



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Bimonthly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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NEWSLETTER - Volume 3, Issue No. 1
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National TCF Website:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

January - February 2018
Editor: Susan Chan
3448 S.W. Mission Ave.
Topeka, KS 66614-3629
(785) 272-4895

JANUARY MEETING

Monday, January 22, 2018
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

How Have My Relationships Changed Since the Death of My Child? - Many of us find that our relationships with family, friends and co-workers have changed since we have experienced the death of a child, grandchild or sibling. We will talk about the ways in which relationships have changed – some perhaps for the better; some perhaps for the worse. An intense grief experience alters who we are and may well alter how we interact with the people around us. Let's discuss this topic and see what we discover.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Monday, February 26, 2018
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th St., Topeka, KS
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Anger & Guilt: The Twin Stumbling Blocks of Grief - Every parent who has a child die will probably experience anger--some will experience intense anger that may frighten and confuse them. Parents may also experience feeling of guilt about their inability to protect their child from accident or disease. Anger and Guilt can be two emotions that can stand in the way of moving forward towards healing as you make your grief journey. We will talk about these emotions, about gaining a different perspective on them, and about finding ways to move past these crippling emotions as you begin to heal.

Meetings are always held on the fourth Monday of each month unless otherwise noted. Listen to radio & TV for cancellations due to severe weather conditions.

This newsletter is sponsored by:

*Tad and Margaret Kramar in loving memory of her son,
Spenser Thomas Good who was born on January 30th*

*Thomas and Debra Schuetz in loving memory of their son
Evan Michael Schuetz who was born on January 23rd*

*Todd and Kathleen Williams in loving memory of their son,
Baby Boy Williams who was stillborn on February 23rd*



The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experience following the death of a child of any age, from any cause; and to foster the physical and emotional health of all bereaved parents, grandparents and surviving siblings.

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We Need Not Walk Alone



From the Newsletter Editor

Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

As I write this message, we are experiencing an extreme snap of frigid cold weather here in Topeka. The landscape seems dark and gray with winter, and the days seem longer than usual and the nights somewhat darker. This might indeed describe the way in which our grief is sitting heavily on our shoulders and our hearts coming off several months of holidays, often a stressful time for those who are grieving. I hope that you have been able to find some peace in the warmth of family and friends over this holiday period. The turn of another year often means a time of new beginnings. As bereaved people we may find it difficult to believe that there are any new beginnings for us. However, I believe that as we move forward on our grief journey, we will catch glimpses of possibilities --- possibilities for joy, for a life not dominated by pain; for a future where we will indeed work to live the kind of life our deceased children, grandchildren and siblings would want for us. Moving forward in your life does not mean forgetting or not continuing to love that precious person who has left this life. The late Darcie Sims once told me to remember that letting go of the pain doesn't mean letting go of the love, not ever. These were wise words and made a huge difference in my own personal journey. I hope that you may find the peace of knowing this to be true in the coming year.

Newsletter Mailing Update: I want to remind you that if you wish to continue to receive our newsletter, you will need to fill out and return the yellow form found in this newsletter **by March 1st**. We want everyone who wishes to receive this newsletter to do so, but we also need to have a confirmation of your interest in getting the newsletter. If you lost your child, grandchild or sibling in 2017, you will automatically be kept on the newsletter database for one full year. If your loss was prior to 2017, you will need to let us know that you wish to continue on the mailing list.

As you may know, we charge no dues or fees to receive this newsletter or to participate in our monthly support group meetings or special events. The yellow newsletter renewal form will allow you the option of sending in a Newsletter Sponsorship in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling. It is also important to remember throughout the year to let us know if you have a change of mailing address (also e-mail address changes for those who have chosen to receive this newsletter electronically). We have to pay the Post Office 50 cents for each newsletter returned for an incorrect/old address. We would prefer to spend those funds on handouts for meetings, printing of this newsletter, etc. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. You may send address updates to me at the address on the front page or e-mail them to me at tcftopeka@gmail.com

We invite you to check out our Chapter website at www.tcftopeka.org< The site contains news of upcoming meeting dates/topics, Special Events updates online grief resources, PDFs of past newsletters and much more. You may also contact us through the website.

