

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS



P. O. Box 50833 • Nashville, TN 37205 • (615) 356-4TCF(4823) • Nashville Website: 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 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.

September 12 Meeting

Speaker: Beth Sheller

Beth Sheller, MSN, RN, C.S, a nurse psychotherapist, will be our speaker for the September meeting. Beth is a counselor with Center for the Family, specializing in bereavement support for families. A longtime friend of TCF, she co-chaired the professional seminar for our national conference in 1998, and has been a favored speaker at our chapter meetings on several occasions.

We hope you will plan to join us for an informative and helpful afternoon. Following this program, we will break into our sharing groups.



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
- Suicide**.....Ruth Edwards
353-8547
- Small Child**.....Kenneth and Kathy Hensley
237-9972
- Drug/Alcohol Overdose**.....Ed Pyle
712-3245
- Murder**.....Joe Ladd
727-3284

Annual Picnic!

The date for our annual TCF Nashville Family Picnic is September 25, 2010 at 3:00 in Fannie Mae Dees Park. Look for details inside!

All who have been touched by beauty are touched by sorrow at its passing.

Louise Cordana

Journaling

In October 1996, my world fell apart. All things felt and believed were shattered. My emotions and feelings were swirling inside my head and heart at such a rate I could not deal with it. All the words I needed to say to my daughter on a daily basis, all the words I had to share with her, all the words I needed to tell her of the future were stuck. They were lodged in my mouth with nowhere to go. There were words of sorrow over my loss of something so precious and dear to me, words of fear, longing, love, joy, anger, hate and any number of other words that you can imagine. What to do with these words? I talked to as many as would listen, but still the words were there, still are in lots of ways. A friend, yes, another bereaved parent who knew, sent me a journal with words of encouragement to use it. I was frightened at first. What do I put in this book? If I wrote the words, would I feel better or worse? How to start? I thought about it for a few days, and then I just sat down and wrote. Oh how I wrote! Pages and pages of words, sprinkled with tears, yet containing my sanity. I wrote poems, letters, and holiday greetings. I wrote of my love, my loss, my longing. I wrote for days, I wrote at odd

times, unusual places. I carried my little book, still do, and felt like it was a link to her in some way. I do not use it as much now. I guess time has robbed me of that need to say those words. I think they are still there, I just have become used to it. Maybe in a way, holding onto those words now keeps her closer somehow. You know time has a way of dimming things for us no matter how hard we try to hold on. I think I have started holding on more to the words to keep her more alive and near me, if that makes any sense. Does to me anyway. I guess I am still afraid, more than I like to admit, more than others would like for me to be I should say. Journaling is good, if you can do it. Some can, some can't. It was a help to me. I try to go back sometimes and read some of it. Some of the pages are so blurred because of the tears they are hard to read. Some of it is too painful for me even though I wrote them. I weep for myself when I read them. Some of them I could share, most of them I could not. It would be like opening up my heart and soul and letting people see inside. I think someday I will toss them away, but not yet. Not just yet....

Barbara Sockwell
TCF, Snellville, GA

A Tribute to my Sister Lori Lee Smith

I Saw You

*I saw you today in the morning dew
As brilliant as a sea of shimmering diamonds
I shared the most amazing sunrise with you today
A million shades of red so random in their perfection*

*I heard you today in the laugh of my children
An enchanting melody a thousand angels strong
I walked with you today and we talked about everything
. . . and nothing all at once*

*I saw you today in the changing of the leaves
The colors of your life, the close of one season
And the ushering in of another
I sat beside a stream with you today*

*The peaceful flow, steady and constant
I saw you today . . . and you were perfect
And rest assured . . . I shall see you again*

Avery Smith
TCF Ada Area Chapter

You Did Not Die

You live in the beautiful wind that blows.

You live in the sound of birds that crow.

You live in the sun that shines so bright.

You live in the peaceful dark at night.

You live in a star I see in the sky.

You live in ocean waves that come in with the tide.

You live in the smell of flowers and grass.

You live in the summer that goes so fast.

You live in my heart that hurts so much.

You did not die, we only lost touch.

Shari Swirsky
TCF, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

For what is once given cannot be taken,
except from the eye and the touch of the hand.
Polly Toland

TCF Picnic Set for September 25

Mark your calendar. For a wonderful afternoon of friendship and fun, a time for remembering our children and for bringing our families together, please join us for our annual chapter picnic. We will gather on Saturday, September 25 at 3:00 p.m. in Fannie Mae Dees Park, Shelter 1. The park is located at 2400 Blakemore Avenue in Nashville. A map can be viewed on our website at www.tcfnashville.org. Barbeque, drinks and paper goods will be provided by the chapter. We ask each family to bring a dish large enough to serve eight, according to the starting letter of your last name, as follows:

A-G: Cole slaw, baked beans, salad or other side dish

H-M: Main dish, other than barbeque

N-Z: Dessert or chips

Plan to bring lawn chairs or a blanket, balls and bats, or other games. Restroom facilities and play equipment are nearby. This event is for families and friends; you do not have to be a bereaved parent to attend. All ages are invited. The picnic tables are under a large shelter in case of a shower. However, if heavy rain is occurring or if you have any question as to whether the picnic will take place, please call our Chapter Leaders, Joe and Melanie Ladd, at 615-727-3284 or 615-513-5913.

