833 • Nashville, TN 37205 • (615) 356-4TCF(4823) • Nashville Website: [www.tcfnashville.org](http://www.tcfnashville.org)

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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 25<sup>th</sup> 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 12 Meeting Topic

Four of our TCF members will be reviewing books from our chapter library pertaining to grief. The Nashville TCF Chapter has a wonderful selection of materials, so please join us as we explore a few of the titles available. We will have our regular small sharing groups following this program.



## 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
- Drug/Alcohol Overdose**.....Ed Pyle  
712-3245
- 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

**Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. Feelings can be overwhelming. We have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Please attend two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. There are no dues or fees. If you choose, you need not speak a word at a meeting. We are an international, non-denominational group, offering support and information to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We Need Not Walk Alone.**

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **Newsletter Deadlines**

In order for donations and contributed poems or articles to be included in the following month's newsletter, we must receive them no later than the Wednesday after the chapter meeting. Any donations received after that date will be included in the next month's issue. Please send them to TCF, P. O. Box 50833, Nashville, TN 37205.

### **Religion and TCF**

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.

## **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.

### **TCF Video on Channel 19**

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. and Fridays at 11:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.

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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.

## How Dare It Be Spring

My daughter, Colleen, died on March 29th and was buried April 1st, 1989. I noticed, through my haze, that spring was coming and I got so angry! I saw the first shoots of flowers in my garden, something that I had always tended so carefully, and I didn't care. I never even picked one of those lovely, fragrant lilies of the valley that grew just outside my front door. I don't think that I could even smell them.

It seemed to me an insult to see mothers pushing their children in strollers on those first warm days. How could they do that when I no longer could? How dare kites dance on spring breezes? I remember coming out of the hospital the morning that she died and seeing a jogger at the lake across the street. It seemed so strange that he could continue his routine when the world had just fallen apart. Just seeing the sun shining isolated that spring, seeing everyone else enjoying nature at its most beautiful. It hurt so much! I couldn't make myself do any of the things that had given me so much pleasure in springs of the past, it was just too painful.

The next year I felt a little better, but my heart still wasn't in spring activities, I forced myself to do things for my surviving daughter's sake. Those first walks felt so alien without a stroller to push that I often had to cut walks short. I did pick my flowers but they didn't seem quite as sweet as I remembered them. I no longer hated other moms who walked their children; I just avoided looking at them.

Now, it is my third spring. It still hurts, but it no longer seems like spring was invented just to torment me. I look forward to working in my yard and garden this year. I take walks and my arms don't ache for a stroller to push. I will always love and miss Colleen. I still think about her every day, but the pain no longer overpowers everything else.

For those of you, who are experiencing your first spring without your child, hold on. It really does get better. I remember very well those words at my first several TCF meetings. I listened politely, all the while thinking, "But you don't know how horrible MY pain is. Somehow mine is worse and I'll never get better!" You probably think that too. Even if you don't believe us right now, you've got to hang on, it DOES get better!

Kathy McCormick  
TCF, Lower Bucks, PA



*Find a little time for spring,  
Even if your days are troubled.  
Let a little sunshine in –  
Let your memories be doubled.*

*Take a little time to see  
All the things your child was seeing –  
And your tears will help your heart  
Find a better time for being.*

Sascha

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## A Gift of Hope

Human pain does not let go of its grip at one point in time. Rather, it works its way out of our consciousness over time. There is a season of tranquility. A season of hope.

But seasons do not follow one another in a lockstep manner. At least not for those in crisis. The winters and springs of one's life have lifted, but the next day they have returned. One moment we can smile, but a few hours after, the tears emerge. It is true that as we take two steps forward in our journey, we may take one or more steps backward.

But when one affirms that the spring thaw will arrive, the winter winds seem to lose some of their punch.

*A Gift of Hope: How We Survive Our Tragedies*  
Robert Venigna

## For Brothers and Sisters

*A page of poems and articles written by and for the siblings of beloved children*

### ***A Brother Means So Much***

*The gift of a brother  
Is a precious treasure.  
It is the love, tears, and  
Joys of a friendship that  
Has unbreakable bonds.*

*The beauty of a brother  
Cannot be described,  
Measured or defined.  
For it is a wonderful legacy  
That will always be carried  
In a sister's heart.*

*Jill Hricik  
TCF, Pittsburg, PA*

### ***On Your Birthday***

*I wrote this date this morning,  
Paused,  
And felt the room grow cold.  
It always does  
When I remember  
All of it –  
Down to the last petal  
Tossed by winds  
Above the upturned earth  
This time the chill  
Does not leave  
So easily  
It would have been your birthday.  
Soon, I shall be  
As old as you will ever be.*

*Wanda M. Trawick  
TCF, Acme, PA*

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### ***A Love Letter To My Children***

**Y**ou are great kids. You have always been great kids, although I haven't always been a great mom. After your brother died, I was hardly any kind of mom at all. I was so lost in my own grief, I wasn't there for you. You were bewildered, scared, and hurt, but I couldn't seem to reach out to you beyond my own pain. I was like a day-old helium balloon drifting along, not sure whether my place was with you or with your brother.

I didn't drift for long. You grabbed my string and yanked me back! The yowls and shrieks still ring in my ears. "Mom, all my underwear is dirty!" or "Mom, I'm starved!" or "Mom, he punched me!" Your brother was being cared for by his heavenly Father, but you needed your earthly mother. It was your need that saved my life.

I'm sorry that your brother's death robbed you of your childhood. While other kids fretted about what to wear or which movie to see, you wondered when the tears and sadness would ever end and if we would be a family again. If I could have shielded you from such great sorrow, I would have, but I couldn't.