We hope many of you will think about attending the 41st National Compassionate Friends Conference July 27-29, 2018 in St. Louis. This will be the closest national conference to us for several years and offers an opportunity to take advantage of more than 100 workshops on grief-related topics, hear guest speakers, participate in a Memorial Candle Lighting and a national Walk to Remember. Our Topeka Chapter will be assisting with the conference by sponsoring the Parents/Grandparents Hospitality area at the hotel. Watch this newsletter, our website or the National TCF website (www.compassionatefriends.org) for more information on the Conference as it becomes available.

We invite you to join us at a monthly support group meeting. We always have interesting topics related to grief to talk about, provide an opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings in a safe, non judgemental setting, and a chance to talk about your child, grandchild or sibling. There is really nothing quite like being in a room with people who truly do understand what this type of loss can mean and how it can affect our lives in so many different ways. This group offers support and hope and we welcome you to join us. There is never any obligation to speak or participate in the discussion if you don't care to do so; but much can be learned by listening to others who are walking this path. There are never any dues or required fees to participate.

Until next time, be gentle with yourself and let the healing happen. Remember, You Need Not Walk Alone

~ Susan Chan, Rachael's Mom

*"Hope is a bridge we can lay
over any crossing.
Faith is knowing
that the bridge will hold."*



~ Huascar Medina
Topeka, Kansas

**Healing through grief
is not about
learning how
to STOP missing you.**

**It is about learning
to live my life
WHILE
missing you**

©The Grief Toolbox
www.thegrieftoolbox.com
www.facebook.com/grieftoolbox

Tanya Lord



Love Gifts

**Your Love Gifts Help Spread
the Message of Hope & Healing ~ Won't You Help Today?**

What is a Love Gift? A Love Gift is a gift of money (or books, etc.) to The Compassionate Friends. It is usually in memory of a child, grandchild or sibling who has died, but it may be from individuals who wish to honor a relative or friend who has died, a gift of thanks that their children are alive, or simply a gift from someone who wants to help. The Compassionate Friends charges *no individual dues* or fees and depends on such Love Gifts to meet the Chapter's expenses, including the printing and mailing of this newsletter. **When you make a donation, make sure to check to see if your employer may have a "matching gifts" program** as this could double the amount of your donation. If you are not sure whether your company has such a program, check with your Personnel Department.

♥ *Tad & Margaret Kramar in loving memory of her son, Spenser Thomas Good, who was born on January 30th*

♥ *Todd & Kathleen Williams in loving memory of their son, Baby Boy Williams, who was stillborn on February 23rd*

♥ *Alan & Diane Zeithamer in loving memory of Rachael Reneé Chan who was born on December 28th*

Your gifts enable us to print this newsletter and reach out to newly bereaved families. Donations are our only source of income and are **tax deductible**. If you would like to sponsor a newsletter, the cost is \$30.00. If we have more than one sponsor, we recognize all of them. If you wish to send a Love Gift, any amount is appreciated. It is whatever you feel you can give. Donations of books that you have found helpful to the Topeka Chapter Library are also greatly appreciated, and it is a nice way to remember your child or other loved one. If you would like to send a Love Gift or a Newsletter Sponsorship, you may do so by sending it to: The Compassionate Friends, c/o Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. For Newsletter Sponsorships, please indicate which issue you wish to sponsor (Jan/Feb, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, or November/December). Makes checks payable to "TCF".

..... An Update on the Chapter Newsletter

As I mentioned in last newsletters, we have established an electronic list of those who prefer to receive the newsletter via e-mail. If you have not requested to be on the e-newsletter list, you will continue to be mailed a hard copy of the newsletter. Remember, you can also always access the current and past issues of our newsletter on our Chapter website at www.tcftopeka.org under "Newsletters". Those families whose loved one died in 2017 are automatically kept on the mailing list for one full year unless they request in writing to have their name removed. You are all asked to send any address changes (hard copy or e-mail) to tcftopeka@gmail.com

TCF National Office e-mail:

nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Compassionate Friends web address:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:

www.tcftopeka.org tcftopeka@gmail.com

Kansas Regional Coordinator:

Marty & Renda Weaver - (785) 823-7191
mweaver@cox.net

Upcoming Events/Dates to Remember

January 19 & 20, 2018 - Teen Grief Retreat (ages 12-18) also sponsored by the Center for Hope and Healing/Midland Hospice Care. For further info, contact Suz McIver at 785-221-7359.

