

# 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.*

## TCF Video To Be Shown

*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. 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.

## **CHAPTER INFORMATION**

### **Are you Moving?**

Each time a newsletter is returned to us with an incorrect address, it costs us 37 cents to retrieve it in order to find out where you've moved; then we pay another 37 cents to mail it back to you. This is in addition to the original bulk mail cost. It would help a great deal in both time and money if you would notify us immediately of any address change so your newsletter can reach you right away. You may call, write or email the chapter leaders or the newsletter editor. Thanks for your help.

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

At your first TCF meeting you are asked to sign a registration card that gives us permission to add your child to the We Remember Them list on page 3 in the monthly newsletter. If you are unable to attend TCF meetings and would like for your child to be listed, 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@prodigy.net. We'll be glad to include them.

### **We Need Your Help**

If you know a family outside the immediate Nashville area who has experienced the death of a child, regardless of age or cause of death, and you have access to the address (and phone number) of the parents, it would be most helpful if you would call us with that information. Our mission is to reach every bereaved family in Middle Tennessee, but we have to know about them in order to give them the support we ourselves have received. If you know the child's name, birth date, date of death and cause of death, so much the better. Polly Moore, our outreach chairperson, will send a warm letter of sympathy and information about TCF along with appropriate brochures and articles. There will be no harassment, no phone calls, and no demands made upon the parents, and the information you provide is strictly confidential.



## **BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES**

### **Alive Hospice Support Group for Bereaved Parents**

A support group for bereaved parents meets at Alive Hospice. For details, please call John Baker at 963-4674.

### **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).

### **Survivors of Suicide**

There is a caring SOS group in Nashville. For information about meetings and receiving their helpful newsletter, you may reach Kitty Sanders at one of the following: Write to SOS, PO Box 40752, Nashville, TN 37204; call (615) 244-7444; fax (615) 383-9714, or email nashsos@webtv.net

### **TCF Web site —A Treasure for You**

When you log onto the TCF Web site at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org) you will find a wealth of information about TCF and grief—poetry and articles, chat rooms, grief in the news, other chapter Web sites and numerous other resources. Check it out.

## Nibbling At Life's Pleasures

Most mothers I know are pretty selfless creatures. When there's not enough meat to go around, Mom takes a second helping of beans. There's probably nothing she'd rather do than iron Missy's cheerleader uniform at midnight. And why would she want a new Easter dress when the old polka dot polyester still fits? Altruism aside, every mom needs a smidgen of pleasure in her life to help maintain her sweet disposition.

To reward myself for being a hardworking wife and mother of three active boys, I allowed myself an occasional indulgence... a long, hot bath in a tub filled to the brim, a good book (preferably one that would make me laugh), and my favorite guilty pleasure, a Skor bar. I liked to eat it a piece at a time, sucking off the chocolate before I crunched down on the tooth-jarring English toffee. If I managed to finish a Skor with fillings intact, it was a triumph. And if I could read a good book while soaking in a hot tub and munching on a Skor bar, well, life just didn't get any better.

Then one day I found out how life couldn't get any worse, when my three year-old son, Blake, died suddenly from meningitis. Guilt and self-hatred overwhelmed me. What kind of mother wouldn't recognize how sick her child was and rush him to the hospital? How could I have been so blind, so stupid? As his mother, he trusted me to care for him, and I let him down.

My once-carefree existence became a series of gray days followed by black, sleepless nights. I ate, but only to stay alive. I took short, cool showers, but only to get clean. I never picked up a book unless it dealt with grief. Driven by guilt, I convinced myself that I no longer deserved any of life's pleasures. Besides, how could I ever enjoy anything again with Blake gone?

