

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.

August 10 Meeting

Where Did you Get That?

TCF members will share unique items they have purchased or have had made to memorialize their child. Come to see these interesting keepsakes and take home ideas for projects you might want to consider. If you have an unusual keepsake memorializing your child and would like to share it with the group, please call Lamar Bradley at 889-1387 for more information.



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

Attending your first TCF meeting can be difficult. We have all experienced feelings that can be overwhelming. We hope you will come to two or three meetings before deciding if TCF is right for you. We simply offer support to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. We Need Not Walk Alone.

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



The Nashville Chapter would like to express our grateful appreciation to Kris Thompson for editing the Chapter Newsletter for the past year. Unfortunately for us, Kris' job responsibilities have become such that she has had to relinquish the newsletter editorship. Best wishes to you, Kris, and thanks for your many hours of hard work.

Lamar and Joy Bradley, Nashville Chapter Leaders

CHAPTER INFORMATION

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.

On Bringing Children to Meetings

Sometimes small children can be distracting to other grieving parents, especially those who have no surviving children. We truly regret that we have no accommodations for young children at our meetings, but teenagers and older siblings are welcome to attend. Regardless of age, all family and friends are invited to the June balloon release and the December memorial service.

Gifts of Love and Remembrance

The following voluntary donations will help The Compassionate Friends to be here for the families who do not know today that they will need us tomorrow. Thank you.

*Ray and Linda Black
In loving memory of
Their son
Christopher William Black*

*Lynn and Sally Moench
In loving memory of
Their grandson
Jason Lee Gant*

*Johnny and Ann Robertson
In loving memory of
Their sons
Christopher Daryl Robertson
And
Joesph C. Robertson*

*Jeff and Lee Gant
In loving memory of
Their Son, Jason Lee Gant*

*Robert and Ann Bourne
In loving memory of
Their son*

*Robert I. Bourne, III
And
Their grandson
Jonathan M. Bourne
Son of
John and Patricia Bourne*

*Carole Renfro
In loving memory of
Her granddaughter
Lindsey Miller
Daughter of
David and Rebecca Miller
And in memory of
Allen Mays and
Madison Mays*

*Stan and Beth Lane
In loving memory of
Their Daughter
Jennifer Lynn Whited*

*Larry and Julie Crist
In loving memory of
Their daughter
Cindy Faye Crist*

*Jerry Dillingham
In loving memory of
His daughter
Bridgette Dillingham*

*Michael and Delora Slade
In loving memory of
Their son
Cliff Huskey*

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.

Turning Point

*Dawn does not so much break as it happens.
Dark slides into light so slowly my eyes
Adjust without thought, as faint pink ribbons
Turn to streamers of orange in eastern skies.
So goes my grief with no strident fanfare.
Sadness and grieving have been all I know,
Then, for a brief moment, it is not there.
Imperceptibly then the moments grow,
Until I laugh without guilt. Life's more
worthwhile,
I don't feel as compelled to visit the grave.
I can remember some good times and I smile.
There was nothing dramatic and I have
Had no revelation, no special thing.
I just felt a bit better sometime last spring.*

Richard A. Dew
from *Rachel's Cry*

Comes the Dawn

After awhile you learn the subtle difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul, and you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and company doesn't mean security, and you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts, and presents aren't promises, and you begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes open, with the strength of an adult, not the grief of a child, and learn to build all your roads on today because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans, and futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight.

After awhile you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure ...

that you are really strong
and you really do have worth.

And you learn and learn ...
with every goodbye you learn.

Dani Rohr
TCF, Ventura, CA

Where Do I Go?

*Now that you're gone, where do I go
to see your fair smile
to hear your tingling giggle
to smell your dank hair after a swim
to listen to your questions
to touch your gentle cheek
to feel your bear hug?*

*Where do I go
to share all my years of wisdom
to find someone who'll tell me truth
to answer the phone that won't ring
to tell you I'm sorry
to know that I am loved and
to pour out my love and my tears?*

*I shall go
to the pictures that hold you forever
to the books we shared
to the music you taught me to love
to the woods we explored as one
to the memories that never fail
to the innermost reaches of my heart*

to where we are always together.

Marcia Alig
TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey

This Mixed-up Grief

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up, confusing emotions involved in grieving?

On the one hand, you feel restless; on the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all. You feel desperately alone, yet you don't want anyone around. You feel scatterbrained, forgetful, and yet frantically meticulous. You feel like crying at nothing, and sometimes laughing at anything. (Or do I have that backwards?) Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you. And yet, if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares. You want so desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was. And yet it can make you furious if ALL they want to talk about is the dead one, and never even mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket. You're as cold as the winter snow. Grief presses on you like a steamroller.