Sites of Future National TCF Conferences:

2018 ~ St. Louis MO - 41st National July 27-29, 2018

2019 ~ Philadelphia, PA

2020 ~ Atlanta, GA

2021 ~ Detroit, MI

2022 ~ Houston, TX

Dillions Community Rewards Program Helps Fund Chapter Expenses - A REMINDER - Have you signed up for the Dillions Community Rewards Program yet? If not, we encourage you to do so as it really helps to bring income into our Chapter to help meet expenses. The more participants we have, the more income we can generate. I encourage you to go to www.dillions.com/community-rewards and click on "Register" at the top of the page. When you enroll you will be asked to designate which charity your wish to support. The Topeka Compassionate Friends Chapter NPO number is 65403. Once you have done so and have a Dillions Shopper's Card, every time you make a purchase at Dillions a portion of your total will be donated to the Topeka TCF Chapter. Participating in this program **costs you nothing** and **does not affect your fuel points** for gasoline purchases. If you need assistance in setting up your account, call toll-free at 1-800-576-4377 and select Option 3.

Our Thanks to: Midland Care Connection for giving us a mailbox and Most Pure Heart of Mary Church for allowing us to meet at their facility. A special Thank You to ProPrint for helping to underwrite the printing cost of this newsletter.

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838 MASSACHUSETTS ST
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TOPEKA, KS 66604
785.272.0070

And We Remember.....

Because of the potential for the hurtful crime of identity theft, TCF Chapter Newsletters will now only publish the date of a child's birth or death without listing the year of each event. This is a directive from the National TCF Office to protect all TCF members. Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing list will be included in the We Remember section

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond,
who was born on February 24th



Tyler James Baker, son of Barbara Baker, who died on March 6th

Brian Lynn Blecha, son of Lynn and Alice Blecha, born February 9th

Monty Brentlinger, son of Don and Carolyn Brentlinger,
who was born on February 6th

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary & Susan Chan, died March 17th

Cotton Christenson, son of Tracy Christenson,
who was born on March 19th

Patrick Cummings, son of Carol Cummings, born March 30th

Wendi Sue Cushing, daughter of Scott and Denise Cushing;
sister of Deana and Dylan Cushing, born March 17th

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington died March 18th

Jaime M. Harrington, daughter of Mary Harrington,
born and died February 3rd



Nason John Hobelman, son of Dee Hobelman,
who was born on February 14th

Zachary James Hudec, son of Greg and Liz Hudec, died March 25th

Bradley "Brad" Hurla, son of Mike and Judy Hurla,
who died on February 15th

Karen Kay Karnes, daughter of Wilson and Maxine Karnes,
born March 2nd

Ben Lake, grandson of Patty Lake, who was born on March 21st

Richard L. "Rick" Linder Jr., son of Richard and Patricia Linder,
who died on February 15th

Gylmn Guerry Lough, son of Billy D. and Inez G. Lough, died Feb. 21st

Billy Lucas, son of Bernie and Jeanette Bialek, died on February 18th

William Henry "Hank" Lumpkin, son of Joe and Penny Lumpkin,
who was born on February 1st

Amy Lundin, daughter of Ralph and Judy Lundin,
who was born on February 16th



Belinda Meier, daughter of Maggie Walshire, who died on March 20th

Cecil L. Miller, Jr., brother of Brenda Bissey, who died on February 4th

Madison "Maddie" Rae Naill, daughter of Lori Neddermeyer and Eric Naill;
step-daughter of Mark Neddermeyer; sister of Jesse and Allie Naill;
step-sister of Cale and Braden Neddermeyer; and granddaughter of Bruce
and Ginny Miller and Allan and Marge Neddermeyer, died on March 19th

Alisha Marie Quigley, daughter of Karen Leiker, who was born on
March 1st and died on March 12th

Kiley Ramey, daughter of Gary and Linda Ramey, born February 28th

Otto G. Schnellbacher, son of Mary Therese Sanders,
who died on February 20th

Brittany Nicole Tucker, daughter of Damon and Collene Tucker,
who died on March 11th