There will be a brief candle lighting ceremony in memory of our children at the close of the event. Plan to spend this afternoon with your TCF family and get to know each other better!

Recordings Available from TCF 33rd National Conference

Recordings of many of the workshops, as well as the Opening, Closing, and Friday and Saturday banquet programs from the 33rd Compassionate Friends National Conference are now available for purchase by our chapter members.

These recordings are perfect 1) if you weren't able to attend the conference, but want to hear keynote speakers or specific workshops you find of interest or 2) if you attended the conference but want to relive some of the high points or listen to workshops you were not able to attend.

The Opening Program, Friday Afternoon Banquet Program, Saturday Evening Banquet Program including the candle lighting, and the Sunday Closing Program are each available on DVD video for \$20 (plus \$6 for shipping for entire order of 3 or fewer DVDs). Or you can purchase the entire four program set for \$69 (plus \$10 shipping). Audio version only is available for less.

Each workshop is \$7 on audio CD (or MP3 for download). You can purchase as many single workshops as you wish on CD and pay just \$6 total for shipping or you can purchase the 59 workshops complete on CD at \$299 (plus \$10 shipping), a savings of \$114 off the \$413 regular price. The complete set is also available in MP3 format on three 1GB flash drives. Workshops recorded include a wide variety of grief topics related to the death of a child. Sibling workshops are not available due to privacy concerns.

To learn more and to order, visit www.freshpublishing.com. Then click on "conferences" and "2010" and TCF's Conference logo. Workshops may become available via MP3 download. Watch the order page for updates or TCF's national website conference page.

Newly Bereaved ... Burden of Grief

*As I struggle with words to find answers
Reading and writing my pain
The pages grow blurred before eyes that are tired
From this crushing emotional drain.
The relief that comes from the writing
Parallels what I feel when I read—
To open myself to the torture of loss
Seems to soothe this unbearable need.
There's no pleasure in life at this moment
It's an effort to get through the day
And I labor to stay above water...
But the shoreline is so far away.
So I pick up a pen or a book about grief
And it serves as a raft for a while.
And I hope, as my tears fall on pages of pain
That I'll learn once again how to smile.
As I swim toward the shore of acceptance
I pray for the peace of belief
That heaven's your home and you're waiting for me
Then I'll finally be free of this grief.*

Sally Migliaccio
TCF Babylon, NY

From *Tracey, An Extraordinary Child*

In this universe nothing is ever wholly lost. That which is excellent remains forever a part of this universe. Human hearts are dust. But the love which moves the human heart, abides to bless the last generation.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Miracle of You

Who would have known
 The exquisite difference
 Your brief life would make upon mine?
 Who would have known
 A tiny baby would
 Show me the beauty of a sunrise,
 Or the wonder of a rainbow,
 Or the pain of a tear?
 Who could have known
 That an innocent little child
 Would take away my fear of death
 And point me in the direction of heaven?
 Who could have known that you
 Would succeed where so many
 Others have failed?

Dana Gensler
 TCF, South Central KY

The Myth of Closure

“When will I begin to feel better? When will I return to normal? When will I achieve some closure?” grievors often ask. Closure, our culture tells us, will bring about a tidy ending, a sense of completion. Some grievors hope that the desired magical closure will occur after the funeral or memorial service. Others are confident it will come once they have cleared out their loved one’s room. Or maybe after a special personal ritual. Or perhaps after the first anniversary comes and goes—surely then, we will have closure, we think. We pray.

The reason we long for closure, of course, is because we would like to neatly seal away all of this pain. We would like to close all of the sad, confused, desperate, angry feelings out of our life. We would like to put all of this behind us.

Closure. What an odd concept really, as if we could truly close the door on pain—turn the lock and throw away the key. The truth is far more complex, of course.

Closure is for business deals. Closure is for real estate transactions. Closure is not for feelings for people we love.

Closure simply does not exist emotionally, not in a pure sense. We cannot close the door on the past as if it didn’t exist because, after losing someone dear to us, we never forget that person or the love we shared. And in some ways, we never entirely get over the loss. We learn to live with the loss, to integrate it into our new identity.

Imagine if we really could end this chapter in our life, completely. It would mean losing our memories, our connections to those we love. If we really found closure, it

would ironically hurt even more because the attachment would be severed. And this attachment is vital to us—the memories are treasures to be held close, not closed out.

Perhaps it is better to think in terms of healing. Yes, we can process our pain and move to deeper and deeper levels of healing. Yes, we can find ways to move on and channel our pain into productive activities. Yes, we can even learn to smile again and laugh again and love again.

