

# 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.*

## Ask-It Basket Scheduled for Meeting

### April 11

Bereaved parents are often plagued with questions regarding their grief. This meeting will provide an especially good opportunity for those of us who are farther along in our grief to give the benefit of our experience to those who are just beginning their sad journey. If there is something bothering you, bring your questions for the basket. We invite our old-timers to come and lend a hand.



### April

*(Time for jesting,  
time for laughter?)*

*And if you are not ready,  
not yet,  
to remember something  
that makes you laugh,*

*tell April to be patient.  
Take your time.*

*Sascha*

## 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  
727-3284
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley  
237-9972
- Drug/Alcohol Overdose**.....Ed Pyle  
712-3245

NO WINTER LASTS FOREVER;

NO SPRING SKIPS ITS TURN.

Hal Borland  
*Sundial of the Seasons*  
(Lippincott)

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **What is the Yellow Slip?**

Please return your yellow renewal slip. After a year on the newsletter mailing list, those names that were added in that month of a previous year, will receive a yellow half-sheet asking that their subscription be renewed. This is simply to keep our mailing list and the information in it current. If you do not send the yellow slip back, we must assume that you no longer want the newsletter. Although you are given an opportunity to make a voluntary donation, there is no cost involved in your subscription. The newsletter is our gift to you for as long as you wish to receive it. You may request that your name be returned to the active list at any time simply by calling 615-356-4TCF (4823).

### **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.

### **The "Children Remembered" Listings**

If you are unable to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed on page 3 in The Children Remembered, please let us know, printing the exact way you'd like the child's name to appear, the child's birth and death dates, and the parents' names as they should be listed. You may call the database manager at 615 356-1351, drop us a note at TCF, P.O. Box 50833, Nashville, TN 37205, or email us at davidg14@bellsouth.net. We'll be glad to include them. You need to contact us only once, unless any of your information changes.



## **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.

## Dealing with Grief: A Sibling Viewpoint

Two things happened to me on January 11, 1992. I lost my brother to death, and I lost my parents to grief. My dad, the one who seemed to always have the answer to my questions, the “rock” in the family, the one whose job was to fix everything, completely lost it. The fear, anger, and shock in his eyes when told that my brother had died are engraved into my memory. He fell limp in the arms of my mother and me in the emergency room at UCLA medical center. This was the first time I had ever seen my parents lose control. At that moment our roles switched.

“I’ll take them,” I said to the nurse as she handed me a bag labeled “EDLER.” It was the personal belongings of my brother. I quietly took them and placed them in my car. For the next three months, I seemed to make many of the decisions. It was not a courageous leader rising up to the occasion. I was the least common denominator. My parents, although they tried, could not help me. They were trying to deal with the tremendous grief themselves.

For this reason, I put off dealing with Mark’s death for many months. I cried and felt sad, but never addressed the issue. My friends were concerned and asked how I was doing. But no one, unless you have been there, really wants to hear the true answers. Mark was the only other person in the world who was a combination of my mom and dad. My friends could not relate nor would I want them to. I would never wish this upon anyone. But this left me alone to deal with it and I chose to put it off.

After three months I met a gentleman at a family retreat with a group of which my dad was a part. Kevin had lost his brother to suicide about nine months earlier. He was farther along in his “coping” than I was. I could talk to him about Mark, mention Mark’s name and share stories without making the whole room uncomfortable about the subject.

I saw someone who was dealing with it and it gave me hope. There is a certain vocabulary that you learn after going through this that no book, no story, and no amount of explanation can do justice. I don’t talk about certain things with my friends because I do not have the time or energy to explain (or try to explain) the many feelings I am having. Kevin understood. He had the vocabulary.

This was the first step into healing. I came to grips with the reality of my new life—different than the one before, but there was no going back. At this point, I went on autopilot. I remember many events of the three years following the death. My girlfriend and I broke up. My parents changed houses. I went through the many firsts, but just kept moving forward. I was not depressed, however. My lows were not very low. But my highs were not very high.

I became involved with The Compassionate Friends sibling group of our local chapter in the third year. I did it half out of responsibility to my parents and half out of the knowledge that if I was running the meeting, then I was in control of how much sharing I needed to put into it. Kind of a control thing. To my surprise the meetings have become so beneficial to my healing that I am surprised at myself. By sharing with others, I feel that I help them and in turn myself. Many feelings, thoughts, or emotions that I may have thought were just mine, I have found are universal with others. After three years I began to come “out of the valley.” I can only say that by looking back. Hindsight has allowed me to see my steps of healing. I stepped into the role of being strong for our family because I felt that was best. Many others I have talked to mention a similar reaction. Your parents are barely able to deal with their own grief. The last thing you want to do is bring more pain on them, so, you don’t share with your parents.