Carmen Cristina Urdaneta, daughter of Leonel and Judy Urdaneta,
who was born on February 13th; died February 3rd

Jason R. VanDam, son of Will and Kay Hasty, born March 25th

Mary Jane Varner, daughter of Will and Kay Hasty, born February 8th

Michael Scott Watson, son of Warren and Beth Watson,
who died on February 23rd

Taylor William Clay Watson, son of Terry and Kathy Watson,
who died on March 16th

Christopher Wempe, son of Dan and JoAnn Wempe, born March 9th

Baby Boy Williams, son of Todd and Kathleen Williams,
stillborn February 23rd



George Winter, son of Cindy Taylor and brother of Elizabeth
and Jolene Winter, who died on February 15th

(Use the form below to submit your listing if you have not already done so. Once you have submitted your listing you **do not** have to do so every year as long as you remain active on our mailing list. Your child's name and dates will remain on the We Remember database unless you request their removal or choose to discontinue receiving this newsletter.. This month's listing includes birth and death anniversary dates for February and March.)

.....
And We Remember - If you wish your child, grandchild or sibling included in the We Remember section of this newsletter, please fill out the form below and return to: Susan Chan, 3448 S.W. Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may also email the information to chanx2@cox.net< We do not automatically list your information just because you are receiving this newsletter. We only list information for those parents requesting it. If you have previously submitted your child's information and it has appeared in the newsletter during the past year, you **do not** need to resubmit it. If you have just begun receiving this newsletter, or have never submitted this information, you will need to do so in order for it to be included. **Please type or print clearly.**

Child's Name _____ Son _____ Daughter _____ Grandchild _____ Brother _____ Sister _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Death _____

Father _____ Mother _____

Note: Please list your address and phone number. You will only be contacted if there is a question about your listing.

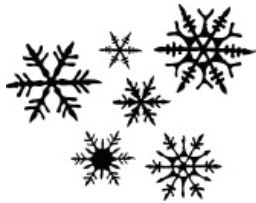
Is this a change of address for you? (please circle) YES NO

January Warmth

Like a tree in winter
which has lost its leaves,
we look ahead to Spring
for new growth and warmth
of the sun to heal the pain in our hearts.

Let us make January a time
to reach out to each other
and give the warmth from our hearts,
and, in return,
we will all show new growth.

~ Pat Dodge, Sacramento Valley, CA TCF



LOVE and HOPE

On a cold winter day the sun went out
Grief walked in to stay
I turned away from the unwanted guest
And bid him be on his way.

Grief was merciless, he brought his friends,
Lonliness, Fear and Despair.
They walk these rooms unceasingly
In the somber cloaks they wear.

Every so often, Love pays a call
She always has Hope by her side
I welcome Love as well as Hope
For I thought surely they had died.

Love counsels Grief in a most gentle way
Bids him be still for awhile
Then Love walks with me through memory's hall
And for a time...I can smile

~ Kerry Marston, TCF, Grand Junction, CO

*"Hope isn't a place or a thing.
Hope isn't the absence of pain
or sorrow. Hope is possibility.
Hope is the memory of love
given and received."*

~ Darcie Sims

ANOTHER YEAR

This is another year just beginning - afresh with new
days, new opportunities, new challenges.

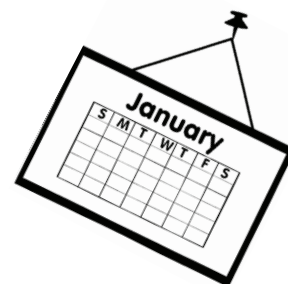
It occurs to me, however, that it is a very difficult
task to keep from concentrating on past years and the
sadness we endure just because it is a new year and
the calendar has flipped a page.

Moving on to a brighter tomorrow and letting go of
the pain of yesterday is a gradual process. We cross
that threshold one step at a time -
a small step at first, faltering and stumbling -
but somehow getting there.

With patience, effort and persistence, once again we
will be able to celebrate life as the year stretches on
before us, putting behind us our sadness, our guilt,
our failures and our pain.

We will be able to smile again. We will be able to
remember our precious children in life rather than
in death. We will recognize in our days many little
blessings and will be able to share
our joys with others.