You're floating in a bubble above yourself. Grief boxes you in on four sides and introduces you to a pain no one should have to know.

But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion. You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own. And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst, you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face. You remember some of the funny times and feel laughter building in your throat. One morning you notice the sun is shining. Many days, months, and possibly years have passed unnoticed ... and somehow, you are still here. Even though your child is still... there. You feel your heart swell with a love you never even knew could exist. And you find a place in your life for something called (dare I say) peace.

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in a warmth as soothing as a cool shower on a hot summer day, so you find you WANT to remember. And tender memories of love lift you to unreachable heights, to the brightest of stars, to the loveliest touch of your child.

Dana Gensler
TCF, Louisville, KY

A Dream

*My loved one didn't want to go away;
He wasn't given any choice.
I've found that he left me something though;
Only I can give it voice.*

*An undeveloped desire he shared,
With just a few and with me.
I'll find a way to make it happen;
Forgotten he'll never be.*

Vicki Reiner
"Remembering our son James"
TCF, Nashville, TN

(This is a second version of the same poem written for a friend who has lost two babies in two years.)

*My beloved babies didn't want to go away;
They weren't given any choice.
I've found that they left me something though;
Only I can give it voice.*

*Undeveloped desires they couldn't share,
Improve the world and me.
I'll find a way to make them happen;
Forgotten they'll never be.*

Vicki Reiner
TCF, Nashville, TN

Spirit Gifts

Grief is such an individual journey. We are cast on its path without our consent, enveloped by a depth of pain we never dreamed existed. We all have times when despair and loneliness threaten to engulf us.

But we do have one companion on this lonely, unsought road: our child who died. I think there is never a moment in the day when a part of me is not connected to Philip, to our years together — and to our present relationship. Our journey through grief is a good-bye to the physical presence of our children, but it is never good-bye to their spirits and to the essence of their beings. Philip lives inside me now, and the same gifts he gave me when he was physically alive are still available to me through his spirit. In some ways, those “spirit gifts” are stronger, because they are contained and undiluted within me. When the days get unbearably hard, when I think of all this wonderful young man missed by not getting to live

out his life, I try to remember to focus on the present Philip, the one inside me. I try to integrate his gifts into my life, sometimes seeing through his eyes, thinking from his heart and mind. Often when I walk in the hills, I’ll hear his voice “Pay attention, Mom.” (He noticed the details in nature so much more than I.)

No matter how old your child who died, the essence of this unique being remains within you forever. It is through us and others who knew them that our children continue to live and affect our present world. Though not in the way we hoped and expected, our beloved children are still alive.

May the spirit of the child who lives so deep within your heart help you through this month and through every moment of the re-establishing of your life.

Catharine (Kitty) Reeve
TCF, Marin Co. & San Francisco, CA

Compassion

A heavy silence falls over the room.

As I look up from my private sorrow

I notice each head is bowed;

Each parent lost in their own thoughts.

And we are all thinking about the same thing:

Our Precious Children.

Do they remember laughter,

Or a sweet tiny face?

Do they remember eyes that twinkle,

Or eyes that are eternally closed?

Do they remember a warm embrace,

Or a kiss on a too cool cheek?

Are they thinking about the first time they

saw their child or the last?

Tears fall silently down a father’s cheek

as a friend hands him a tissue.

Sobs tear through a mother’s body, while

someone moves closer to hold her

Now I discover my tears are not only for

my child, but also for yours.

And as you weep for your child,

you also weep for mine.

Arms reaching out...

Hearts reaching out...

To those who mourn the death of a child.

This is compassion.

These are the friends.

This is where our healing begins.



Dana Gensler
TCF, South Central, KY

Challenge and Change

As I look back over the past six years since our son died, I realize how much I have changed. When we talk about grieving, we often forget to mention that we grieve, too, for the person we were before our child died. We might have been energetic and fun-loving, but now are serious and absorbed.

Our friends and family miss the *old* us too, and their comments show it. “Don’t you think it’s time to return to normal?” “You don’t laugh as much as you used to.” They are grieving for the person who will never be the same again.

Like the caterpillar that shrouds itself in a cocoon, we shroud ourselves in grief when a child dies. We wonder, our families wonder—when will we come out of it? Will we make it through the long sleep? What hues will we show when we emerge? If you’ve ever watched a butterfly struggle from the safety of the cocoon, you’ll know that the change is not quick or easy—but worth the effort!