Last July at The Compassionate Friends conference, many parents walked up to me and asked, “How do I know if my son (daughter) is dealing with this? I am concerned since they do not tell me anything.”

“You don’t know,” I answered, “and neither do I, but unless you see something obviously dangerous, they are dealing with it in their own way at their own speed and you may not be a part of their grieving.”

I now have a different outlook on life. It is precious. I feel that in my new life I am closer to my parents. Each one of us has to live our lives 1/3 better in Mark’s memory. I value my friends and time more. I can handle stress much better. Just think of the alternative. I have become a better person by helping others. I like the new person I have become.

*I would trade it all in a second!*

*Rick Edler  
TCF, LA/South Bay, CA*

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*The heart knows many songs,  
and sings them well.  
The heart knows images  
and sees them, even  
when life is much too dark  
to light the eyes.  
The heart knows many songs,  
we cannot hear.*



*The heart is wise.*

Sascha

## Memories

*Memories are flowers growing in the heart.  
Flowers picked on happy days  
That time arranges in bouquets  
To warm the hearts in tender ways  
By feelings they impart...  
Memories are pictures taken through the years.  
Pictures of a smiling face,  
A happy time, a favorite place...  
These pleasures time cannot erase.  
They are kept as souvenirs.*

Laura Rogers  
TCF, Northfield, NJ

## Our Act of Love

Grief over the death of a child is the hardest work that most of us will ever do. While we all wish for the pain to stop, we need to remember that we grieve intensely because we loved so intensely. It is unrealistic to expect the grief to ever totally go away because the love we have for our child will never go away. Our grief is an act of love and is nothing for which we should be ashamed.

Elaine Grier  
TCF, Atlanta, GA

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## When Healing Hurts—Do We Really Want to Get Well?

The physiological process of healing within the human body can be very painful, depending on the severity of the illness. In an attempt to relieve the symptoms of disease, various procedures create their own amount of discomfort.

Psychological healing, on the other hand, is vastly different: as broken hearts mend slowly, as one attempts to put the pieces of his life back together after a crisis, he may discover that most of the pieces are missing, while others are fragmented and scarred beyond recognition. These “pieces” will no longer “fall into place.”

The battle within the human psyche is an all-consuming one: the pain is intense, leaving ugly scars etched deeply into the soul and invisible to the eye. In the face of adversity one must battle the enemy with a fierce determination to survive at all costs. Hence the mind will seek ways to shield itself from further onslaught.

The dictionary defines defense mechanisms as those reactions which serve to protect the self against something harmful, whether the threat is real or imagined. These defense mechanisms are often unconscious behaviors used to resolve or conceal conflicts. They are normal responses to painful and often abnormal problems which occur; but in excess, these defense mechanisms can become unhealthy and pathological.

Defense mechanisms provide a safety net for our sanity. They “cushion” the blow between actual crisis and continuation of life. They permit us to slowly absorb the reality of the situation or loss and the changes within us that the crisis will require. In this healthy and God-given way, pain is confronted, dealt with and dissolved without overwhelming us.

When a person refuses to confront his pain and allow its expression, then the normal use of defense mechanisms break down and become unhealthy. Pain does not cease to exist. It will not lie hidden within the ruins of a broken heart indefinitely; eventually it will demand release. The explosion of that original pain and grief may not be in any logical or recognizable form when it finally surfaces.

Pain, when not confronted, changes over the years and may resurface in numerous ways. Grief unattended may later disguise itself in the form of anger, resentments, or chronic depression.

The loss of a loved one and the cherished dreams of their future may develop into very real physical illnesses, such as migraine headaches, ulcers, diverticulitis, or other maladies. In order to remain healthy, we must choose to deal with our pain and not ignore it or push it away. We cannot, physically or emotionally, afford to pretend that our grief does not exist.

We must allow the tears to flow and provide healing. We must verbalize disappointments and anger in order to prevent the inner rage. We must allow our minds the freedom to “remember” and give our hearts permission to break. There can be no release unless we “feel” the loneliness and isolation, the confusion and the pain. It is only when we embrace the nightmares that they will disappear. Sometimes we have to hurt in order to be healed—but the choice is ours and the question remains: do we really want to be well?