~ Alice Weening, TCF, Cincinnati, OH



A Special and Important Message to Our New Compassionate Friends

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first Compassionate Friends meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

---Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee

Additional Support Group Resources

HEALs - Healing after loss of suicide offers support to all survivors affected by the loss of a loved one to suicide. Meetings are at 6:30-8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Pozez Center (north side of Stormont Vail). Contact Information: Sandy Reams 785-249-3792 or email TopekaHeals@gmail.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 6-8 p.m. at the Pozez Education Center. The group, which has regular meetings to share information and experiences, also has a blog for members that offers communication, resources and support. If you are interested in learning more about the blog, please email lrosen@stormontvail.org. For information call (785) 354-5225.

From Victims to Survivors - Support group for families who have had a loved one murdered. The group meets the fourth or last Wednesday of each month at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4775 S.W. 21st. For more information, call Bill Lucero at 232-5958 or see <http://fromvictimstosurvivors.com>.

Are You Moving?

If you move, please let us know your new address so you can continue to receive this newsletter. It costs the Chapter 71 cents every time a newsletter is returned by the Post Office with an outdated address. Please send address changes to: Susan Chan, 3448 SW Mission Ave., Topeka, KS 66614-3629. You may email address changes to chanx2@cox.net. We appreciate your cooperation as this will save the Chapter money which can be better spent on bereavement outreach. If, for any reason, you wish to have your name removed from our mailing list, please drop me a note or email and I will take your name off the list.

TCF Mission Statement: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.



Find us on:
facebook®

TCF National Page (open group)

<https://www.facebook.com/TCFUSA/>

Los Amigos Compasivos/USA

<https://www.facebook.com/LACUSA/>

TCF Private Facebook Groups

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/private-facebook-groups/>

Loss of a Child

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/407123299460580/>

Sounds of the Siblings (bereaved siblings only)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/21358475781/>

Loss of a Grandchild

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/421759177998317/>

Sign up for Compassionate Friends E-Newsletter

The Compassionate Friends National Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter designed to keep you up-to-date on what's going on with the organization and its chapters.

The e-newsletter includes information on such things as TCF National Conferences, the Walk to Remember, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, regional conferences, and other events of importance.

All you have to do to receive The Compassionate Friends e-newsletter is sign up for it online by visiting The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and filling out the request to sign-up at the bottom of the page.

TCF National Magazine

***We Need Not Walk Alone* Available Free Online**

The Compassionate Friends national magazine, *We Need Not Walk Alone®*, is available for free online. The magazine remains available in print free with any patron donation or when ordered by paid subscription through TCF's online store.

We Need Not Walk Alone provides comfort and support to bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents through stories, poems, advice columns, and much more. It has been referred to as "a support group in print" and is published three times a year.

Sign-up for a free online subscription through our website, compassionatefriends.org. It can be read online or downloaded to your computer for personal use.

A Personal Evolution Through Grief

I have been a bereaved parent now for three and a half years. I have learned a few things during that time, and I have much to learn in the future. I am evolving. Evolving from what I once was.....a person who had reasonable expectations of a life that included my son, his children, graduations, holidays, birthdays and special occasions. Now I have become a person who has virtually no expectations that are similar to the ones I had before my son died.

I have evolved into a more sensitive person. I know what some people are thinking before they even say the words. I feel others' joy as if it were my own. I cheer for the successes of others. I feel their sorrow, their failures, their missteps. I watch children play and remember my childhood, my son's childhood and I think of the joy of that childhood. I sit for hours watching birds at our feeders, marveling at the beauty of the natural world.

I have slowed down the pace. I no longer feel the pressure to be here or there, to do this or that, to call this one or that one, to wear certain clothes, to "put on the best face" for strangers. I have liberated myself from the mundane and the materialistic. Instead, I simply feel deeply about others. I have become extremely sensitive to all that surrounds me. I believe the loss of my child has changed me in many different ways. I see this in the attitudes of those who are in The Compassionate Friends as well. While few of us will tolerate nonsense in our lives because it is meaningless compared with our experiences, we will listen intently for long periods to the weeping, hysterical cries of a newly bereaved mother. Or we will nod quietly as a parent who is far into grief has a sudden flash of sorrow that is overwhelming. We have a heightened sensitivity to others through no choice of our own. It came with the loss of our beautiful children.

