



# 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 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.*

## TCF Video to be shown January 13

The Compassionate Friends helps us to cope with the death of a child. It is where one can turn for support when the devastation of the loss seems overwhelming. The vision of TCF is that everyone who needs us will find us and everyone who finds us will be helped. The Compassionate Friends has produced a short video describing the story of the organization as told by testimonials from some of those most involved with the organization. It includes the executive director, board members, chapter leaders and siblings. This video will be shown at this month's meeting followed by a short discussion by local chapter members explaining how TCF has helped them in their grief journey. Please join us.



### 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. 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.**

## 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.



## 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](mailto:tcf@tcfnashville.org). We'll be glad to include your child's name. You need notify us only one time.

**NOTE:** TCF Nashville Newsletters are now available on our chapter website. <http://www.tcfnashville.org>

## 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.

*Andy and Kande Wyatt  
In loving memory of thier son  
Will Hinds*

*Gerald and Vicky Donegan  
In loving memory of their son  
Clinton Wayne Donegan*

*Oddie Jones  
In loving memory of her son  
Jay Jones*

*John and Georgia Warren  
In loving memory of their son  
James Donald (Donnie) Warren*

*Hank and Jody Evans and family  
In loving memory of their daughter  
Jennifer Joan Evans*

*Freddie and Pippy Weller  
In loving memory of their son  
Brandon Fredrick Weller*

*Wayne and Marsha Vick  
In loving memory of their son  
Daniel Vick*

*Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Albertson  
In loving memory of their granddaughter  
Katherine Grace (Katie) Albertson  
Daughter of  
Mr. and Mrs. Norman Albertson*

*Larry and Peggy Ard  
In loving memory of their daughter  
Samantha Dawn Shore*

*Linda Doss and Jennifer Lynch  
In loving memory of son and brother  
Jeffrey Ray Doss*

*John and Patricia Bourne  
In loving memory of their son  
Jonathan Michael Bourne*

*Michael and Delora Slade  
In loving memory of their son  
Clifton Roy Huskey*

*Jesse and Vera Dedman  
In loving memory of their daughter  
Officer Christy Jo Dedman*

*Scott and Jayne Head  
In loving memory of their son  
Charles Alan Head*

*Jeff, Diana and Benjamin Kulas  
In loving memory of son and brother  
Sean Ashley McKitrick*

*Gerald and Peggy Nolan  
In loving memory of their daughter  
Amanda Jo White*

*Bill and Jean Reischman  
In loving memory of their son  
Mark Elliott Reischman*

*Craig and Melanie Crane  
In loving memory of their daughter  
Jennifer Garcia*

*Bob and Ann Bourne  
In loving memory of their son  
Robert Irl Bourne  
and grandson*

*Jonathan Michael Bourne  
Son of John and Patricia Bourne*

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## What Do I Do With My Child's Things?

This is a problem that faces all bereaved parents. We discuss it from time to time at our meetings. Some of us keep the child's room just as it was before the death. We don't want anything touched or moved. Some of us find solace in giving things away to close friends or relatives. Knowing that someone we love is wearing our child's clothes or playing with his or her toys brings us comfort. Some of us find we can deal with only a few items at a time: clothes one month, books another, and perhaps toys a few months later. Some of us find that as time goes on and we would have gotten rid of the things anyway, it becomes easier. For instance, after awhile, we may realize that if our child were still alive, he/she would have outgrown the clothes. Then it may be easier to give them away. Or he/she would have graduated college this year and would therefore no longer be using a study desk or clock radio. We can give these things away in the normal time sequence. The important thing is to not let ourselves feel guilty about the amount of time it takes us to make these types of decisions and equally important not to let others rush us into something we are not yet ready to do. When the time is right, we will know what to do.

Nancy Mower  
TCF Honolulu, HI

*Bryan Houstrup and Joe Philpott at Allegra Printing & Imaging, 601 Grassmere Park, donate the printing, collating and stapling of this newsletter each month as a gift to the families of TCF. We are very grateful. Also, a special thank you to Deanna Brown and her family who label, sort and mail the newsletter in loving memory of their son, Marcus Dean Brown. We appreciate all of your generosity.*

## A Stepfather's Love

Lindsey came into my life when she was not quite four. She captured my heart with her personality and charm. She was so full of life even at that young, tender age. As we spent more time together, she took over my heart. My fondest birthday remembrance and one I will never forget was this: Miss Piggy all decorated in purple, Lindsey's favorite color. She had her moods, her ups and downs. But always more ups, always looking for the bright side. She walked on the balls of her feet, which caused her blonde hair to swing back and forth. She loved to sing and play the piano and perform. Such sweet sounds filled our home. It is much too quiet now. Her friends were many. She was very loyal to them, always listening and giving advice. Lindsey was involved, she could not say no. Involved in church, school and community, she truly lived her life to the fullest. She accomplished more in her seventeen years than most do in a lifetime.