One night, some months after Blake died, my husband, Jeff, left to take our boys to basketball practice. The dishes were done, the house was spotless, and the long, empty evening loomed ahead of me. I went into the bedroom, flopped on the bed and curled up with the cat. On the nightstand I spotted a book a friend had given me. "Funny," she had said. "A great read." Well, it wasn't a grief book so I wasn't interested. Idly, I picked it up anyway and read the first page. Before I knew it, I was hooked. Suddenly, I heard a strange sound, somewhere between a hack and a hoot. The cat jumped and looked at me in alarm. I had laughed! It was a creepy, creaky laugh, rusty from months of disuse, but a laugh nonetheless. Did I just have fun? Yipes! I couldn't do that! I snapped the book shut and shoved it under the bed.

The next morning I took a shower as usual, only this time I lingered for three minutes instead of two and I turned the temperature up a notch so it was almost warm. I dressed and headed for the grocery store, where I careened down the aisles grabbing stuff from the shelves and trying not to look at the treats I used to buy for Blake. While reaching for a package of sugarless gum at the checkout, I caught sight of a display of Skor bars. I quickly looked away, but to my amazement, a Skor bar leaped onto the conveyor belt with my other groceries. Before I could put it back, the sacker had bagged it and it was mine.

I broke the speed limit getting home, dashed inside, and guiltily pitched the Skor bar on the highest shelf of the

pantry. Later, when I opened the pantry to get a can of tuna for my lunch, a small voice from above called out, "*Pat, oh Pat, I'm here. Come and get me.*" I slammed the door and started furiously chopping pickles for tuna salad. But the voice in the pantry became more insistent. "*Pat, I'm here and I'm delicious!*" A Skor-deprived woman can only stand so much. I flung open the pantry, stood on tiptoe, snatched the talking Skor bar, and ripped the wrapper open with my teeth. In a frenzy, I broke off a piece and popped it in my mouth. Hungrily, I sucked the chocolate off and crunched down on the rock-hard toffee. Lord, it was good! To my amazement, the heavens didn't open and swallow me. Lightning didn't strike me dead. For the first time in months, I REALLY enjoyed myself! I chucked the tuna back on the shelf and piece by piece, I relished the rest of the Skor bar. Then, with chocolaty fingers, I grabbed a handful of Cheetos and a couple of Oreos, and washed them down with a Yoohoo. It was the best lunch I'd had in months.

Later, as I was putting clean towels in the linen closet, I heard a familiar voice echoing from the bathtub, "*Pat, I missed you. Wouldn't a hot bath feel good? Why don't you fill me up?*" Trying not to be alarmed that voices were orchestrating my behavior, I obediently ran hot water in the tub, but only half-full. I didn't want to go overboard. Peeling off my clothes, I hopped in. And as I sank into the heavenly, steamy water, I closed my eyes and thought of Blake. He knew how to live! He packed more living into three years than some people do into thirty. He ran faster, climbed higher, laughed louder than any little kid I ever knew. He savored life, every aspect of it. No nibbling at life for him! He broke it off in chunks and devoured it.

Right now, because of my grief, I could only nibble at life's pleasures. But I knew Blake wouldn't want me to live a guilt-ridden, joyless, life. He would want me to buy a SIX-PACK of Skor bars, fill the tub, but only half-full. I didn't want to go overboard. Peeling off my clothes, I hopped in. And as I sank into the heavenly, steamy water, I closed my eyes and thought of Blake. He knew how to live! He packed more living into three years than some people do into thirty. He ran faster, climbed higher, laughed louder than any little kid I ever knew. He savored life, every aspect of it. No nibbling at life for him! He broke it off in chunks and devoured it.

Right now, because of my grief, I could only nibble at life's pleasures. But I knew Blake wouldn't want me to live a guilt-ridden, joyless, life. He would want me to buy a SIX-PACK of Skor bars, fill the tub to the brim with the hottest water, grab a good book, and soak and eat and read until the water turned cool and I was all pruny.