I wonder about what my son would think of events that have unfolded since his death. I have come to conclusions about others that aren't, quite frankly, flattering. Yet, he had come to these conclusions before he died. While I tried to mollify his perception of the dysfunctional people with whom he was burdened, he just said, "that's how it is, Mom." And he was right. That's how it is. I have learned to accept people for what they are. If I can help, I will certainly do so. If I can't help, I accept that some things can't be changed, and some people won't change. There is no magic here. It's a simple fact of life. "That's how it is, Mom."

I volunteer more these days. I give of myself, my knowledge, any wisdom I may have acquired on life's path to others who are in need. I give of my time, my talents and my labors to those who don't ask as well as those that do. I am comfortable with this.

I have less appreciation for money than I once had. Perhaps that is the best thing to come out of this. What was I chasing? What was my son chasing? What was the point? Bigger, better, faster, farther, more, more, more. It's a shallow existence when one is so focused on the material things that one is defined by materialism. I have learned to let go of preconceptions, and in that letting go, I have been pleasantly surprised by many people.

How did I get to this place? One minute, one hour, one day, one week, one month at a time. It is a slow journey from crawling through the pits of hell in deep grief to coming back to the reality of the here and now. It's as close to a near death experience as I can imagine. Instead of great epiphanies, there are moments of clarity. Instead of instant gratification, there is much work to achieve tiny steps forward. But the effort is well worth making. When I came out of the pits of hell, I realized that my reality was changed. I realized I was a different person. I discovered that the world doesn't run on the dollar. I found that all people have the capacity for goodness, but that many will never use this capacity.

But most importantly, I discovered that after leaving the pits of hell, there is a road toward hope that is traveled by each of us. Some walk more quickly, some more slowly. But we each walk that road of hope. Hope represents a life that is tolerable once again. Hope represents the acceptance of our child's death and the acknowledgement that we will keep our children alive in our hearts for all eternity as we continue into our tomorrows. Hope is reconciling those two elements: yesterday and tomorrow.

I have learned to adjust to chance, because change is inevitable. I have learned to stand up for what is right because that is our duty as human beings. I have learned much about the fears of others and even more about my own fears. I have conquered my phobias as a result of my son's death. Nothing my imagination could conjure would equal that gripping pain, the ache that hangs in my heart forever because my child has died.

But most of all, I have learned that my son was right. "That's the way it is, Mom". Shortly before he died, he said he wanted to give me a copy of the book "Who Moved My Cheese? He never had the opportunity. But I will read it. I have a feeling I know what it will say. Perhaps Todd gave me the plot line when he died. I'd like to think that he was subconsciously preparing me.

~Annette Mennen Baldwin, in memory of her son Todd, TCF, Katy, TX

On Valentine's Day

There'll be no chocolate red-heart box

Like your Daddy used to buy;

No cookie heart or "daughter card"

Or heart-shaped pizza pie.

Looking through your things I hope for signs

That we're not so far apart.

On Valentine's I hope you know

That now your ARE my heart

~ Carol Thompson in memory of Sarah in 2011



February

When February comes, there is finally an end in sight to the long winter. Sometimes melting snow reveals the green tips of an early crocus or even an exquisite blossom itself, a soft flower of hope invading a harsh landscape of graying snow, biting wind and an ominous sky -
a small promise of new life to come.

My heart, grieving for my son who died, was like that image of winter. For somehow, even during the darkest, coldest moments, an unexpected sign of hope would intrude. And as the hours and the days and months dragged on, my heart finally learned once again to be open to the promise of new life. Painful memories melted into loving ones. Life that seemed forever dormant once again sprang forth from my heart. In living hopefully and lovingly, the season of the heart can change. The living memories of your special child, like the flower in the snow, can be the beginning of the end of winter.

~TCF Chapter Newsletter, Portland, OR

The Wounded Heart

Children have preceded their parents in death for eons of time. We are not the first, nor will we be the last to enter the realm of Bereaved Parents. But for now - right now - it is Our Hearts that are freshly wounded and Our Hearts in need of mending. Wounded hearts must be allowed to mourn and lament their loss; to pour out their pain, agony, sadness, hurt, and anger; and to release their well of tears. Wounded hearts need to be wrapped in quietness, gentleness, and compassion, away from the turmoil of daily life.