It all happened so fast and then she was gone; no time for hugs and kisses, not even "I love you." I always wanted to be involved in her life. She brought so much joy and happiness into mine. I never intended to replace her dad, whom she loved. I'm Bob, Lindsey's stepfather, who loved her like his own.

Bob Stoudt  
TCF Memphis, TN

### *My Failure*

*My child is dead.  
I failed him.  
I am FAILURE.*

*I realize  
I have no power,  
So I have no hope.*

*I cannot do my will,  
So I have no will.  
Still I breathe.  
Why?*

*I am impotent.  
What I do is so small,  
So much less than before.*

*With some self-pity,  
A lot of humility,  
And a bit of humor,  
I accept my new place.*

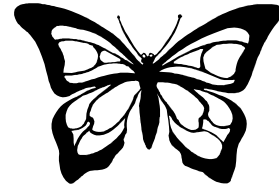
*Past opportunities and responsibilities are gone.  
Tiny, insignificant things begin my recovery.*

*Unrewarded, often unnoticed acts  
Are my reason for being.  
It is all that I have.*

*I plant a flower, pull a weed,  
Cook a meal, feed my children, clean a sink.  
That is all I can do.*

*As I do these things,  
I begin to believe in me again.  
So I embrace it.*

Jeannie Sevier  
TCF Nashville, TN



### *Those That Are Gone*

*They shall not grow old:  
Age shall not weary them,  
Not the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun  
and in the morning  
we will remember them.*

Laurence Binyon  
*Poems for the Fallen*



## Be Still

*Be still my heart when jeans and sneakers pass by me,  
Be still, my tears, which come so easily,  
Be still, my longing to hear his voice and see his smile,  
Oh, how I miss his smile.*

*Be still the memories which race around in my brain and ease the pain,  
Be still the pain which is ever there at first sharp but now more dull,  
Be still, my sorrow, for he is at peace, so much more than I.*

*Be still, my loneliness for him, to touch him again,  
Be still, the wish for others to cry with me as they did at first,  
So I would know they still miss him as much as I.*

*But life goes on, they say, and so must I,  
Be very still the need to ask, "Why did he have to die?"  
Be still, the anger when they say, "someone else wanted him."  
No one could want him more than I.*

*Be still my heart so you can remember that you still have life  
And love around you, that only a piece (huge piece) of your heart is gone.  
Be still my grieving for that one small part.*

*Yet grieve I must, for the books say I must go through it, not around it.  
Be still the bargains I made and the games I played  
(to have him back and pretend it was all a mistake),  
As they are dangerous and to no avail.*

*Be happy, heart, that we had him for a while, even a short while.  
Be strong, my pride, that I am slowly healing and loving and feeling.  
My precious Dustin died on that cold winter December day.  
Winter's snow came and went,  
Summer's heat came and went,  
Fall's colors came and went,  
And now spring has come again.*

*It seems the world is going on, and so should I.*

Carol P Wilson  
TCF Nashville, TN

## Newly Bereaved

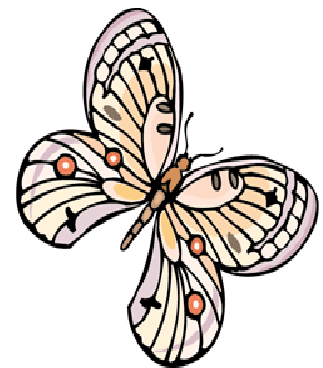
There is a wide variation in time for recovery., just as there is a wide variation in our grief experiences. How long it will take each of us to reach this point of being comfortable is impossible to predict, and different for each of us. I think much of the timing has to do with how effectively we have faced and worked through our grief. Because I did not grieve a healthy way for many years after Arthur was killed, I had to begin to grieve properly six years after to reach a point where I feel no pain at the thought that Arthur is dead. My daughter, also a bereaved parent, had the support of TCF and reached a comfortable point in a much shorter time.

I know that what I have said is hard to believe. For that reason, I would suggest that you accept this with blind faith for the time being. Then, when the pain becomes more devastating than usual, think of what I have said. Think of it as a rope hanging "out there" for you to grab on to. Think of it as a rope of hope. Recovery is the end of this terrible journey.

Margaret Gerner  
TCF St. Louis, MO

**"You once did something for me more meaningful  
than the greatest of deeds; you held me in your  
arms and let me cry."**

Bonnie Jison  
TCF Topeka, KS



## SUICIDE: How Do We Say It?

From the moment we learned of our daughter's death, I knew that the word "suicide" had the power to erase her life while emblazoning her death in neon letters in the minds of her friends and colleagues. During the unremitting misery of those early days, I even toyed with the idea of telling no one she was gone, willing her to stay alive in the thoughts of those who knew her, forgetting that I'd already notified our family and closest friends. It was a fairy tale wish I contrived as a way of allowing myself a momentary escape from the unthinkable reality of her death. If her death were never acknowledged, would she still be here?