And, by golly, some day I'd do just that. *For Blake. For Blake's mommy.*

Pat Dyson became a regular contributor to *Guideposts* after winning the New Writers' contest in 1996. She also writes business reviews for the *Beaumont Enterprise*. Pat has 5 children including Blake, who died in 1987. She and her husband, Jeff, restarted the Beaumont, Texas chapter of TCF in 1991 where they were chapter leaders and newsletter editors for two years.

## *A Flicker In The Distance*

*In this time of grief,  
When the darkness is so great,  
And your heart is aching so,  
You feel that it may break.  
Remember that in this darkness  
There is a candle's light  
A flicker in the distance  
Small but intensely bright.  
That tiny little glow  
That seems so far away  
Will grow brighter and brighter  
With each passing day.  
Time does not heal, as they say,  
But it tends to numb  
The ache we feel inside our heart  
When that darkness comes.  
In time your heart will feel lighter  
And the memories won't bring such pain  
The tears won't flow as often  
And you will find laughter again.  
So keep your eye on that distant glow  
To see how far you came...  
Because at the end of the darkness  
That flicker becomes a flame.*

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux  
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## *Love's Lasting Touch*

*Don't weep for me when I'm gone,  
Because I'll always be there.  
My spirit will exist in all the earth,  
In the water, trees, and air.  
You'll hear me say, "I love you",  
In the whisper of a breeze.  
You'll know that I'm beside you,  
With the rustling of the leaves.  
You'll feel my arms caress you,  
In the warmth of each sunrise.  
The moon will be my goodnight kiss,  
The stars my watchful eyes.  
Your life will be my legacy,  
Your memories my epitaph.  
These ties will bind us together,  
Till we meet on heaven's path.  
I'll not ever desert you,  
We'll never be far apart.  
I'll live within you always,  
Nestled deep inside your heart.*

Jacquelyn M. Comeaux  
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## Thoughts From A Parent Who Lost An Older Child

Perhaps I had my child longer than you had yours, but thirty-eight years does not seem long. Perhaps there are more memories to hold in my heart, but I know yours are just as dear to you as mine are to me, even if your memories are memories of only one or two days. Your dreams for your child are gone. So are mine. Never did I imagine that I would have to deal with my child's death instead of him having to deal with mine. In thirty-eight years there was time to give me a legacy of three grandchildren. This is a very special blessing and one that I do not take for granted. My mission is to sustain the relationship with my three granddaughters who now live three thousand miles away from me.

My child died from a terminal illness that is not one of the "acceptable" diseases. My child died of alcohol and drug addiction. The tools for remission of this disease are placed in the hands of the person who has the disease. Even with the help of four treatment centers, the recovery was not to be. One day at a time, my recovery is taking place. The pain, after two and one half years, has gone to a place where it can be tolerated. My story and my age may be different from yours, but the bottom line is the same: my child has gone to a place where I cannot go and I miss him so much. The pain of grief is still there, but I am living life one day at a time enriched because my son came...into my life.

Helen Godwin  
TCF, Orange Park, Jacksonville, FL



“Love on earth is limited and bound,  
Stayed by human flesh to the ground.  
-but-  
Love taken out of sight,  
Is love made free –  
Where wings take flight”

Faye McCord  
TCF, Jackson, MS

## Windows

*The breath of winter  
painted fragile stars  
on all the windows  
of my quiet house.*

*And there I found  
your face,  
more fragile even  
than the season's art,  
a wonder to my eyes.*

*How can it be  
that winter paints such secret things  
in white-and-silver sheen  
for those who cry alone  
at frosted windows?*

Sascha



## The Holidays Are Behind Us

**I**t is the new year. The holidays are behind us. We did with them what we could. Whether they were a time of sorrow, a time of joy, or a combination of each, they are now a part of our memories. In a strange way, as a memory in our hearts and in our minds, our child's place is there amongst all the other memories of the season. There is hurt along with the memory, but also a thankfulness for the memory.