A wounded heart not allowed to mend from the depth of its agony, will be as an abscess - to swell and undermine - erupting at a distant time. Or, suppressed, will slowly choke the spirit of its host. Only the bearer will know when his heart has healed. The wounded heart, encouraged and given the time and freedom to mend, will carry in its chambers the memory and shared love of a precious child.

~Nancy Green, TCF, Livonia, MI

Valentine Message

I send this message to my child
Who no longer walks this plane,
A message filled with love
Yet also filled with pain.

My heart continues to skip a beat
When I ponder your early death
As I think of times we'll never share
I must stop to catch my breath.

Valentine's Day is for those who love
And for those who receive love, too
For a parent the perfect love in life
Is the love I've given you.

I'm thinking of you this day, my child,
With a sadness that is unspoken
As I mark another Valentine's Day
With a heart that is forever broken.

*~ Annette Mennen Baldwin
in memory of my son Todd Mennen*

New Year's Resolutions for Bereaved Parents

- That I will grieve as much and for as long as I feel like grieving, and that I will not let others put a timetable 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 expect family and friends to know how I feel, understanding that one who has not lost a child cannot possibly know how I feel.
- 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 feelings of guilt are overwhelming, I will remind myself that this is a normal part of the grief process and it will pass.
- That I will not be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if I feel it is necessary.
- That I will commune with my child at least once a day in whatever way feels comfortable and natural to me, and that I won't feel compelled to explain this communion to others or to justify or even discuss it with them.
- I will keep the truth in my heart--the truth that my child is always with me in spirit.
- That I will try to eat, sleep, and exercise every day in order to give my body strength it will need to help me cope with my grief.
- To know that I am not losing my mind and I will remind myself that loss of memory, feelings of disorientation, lack of energy, and a sense of vulnerability are all a normal part of the grief process.
- To know that I will heal, even though it will take a long time.
- To let myself heal and not feel guilty about not feeling better sooner.
- To remind myself that the grief process is circuitous--that is, I will not make steady upward progress. And when I find myself slipping back into the old moods of despair and depression, I will tell myself that “slipping backward” is also a normal part of the mourning process, and that these moods, too, will pass.
- To try to be happy about something for some part of every day, knowing that at first, I may have to force myself to think cheerful thoughts so eventually they can become a habit.
- That I will reach out at times and try to help someone else, knowing that helping others will help me to get over my depression.
- That even though my child is dead, I will opt for life, knowing that is what my child would want me to do.

TIME

By Margaret H Gerner, MSW, BP/USA, St. Louis, MO

Before the ninth anniversary of my son's death I had become aware for weeks that the day was coming. When I went to bed the night before, I thought about it being the anniversary, but on the day of his death it wasn't until 1:30 in the morning that I remembered it. I couldn't believe myself. I felt quite comfortable. My son had died nine years ago that day and I wasn't miserable. This set me to thinking. What had happened in those nine years that I could reach this point?

In my years of association with bereaved parents in all stages of their grief and recovery, I have learned that the pain does get to be less as the years go on. I found that time does soften the sorrow, and that parents do find happiness and contentment again. The word "time" is always used to explain recovery, but I question that. How can the passing of days and months and years make a difference? There has to be a positive happening that causes return to peace. I know of people who have been terribly hurt 20-30 years ago who became bitter and angry people. They have had "time" and they have not healed. For them time has only created a cover over a boil that has metastasized to their whole being.

Personally, I wallowed in my destructive grief for five years after Arthur died. I tried to find escape in alcohol and pills. I was steeped in self-pity and anger and guilt. For five years I did nothing that would help me work through my grief. I didn't share my pain with others. I didn't talk out my feelings. I didn't read anything that would help me understand my grief. I pushed it down and down into my very soul.

The alcohol and pills, instead of giving me the escape I sought, increased my depression. It wasn't until I stopped trying to run away and began to look at myself and my grief with a clear head that I began to heal. Time itself did nothing.