We begin to mark our struggle from the cocoon of grief when we begin to like the *new* us. When our priorities become different and people become more important than things; when we grasp a hand that reaches and reach in turn to pull another from the cocoon, when we embrace the change and turn the change into a challenge, then we can say proudly: “I have survived against overwhelming odds.” Even though my child’s death is not worth the change in and of itself, the changes and challenges give me hope that I can be happy. I can feel fulfilled again. I can love again.

Sherry Mutchier
TCF, Appleton, WI

Healing Does Happen

Parents sometimes ask, "Does it ever get any better?" From my own experience and that of many parents to whom I've talked, I can truthfully say, "Yes, it does." However, it takes time, and it takes work.

When our daughter died, the pain was almost physical at first. I thought of her all day, every day. I found that what helped me most was keeping busy, not trying to take in the finality of it all at once, receiving the support of friends, family and church and my believing that our daughter was now with God. I tried to concentrate, as time progressed, not on what I had lost, but on what she had gained.

I felt in my grief that it was a choice of being over-controlled or out of control, so I decided to choose the former. From my present perspective, I think this was a mistake. Our family, I think, would have worked through our grief in a better way had we been more open with each other about the grief we felt. I think that many of the problems we faced after our daughter died were really due to our grief, which was unrecognized and unresolved because it was unexpressed. It was compounded by the earlier death of our infant son, who had been born prematurely and for whom we had not been encouraged to grieve fully when he died.

At that time, fourteen years ago, we were not aware of any guidelines for the grieving parent. It was difficult to find the sense of direction which some excellent books on grief now offer. I have learned more about grief and the grieving process in the almost three years of involvement with The Compassionate Friends than I had in the previous eleven. Slowly, however, we did begin to heal. Memories, even happy ones, at first had been only painful; now they began to bring some smiles. From sorrow and regret we moved to acceptance.

Life is different; we are not the same people, but we are happy again. We have been fortunate in the birth of our son, who is not a replacement for our other children, but who does help us feel more like a family again. We now are more appreciative of the time we have together and do things we might earlier have put off until "someday." Of course, we have times when we become irritated or upset with each other; family life often can lead to some friction. But we also realize that minor irritants are not major problems.

The sky we see is no longer the leaden gray of grief and has not been for many years. This is not to say we never have an unhappy moment. Our children have died; we will always regret this and wish it were not so. But now we deal more with the memories of grief, rather than grief itself. Our sky is blue although there still is, as Father Ken Czillinger expressed it, a small puff of cloud which will always remain. Our lives are different now but happy. My wish for you is that this will soon be true for you as well.

Barbara Cook
TCF, Birmingham, AL

The Living Shrine

*A shrine there is
within our house
A shrine created
with my spouse
A shrine to call
the thoughts so dear
Of our child
no longer here.*

*A shrine not of
the morbid climes
But rather one
of happy times
Of days gone by
when in our mid
We shared in life
this wondrous kid.*

*This shrine is not
of wood and stone
For it is housed
in flesh and bone.*

*It does not have
an altar place
Nor will you find
a display case.*

*Contained there is
that memory
Of thoughts we hold
in reverie
A shrine of deeds
we hold in pride
When our newborn
was by our side.*

*No others see
our thoughts of gold
About our child
who now lies cold
But we shall keep
within our mind
This honored place
Our living shrine.*

Guy Rall
TCF, Houston/West, TX

The Piano Sits Silent

*I etch her name in the dust.
Run my hands over
the keyboard,
too long untouched
by the pianist;
The one no longer
physically here,
who played the songs,
badly at times,
yet was unstoppable in
her need to make music.
As if it was her mission
to learn to get it right.
As if she knew there was little
time to master the melody.*

*So she played and played.
Melancholy tunes
that spoke of lives gone too soon.
I would call to her,
"You're playing too loud,
I can't hear myself think."
If I could just take back those
words, for I long to hear my
beloved child play the music
that once rang through these halls.
Those uneven strains would be
the sweetest music to my ears.
I touch the ivories and hear
the foreign sound of this long
silent instrument.*

*And remember my precious child,
remember the joy
her efforts brought her...
Remembering, remembering...
Though my tears fall gently,
my heart smiles as I
recall the sweet sounds of her life.
And even as the piano sits silent,
My memories resound
and I recall the love, always the love.*

Cathy Seehuetter
TCF, St. Paul, MN