But let’s not ever think that we’ll close the door completely on what this loss means, for if we did that, we would unwittingly close the door on all the love that we shared. And that would truly be a loss too terrible to bear.

by Ashley Davis Prend, ACSW
 Hospice of North Idaho
 reprinted from TCF Southern Oregon Chapter Newsletter

God’s Gift

It seems like only yesterday
 I tucked my daughter in to sleep.
 I put her doll by her side
 and teddy bears at her feet.
 I kissed her softly and said,
 “Good night, my sweet baby angel.”
 How was I to know, that early morning,
 God would call her name?
 In life, I loved her ever so deeply.
 And in death, I will do the same.
 I felt so much pain and so alone.
 How could I go on?
 I looked up and asked “WHY!”
 Then I saw the brilliant blue sky,
 The same color as my angel’s eyes.
 Sweet aroma filled the air
 and blew across my face.
 Oh! How it smelt like her
 and the warmth of her embrace.
 The more I looked, the more I saw.
 She was all around me. She hadn’t left at all.
 And if I listen closely, I can hear her voice,
 Singing of happiness and of a time to rejoice.
 Don’t cry, Mommy. I’m okay.
 Each time you wake, look and see
 how I will visit you each and every day.

Cynthia Harvill Perryman
 TCF, Nashville, TN



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.

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. David Gibson, 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

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.

As The Tide Recedes

It has been two years since our son Nathan died, and I am often amazed at how much our family has changed during that time. I think of our grieving process as being a lot like a stroll along the beach at high tide. In the beginning, when our loss was fresh and new, the waves of pain were unbearably intense, coming at us without pause. They seemed to hit us everywhere at once—in the face, in the stomach, in our hearts—knocking us down to the ground.

The grief and anger we felt swelled up over our heads; we were drowning in emotions we could not understand. And we began to wonder if we would ever be able to breathe normally again. “How can life go on,” we asked, “when it hurts so much?”

But time passed, and the tide receded. The water had dropped to the level of our knees. The waves seemed to strike with less frequency, and when they did hit, their power was diminished. And yet, we sensed that we were still not free. Sometimes, when we least expected it, a huge wall of grief seemed to rise up out of nowhere, pounding us with the memories. We stumbled but did not fall.

One day, we looked up and discovered that we were walking only on wet sand. We had been battered by the waves, but still we stood erect. And we recognized that our loss had given us an enduring strength.

Scattered on the shore before us were numerous beautiful treasures that had previously been hidden by the deep water. These treasures, which sparkled like jewels in the sand, were all of our priceless memories of our child that we had submerged in our pain. Now it was possible to gather up our thoughts of the happy times and hold them close to our hearts.

Today, we walk through the shallow, lapping waves with a new confidence, leaving our wet footprints in the sand. Following behind us, however, there is another set of footprints, invisible prints which are quickly washed away by the swirling water. These are the steps which our child will never take.

The past, like the salt of the sea, clings to our skin. We know that the tide will return—with anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and special family occasions—but the grief will never be as powerful or as strong. We have learned to live like the flotsam which floats on the surface of the water. Ride gently with the waves; let the grief carry you forward, so that you will be ready to stand strong and upright when once again your feet touch solid ground.

Janet Lyet Gassman
TCF, Colorado Springs, CO

The Good Fight

Before our son’s death turned our lives upside down, I cannot recall spending any time in cemeteries. One or two elderly relatives, who had lived out their span, are in cemeteries now, and their loss is felt at holiday gatherings. When I was a child, our Sunday school class once took a tour of the pre-Revolutionary cemetery behind the historic old church I attended. I remember being shocked at the number of tiny markers for the very young who, our teacher said, were so susceptible to diseases in those colonial days. We were simply told that people had large families then because they knew illness would take some of the children. We were never exposed to the notion that this was a tragedy to these real people of so long ago.

Many years later, when my grandmother was in her eighties, she told me that the child born before her died at the age of three. At the age of thirteen, Grandmother was stunned to find her mother caressing this child’s clothing and weeping in the attic of their home in the rolling hills of Kentucky. I was a parent then and I thought, “Well, of course Grandmother’s mother was sad, but she had other children.” I didn’t know, did I? Who among us did?

Now when I go to my son’s marker, I examine the other headstones carefully. Did everyone in the family live to an acceptable age? When I find one that clearly indicates the death of a child, I study the parents’ markers closely. How long did they have to live without their child? Sometimes the number of years takes my breath away. I am to learn from this. Others “made it.” So can I. Without Compassionate Friends I wouldn’t have had a clue as to HOW they made it, and I probably would have given up on the effort.

I read the inscriptions on these older markers to see if they provide any clues as to what helped those before me carry on. I found one that summed it up. It read:

“LIVING, YOU MADE IT GOODLIER TO LIVE;
DEAD, YOU MADE IT EASIER TO DIE.”

So—we are to endure. We do know what it was to live, but now we have the added dimensions of courage, love and steadfastness. And, though we no longer hope for our own death as a release from the pain, we, unlike most “other people,” will not fear it when we have finished “fighting the good fight.”

Pat Kuzela
TCF, Atlanta, GA