I had to go back and consciously relive the pain of Arthur's death. I had to talk out my feelings. I had to experience my feelings. I had to face the reality that my child was dead. Time didn't do it. Work; positive, constructive grief work did it. I had to share the pain and experiences of other grieving parents. I had to excise the tumor of grief that had permeated my soul. I had to let Arthur go.

Time itself does not heal; it is what use we make of that time that heals. Granted, there is a dimming of the memory of how much we hurt when our child died, just as there is a dimming of the memory of the joy we felt at his birth, but



time itself does nothing. It's what we do with that time on a minute to minute basis, day to day, basis that heals.

Daily we must look at our remotions, at our guilt, anger and regrets. We have to ask ourselves what we want to do with them. We have to ask ourselves if hanging on to them will bring our child back. We have to work to replace our negative emotions with positive ones. We have to look at the beauty left to us in life instead of what was taken away from us. We must find good in life. We must find reasons to go on.

Time is the passing of moments lived one at a time. Our recovery depends on what we do with each moment. We cannot simply sit back and say, "Time will heal me". Time is simply the movement of the clock; our successful return to comfortable living is what we do while the clock is moving.

GRIEF

GRIEF: is sometimes silent,
Like snowflakes falling on a dark winter's night...
but never peaceful or serene or pretty like the pure
white snow. When grief is silent, the tears seem
to turn to ice like snowflakes,
before they reach our eyes.

GRIEF: is sometimes raging.
Like a monstrous thunderstorm...
with all its fury and lots of lightning striking our
hearts at every angle. When grief is raging
the tears come in torrents,
like the rain, and flood our soul.

GRIEF: whether it be silent or raging. . . HURTS

~ Verne Smith, TCF, Ft. Worth, TX

"My life was suddenly divided into BEFORE and AFTER and there was no going back to BEFORE.

Bu then I realized I had a choice to live the AFTER. I had to decide."

*~ from "A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance"
By Brenda Nea*

Honoring Unhappiness

I have re-read the book *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl more times than I can count. In it, Frankl quotes from a paper written by Edith Weisskopf-Joelson, who had been a professor at the University of Georgia. She wrote, "Our current mental-hygiene philosophy stresses the idea that people ought to be happy, that *unhappiness* is a symptom of maladjustment...in the present day culture of the United States, the incurable sufferer is given very little opportunity to be proud of his suffering and to consider it ennobling rather than degrading...so that he is not only unhappy, but also ashamed of being unhappy."

It is my hope that all bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings will have the chance to feel that our unhappiness is honored and respected by others suffering similarly. I hope we will find validation, whether from the embrace of others at Chapter meetings, from words read in a newsletter, or from conversations with other bereaved parents and siblings. I hope we will not be ashamed of being unhappy. And when our time is right, I hope we may find some moments of joy and peace even as we keep our grief for our lost children and siblings.

~ Peggi Johnson, TCF Piedmont, VA

A Promise

*The colors of life change
as we go through grief.
We begin with black and white;
Then gray settles over us,
seeping into our pores, surrounding us,
Smothering us for a long period of time;
Then slowly the colors change.
We may not even be aware of
their changing 'til one day
We see a rainbow,
And know it was meant for us.*

~ Faye Harden, TCF, Tuscaloosa, AL



Treasure

Is this the first day
when you can bear to
remember
how you smiled
together,
that day in Spring,
that morning in the rain?
Are you discovering
how many gifts of
comfort
he left behind,
this child who died
too soon?



His life is gone,
but he endows your
time
from this day
forward,
with all the faithful
treasures
of remembrance.

~ the late Sacha Wagner, TCF Poet Emeritus

Is I knew the pain and hurt and stress of
it all, it wouldn't matter. If I knew that I
would only be able to hold you for just so
long, it wouldn't change a single thing. If
I knew the tears I would cry, out of a sea
of millions, I would search until I could
look you in the eye, and I would call you
mine and choose you. Again.
And again. And again.



Lexi Bernhardt, Scribbles & Crumbs

The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter, c/o Midland Hospice Care., Inc.
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**A self-help organization offering friendship and
understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.**

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We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.
Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.
We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.
We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief,
but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.
But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share,
just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace,
share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.