My fantasy vanished in the cold light of the days that followed. I knew that we could never dishonor Rhonda's memory by concealing her suicide. I wrote a letter to friends and relatives, informing them of the events leading up to her death. I hoped my letter would quell the inevitable whispers by openly acknowledging her depression and her decision to end her own life. I implored them to speak often and openly about her to us; to do otherwise would deny her existence.

I never intended to embark on a campaign to confront, let alone eradicate, the stigma of suicide. What mattered the most was that we who loved Rhonda must not let the circumstances of her death diminish her memory or her accomplishments. I explained that she had "taken her own life" or that "she died of suicide." An expression I refused to use then and refuse to use to this day, is the despicable "committed suicide," with its implications of criminality. Historically, that term was an instrument of retaliation against the survivors, and it has no place in today's enlightened society.

Many people prefer to say, "completed suicide," but as a parent who witnessed my child's twenty-year struggle against the demons of clinical depression I don't care much for that, either. "Died of suicide" or "died by suicide" are accurate, emotionally neutral ways to explain my child's death.

My first encounter with suicide occurred many years ago when my dentist, a gentle family man in his mid-thirties, took his own life. Since that time, I have known neighbors, relatives, friends and other hard-working, highly respected individuals who died this way. I've facilitated meetings in which grieving parents declined to speak about their children because they couldn't handle the group's reaction to the dreaded "s" word. I've known parents who never

returned to a chapter meeting because of negative comments about the way that their child died.

Rhonda was a gifted scholar, writer and archaeologist who, like my mother, suffered from adult-onset manic depression (also called bipolar disorder). She made a lasting contribution in her field, and a wonderful tribute to her life and her work appeared in *American Antiquity*, *Journal of the Society for American Archaeology* (October, 1994).

Both my daughter and my mother suffered tremendously in their struggles to conceal their illness. Neither of them won that battle, but my mother responded to medications that minimized the highs and lows, and she died of cancer at eighty-seven. Sadly, doctors never discovered a magic formula that could offer Rhonda the same relief. She ended her own life at age thirty-six, after a year of severe depression that was triggered by life stresses beyond her control. I saw her battle firsthand, and I witnessed her valiant struggle to survive. She wanted desperately to live; she died because she thought she had no alternative.

In his revealing book, *Telling Secrets*, the great theologian Frederick Buechner describes his father's suicide, which occurred when Buechner was just a boy. The conspiracy of silence that was imposed on Buechner and his brother had a profound effect on their development and their relationships with other family members. "We are as sick as our secrets," he concludes.

We whose children have taken their own lives must do all that we can to help eradicate the secrecy and stigma that surround their deaths. If we allow these to persist, we allow their lives to be diminished. We owe our children more than that.

Joyce Andrews  
TCF, Sugar Land, TX © 1999

*The national Board of Directors of The Compassionate Friends has officially adopted the terms "died by suicide" or "died of suicide" to replace the commonly used "committed suicide" or "completed suicide." All TCF publications are being updated to reflect the new language, and TCF chapters, as well as the community at large, are being asked to use the new terminology when discussed.*



## Measuring Loss Comes Up Short



“Your child chose to die, mine didn’t.”

“Your child was just an infant, you didn’t have as much time invested in him as I did in mine.  
You shouldn’t need meetings as much as I do.”

“My child died suddenly, at least you got to say goodbye.”

“The way my child died is the worst.”

Sadly, these are actual statements made by bereaved parents. Since we have lost a child, we often assume that we know exactly what another person is experiencing and there is a strong temptation to measure another’s grief against our own. Perhaps we forget that in making a comparison, we may be diminishing the other person’s loss. To say that one child’s death is worse because of all their goodness implies a lesser worth of the child who may not have had such a successful life (but who was not less loved by his parents). Also weighing one age or one cause of death against another is not valid, for the final outcome is the same. A child has died. To suggest that one loss is greater than another automatically places less value on the other child’s life. This is hurtful to parents and can compound their distress. Usually when we hear a comment of this kind, it is best to overlook it. The parent who makes it is probably so absorbed in the initial agony of his or her own loss that he simply does not understand what he is doing. To become aware of the damaging effects of such remarks and refrain from making them shows loving consideration for others. Having experienced great pain, most bereaved parents are sensitive to the pain of others; nevertheless, even in the mind-numbing state called grief, learning continues, and compassion must guide us to take extra care with each other’s feelings.

Peggy Gibson  
TCF Nashville, TN