Debby Grogan, R.N.  
TCF, Atlanta, GA

## “How Many Children Do You Have?”

Shortly after my son died, I realized that this question was going to be bothersome. Each time someone asked me about the number of children, I struggled with the answer. I soon decided I was not going to let this become a problem. I thought about how I felt about my choice of answers and chose the one that met my needs in the beginning. I had a surviving daughter, but I know for me to say “one” would seem a denial on my part that my son had lived, and that wasn’t right for me.

In the beginning, when I still needed to tell people that my son had died, I would tell in detail about his accident when the question about how many children came my way. As the months passed and I had told the story enough times, I found that it wasn’t necessary to go into detail any more. My needs had changed, and I rethought my answer.

Now, when I am asked how many children I have, I answer, “I had two children.” The criteria I used in determining if I go any further is whether the person asking is going to be a continuing part of my life. If so, they need to know about my son, and I tell them. Otherwise we will be constantly dancing around the fact. Better, I think, to have it out in the open.

If, on the other hand, the person asking is simply passing through my life, then I feel no need to go any further than “I had two children.” Seldom does anyone catch the “HAD” instead of “have,” and pursue it. If they do, or if they ask follow up questions about ages or professions, I tell them first that my 26 year old son was killed in an accident. Then I tell them about my daughter who is alive and doing well, this gives them a choice. They can either acknowledge my son’s death and ask questions or they can ignore that and ask about my daughter. I am comfortable either way. If they are embarrassed, I see that as their problem. Just to show you how different we all are, however, my husband feels comfortable answering, “We have one child.” That is what is right for him and that is what he should say. You decide what is right for you – then Say it. That way you defuse that powerful question and it loses its ability to traumatize. Don't let it be a problem.

Mary Cleckley,  
TCF Atlanta, GA

## A Yes for Spring

*Crocuses, robins, light breezes and warmth  
Signal the coming of Spring.  
Already my neighbor measures his lawn  
With the spreader to encourage  
Green grass and new life.  
But not for me. No, not for me.*

*How dare that robin build  
A nest in my apple tree!  
Can't she see that here  
Winter still shrouds the house—  
That storms still howl within?*

*I do not yearn for Spring.  
There is no new awakening  
Or joy within my heart.  
I cling to winter's dreary cold  
For it echoes the cry of my soul.*



*And yet that bird builds!  
Now comes her mate to add  
A ribbon fallen from the Christmas rubble.  
Together they stack and weave  
Until a strong new nest appears.*

*Was last year's nest torn asunder  
By winter's brutal wrath?  
Were the nestlings caught  
By neighbor's greedy cat?  
Whatever: robin sits upon the new nest.*

*I watch the robins and long to stay in winter,  
To postpone the pain of rebuilding.  
But I cannot—I must not.  
Spring is coming even here.  
Crocuses grow in my yard, too.  
And for me—especially for me.*

Marcia F. Alig  
TCF, Hightstown, NJ

## The Shirt in the Clothes Hamper

The shirt was at the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper when he died. I found it there when I got around to doing wash sometime after the funeral. Life must go on in spite of what happens to us, and the wash is part of ordinary day-to-day life.

It was natural for the shirt to be there; I'd done his wash since he was born twenty-one years before. I stood and looked at it and decided to leave it there.

Year after year, wash after wash, I left it there. This was a symbol of normal life. My life wasn't normal any more, and I left it there to sort of hang on to the past, I guess. It gave me comfort to see such an ordinary, normal thing as one of his shirts in the dirty clothes when my life was so extraordinary now.

One by one such 'hangings on' are done away with as we slowly reenter life's mainstream again. We know the time is right for these habits to go, when we don't grieve for them when they happen. And they must happen, just as we must move on eventually.

One day in a fit of neatness my daughter did the wash, and she washed the shirt. It must have been five years after her brother died. I felt a tiny surprise when I saw the shirt hanging clean in the closet, but I didn't feel the sorrow or even disappointment. The time seemed to be right for the shirt to leave the dirty clothes hamper. A simple thing, but this was a symbol of progress of sorts.

I'm glad no one rushed me--I would have resented it. I was allowed this simple idiosyncrasy until it was natural to give it up. Left alone I probably never would have removed the shirt, just left it there, never really knowing why. But when this happened, I knew I was getting better. Finally, I was letting go, and that was okay.

Faye Harden  
TCF Tuscaloosa, AL

## *The Compassionate Friends*

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