Your lives were changed forever, and the future was uncertain, but you kept going. You supported and inspired me as we traveled that rocky road of grief together. You talked about your brother when no one else would say his name. You kept his picture in your rooms and proudly pointed out to friends, "This was my brother." You used his things, but gently. You reminded me of the cute, funny things he said and did. You included him in your bedtime prayers. You still do. Someday I believe you will tell your own children about your brother. Thank you for keeping his memory alive.

Because of the tragedy you experienced, you are more mature than other kids your age. You possess strength and courage beyond your years. You are resilient; little things don't get you down. Best of all, you are kind, sensitive, and compassionate to others. I adore you. You are my life.

Love,  
Mom

Patricia Dyson  
TCF, Beaumont, TX

## Cemetery

Are you one of those people who have a need to go to the cemetery often. The non-bereaved frown on that as a rule. Many people feel there is something morbid about those visits; that you are obsessing. Unless you know the pain of losing someone you love better than yourself, you can't understand that need.

Some people need to visit every day; others go now and then, and still some never go back once the funeral is over. There are no rules. If it makes people uncomfortable when you make your cemetery visits, go alone. Don't feel you need to get anybody's permission or approval.

It is important for you to know that how often you go to the cemetery has absolutely nothing to do with the length and depth of your expression of your grief. It is also important to know that you have the right to do whatever comforts you. It may not seem right to your sister, your brother-in-law or your friends, but that's their problem. If you try to please everybody by the things you do and say, you'll find you are not taking care of *your* needs – and there aren't more important ones right now. You won't always require visits this often, and when you no longer feel this urge to go so often, don't feel guilty. It just means you are getting better. Accept it as that, and move forward with your life when you are able. For right now, do what makes *you* feel better.

Mary Cleckley,  
TCF, Atlanta, GA



### *Images of Spring*

*Sweet honeysuckle,  
Flowing with nectar,  
The sweet aroma of your purity  
Blows over the grave where she lies sleeping,  
Sleeping beneath the sycamore's scaly bark.*

*Green grass,  
Waving in soft breezes,  
Cover the scars of cruelty and hurt  
With your blades day by day.*

*Spring rain,  
Showering the air with your freshness,  
Cleanse her wounds and wash away her tears.*

*Wild flowers  
Grow there.  
She too was a tender plant,  
Untamed and beautiful.*

Lourene Mackey  
TCF, Murfreesboro, TN

### *Just for Today*

*Just for today  
I will be happy!  
Just for today  
I will search for and find  
A new beauty to gladden my heart  
As in the days of my long ago.*

*Just for today  
I will put yesterday with its pain  
behind me  
And bask in the warmth of today.  
I will lift up my eyes to sunshine,  
Let my fingertips touch  
The glad rays of a new day.  
My peace shall not be of yesterday or  
tomorrow,  
My peace shall be of today!*

Mary Wildman  
TCF, Moro, IL

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## Hope

It is the gift of hope which reigns supreme in the attributes of The Compassionate Friends.

Hope that all is not lost. Hope that life can still be worth living and meaningful.

Hope that the pain of loss will become less acute and, above all else,  
the hope that we do not walk alone, that we are understood.

The gift of hope is the greatest gift that we can give to those who mourn.

Reverend Simon Stephens  
TCF Founder

## Spring is for the Birds

I sat at the kitchen table, looking out at the dazzling spring day. It was the kind of breathtakingly beautiful day that brings a lump to your throat and a song to your lips. Spring was my favorite time of the year, but I couldn't have been more miserable. Only five months before, the joy had fled from my life when my precious son Blake died.

All at once, a ridiculous verse from my childhood popped into my head:

Spring is sprung,  
The grass is riz;  
I wonder where  
The flowers is.

Like the poet, I wondered where the flowers were—oh, they were here all right, but not for me. It seemed that the whole world had burst into bloom around me, but grief-stricken as I was, the glory of the awakening earth only brought me pain. I studiously ignored the startling greenness of the trees. I averted my eyes from the bushes laden with bright azalea blooms. I considered each new bud, each tiny sprout, a personal affront. Where was my renewal? Where was my hope? How could I celebrate spring while winter still raged in my heart?

I continued to gaze out the window, knowing that I had plenty to do but not having the energy to move. Suddenly a saucy, fat robin hopped onto the deck. "Just what I need," I thought bitterly. "Another sign of spring." At last I was motivated to drag myself over to the sink and tackle the mountain of dirty dishes.

The bird was back the next day. "Shoo," I growled through the glass. "Go back where you came from!" Ignoring me, he hopped cheerfully across the yard, stopping to peck the earth in search of an especially delectable bug. He was so perky, it made me sick.

That night, heavy rains brought a cold front, and the temperature dipped into the forties. The next morning he was there, chipper as ever. "Dumb bird," I hissed. "Don't you know how cold it is?" The realization that I was talking to a bird made me question my sanity—once again. The robin came back the next day and the next. The following day, however, he didn't return. I was torn between feeling sad that he was gone and being embarrassed that I had been looking for him. The next day he reappeared, bringing with him two cousins, an uncle, a nephew, and his wife's good-for-nothing brother Earl. "Now you're ganging up on me!" I shouted, as memories of an old movie drifted through my addled brain.

At that moment, I experienced an unfamiliar contorting of my face. It was a smile. As a little of the heaviness lifted from my heart, I realized that though I couldn't delight in the season as I usually did, there would be other springs. Beauty and joy would someday return to my life, as surely as the first timid shoots emerge from the frozen earth. As for those pesky robins, there was just one thing left for me to do. I went to the pantry to get some bread to feed my friends.

Patricia Dyson  
TCF, Beaumont, TX