Now we look out on a winter landscape. The earth is cold, the land sharply defined. Yet underneath the hard crust, the great energy and warmth of our earth is guarding and providing life to all that grows.

We may personally know the coldness and hardness of a grief so fresh that we feel numb; a grief so hurtful that our body feels physically hard; our throats tight from the muscles pulled by tears, shed or unshed; our chests banded tightly by the muscles of a mourning heart.

If we are not now experiencing this, our memories recollect so easily those early days. Yet, as we live these days, like the earth from which we receive our sustenance, we, too, in our searchings, find places of warmth and change and love and growth, deep within.

Let our hearts and minds dwell in these places and be warmed and renewed by them, and let us have the courage and love to share them with our loved ones, to talk about even that first dim shape of new hope, or of new acceptance, or of new understanding, or of new love.

These are the new roots, born of our love of our child, that are forming and stirring within, gathering strength so that our lives, at the right time, can blossom once again and be fruitful in a new and deep way.

Marie Andrews  
TCF, Southern Maryland

## Keeping Myself Close

*I have to keep myself close  
stay within myself  
take time to gather inner resources.  
I am depleted and sad  
unable to reach out.  
Even one phone call  
is too much effort.*

*But it's not depression.  
I'm choosing  
to take care of me,  
not pushing beyond what  
I feel like doing,  
gathering up my life,  
knowing I will again feel  
like calling, reaching out,  
maybe soon.*

From *Catching the Light:  
Coming Back to Life after  
the Death of a Child*  
Genesse Bourdeau Gentry

**“Grief is a process. Recovering is a choice. Grief is the price we pay for love.  
But you don't have to go on paying the price forever.**

—Rabbi Earl Grollman

## ***New Year's Wish***

*I wish you gentle days and quiet nights.  
I wish you memories to keep you strong.  
I wish you time to smile and time for song...*

*And then,*

*I wish you friends to give you love,  
when you are hurt and lost and life is blind.*

*I wish you friends, and love, and peace of mind.*

Sascha



## ***January One***

*New Year  
new life – new hope  
new expectations – new beginnings*

*Old Times  
old fears – old places  
old disappointments – old dead ends*

*I am aware of my resistance to change  
I am aware of how reality is and how  
LIFE GOES ON  
I am aware of how I feel vulnerable*

*Birthdays  
death days – celebrations – anniversaries*

*Seeking a new future as the haunting  
past returns  
I AM ME*

*Change is possible and difficult, inevitable*

*I LIVE ON  
NOW*

Cindy Bouman  
TCF, Hinsdale, IL

## ***Winter Grief***

*Grieve as if to find eternal winter,  
ache as if to banish every spring,  
In your broken footstep follows mourning  
for the children who were with you once.*

*Grieve as if to keep the day from dawning,  
weep as if to kill each song you shared,  
But be ready; when the sun grows stronger,  
spring will yet reclaim your loving heart.*

Sascha

## ***Happy New Year***

*SURE, that's easy for you to say.  
But how can I be happy when my children  
have gone away.  
I look back upon what was  
And dream about what should have been.  
Because I dread the new year,  
Can that really be a sin?*

*You loved your children dearly,  
You held them in such pride.  
Are all those feelings gone now  
Because your children died?  
You see, my friend, by dying  
Your children left you with a chore.*

*One that must be completed,  
Though your heart and soul are sore.  
You must reach out your arms in comfort,  
Show folks they need not fear.  
Teach them their children rest now,  
In God's warm, loving care.*

*Once more I wish you HAPPY NEW YEAR  
For now and years ahead.  
And be a true Compassionate Friend.  
And so your children's death now  
Need never be in vain  
They live on within you  
And give again and again.*

Dolores Fischer  
TCF, Cape May, NJ



## *Guilt*

*My child has died.  
I must have done something wrong.  
Otherwise, she'd still be alive.  
Wouldn't she?*

Genesse Bourdeau Gentry



## The Guilt Box

On my long journey, I am carrying a large and heavy object. It is a guilt box. I set it down for a moment. After resting a while, I find an opening and climb inside. As my eyes adjust to the murky darkness, I realize it is a very tight and uncomfortable in the box. My guilt is so large that there is barely room for me.

I look at my guilt and say, "I've been carrying you for a long, long time. You are getting heavier and heavier."

"Yes," guilt answers. "I am a heavy burden. It takes a lot of energy for you to carry me. But now that you have set me down and are here inside with me, maybe you can get to know me better."

"I thought I did know you," I say.

"No," guilt answers. "Not really. I am treated as a burdensome stranger, something to carry around, your cross to bear. Why not get to know me, learn to understand me? I deserve that, you know, since I am your creation after all.

I sigh and agree to stay here with guilt as long as it takes to get to really know this important feeling. After a while I realize I must know everything it has to tell me because I am now familiar with its sad and endless stories.

Bored, I look around. Surprised, I see that guilt is no longer taking up so much space and wonder if there is anything else in the box. I thank guilt for all it has taught me, give it a hug, and excuse myself to get up and look around.

Almost at once I see, almost hidden in a corner, something that looks familiar. As I get closer I realize it is my coat of perfection. This is where I lost it! This is where it is! When I look closely, I see with dismay that now it has holes in it. It is no longer perfect! As I look at the rips and tears, I see movement out of a corner of my eye. A dark shape comes towards me and says hello. I instinctively draw back, but it moves nearer, pleading, "Don't be afraid of me. I am only shame, the cousin of guilt. Please don't be afraid."

"I don't like to look at you," I say.

"But you must," shame answers, and begins to grow brighter.

As I stand still, letting it come towards me, something very comforting takes my hand. I look and without being introduced, because of the way it makes me feel, know that it is courage. With courage beside me, I stand taller and look into shame's face. I see myself reflected in its eyes. After gazing steadily a few moments I am surprised to see I am growing brighter too for having looked so bravely.

I sigh, hold my arms out and let shame embrace me. Now coming to embrace me too, is sadness.

Shame and sadness hold me for a long time and then they move back, revealing something else – regret. Regret takes my hand and tells me she is much lighter to carry than guilt, and that with her there is even room for joy.

Then regret, too, moves back and I see my coat of imperfection lying at my feet. I want to leave it there, but courage nudges me, bidding me pick it up, to look at the coat more closely. When I do, I realize it has changed once more.

Now where the rips and tears had been, there are stitches of tiny, gossamer threads and beads of colored glass. In a strange way it is very beautiful.

I try it on and find it is no longer tight and constricting, but lighter and roomier. It is warmer and more comfortable than when it only held perfection. While wearing it, I begin to grow until I no longer fit in the guilt box. Suddenly the walls break down and disappear. I look around. I am in a large and beautiful open space filled with all of life's possibilities. I take a big, deep breath, letting all my feelings fill me, then release them with a long, long sigh.

I look back and see where I have been. I turn, looking ahead at the path before me. Wrapped snugly in my coat of imperfection and with hope and courage leading the way, I step out once again on my journey.

## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION FOR BEREAVED PARENTS

### I RESOLVE:

- \* That I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving and that I will not let others put a time table on my grief.
- \* That I will grieve in whatever way I feel like grieving and I will ignore those who try to tell me what I should or should not be feeling and how I should or should not be behaving.
- \* That I will cry whenever and wherever I feel like crying and that I will not hold back my tears just because someone else feels I should be "brave" or "getting better" or "healing by now".
- \* That I will talk about my child as often as I want to and that I will not let others turn me off just because they can't deal with their own feelings.
- \* That I will not blame myself for my child's death and I will constantly remind myself that I did the best job of parenting I could possibly have done. But when my feelings of guilt are over-whelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it will pass.
- \* That even though my child is dead, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.

Nancy A. Mower  
F, Honolulu, HI

